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The Drummer's Journal.

An independent, online magazine
dedicated to drum culture.

VOLUME FOUR ISSUE SEVEN- TEEN

Summer 2019

[CLICK OR TAP TO NAVIGATE]

10

SNL's Fred Armisen

Lasting Impression

17

Oceansize's Mark Heron

Beneath the Waves

32

Death of a Drum Magazine

Rhythm Obituary

35

How to Build a Drum Module

Brexit, Blue Jackets & Microchips

49

Valuables **NEW**

Things We Like

57

Bill Bruford

To the Point of Creative Crisis

67

It is Brain Surgery, Actually

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club's Leah Shapiro

76

Win!

*Issue 17 Mega Prize Bundle, with prizes
from Sabian, Keo Percussion & Evans.*

79

Listen Up!

Jo Jones Trio, 1958

86

Trail by Fire

*In the Studio with Frank Carter
& the Rattlesnakes*

95

Surface Tension

The Push & Pull of Drum Tuning



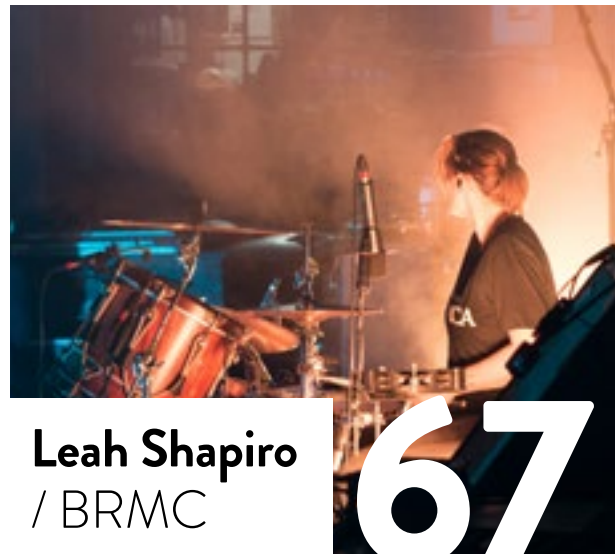
Mark Heron / Oceansize



Fred Armisen / SNL



Rhythm Obit.



Leah Shapiro / BRMC



Life in the Studio



Bill Bruford



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Things We Like

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FUTURE

THEY CAN HAVE THE PAST

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MAST- HEAD ISSUE SEVEN- TEEN

Summer 2019

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LIFE JACKET

Hi. Been a while, hasn't it? Sorry about that. Moving on.

Proud to introduce our 17th issue. We did string this one out a bit, I'll admit. But I think it's all the better for it. Then again, I would say that.

I was lucky enough to spend a bit of time with Mark Heron. If you've never heard of Mark Heron, I encourage you with every fibre of my being to listen to the band in which he used to play: Oceansize.

I would go as far as to say that Oceansize are one of the best bands that Britain has ever produced. Musically, I think they are "that band" for me, the one that had the sort of impact on me which went beyond simply liking their music. I'd entered that awkward phase where I wasn't sure what I wanted to listen to and everything seemed a bit bland. Then I was given an Oceansize CD, and that changed.

The point here isn't to weirdly relive the glory days of my youth, but to illustrate that I have a lot of respect for Mark. If I was in the business of picking favourites – which I'm not – I'd go as far as to say that he's also one of the best drummers I've ever seen or heard.

I was gutted when Oceansize broke up. Like, heartbroken teenager gutted. But what happened to Mark was far worse. A life-changing injury and intense drug addiction ensued.

OxyContin is a prescription drug that is often cited as the prime cause of the opioid epidemic currently plaguing the

US. Highly addictive, it's the number one cause of overdose deaths in America. It's also a prominent form of prescription pain medication. I'm no medical professional, but it seems like having large pharmaceutical companies pay doctors to prescribe highly addictive drugs, which are themselves marketed as non-addictive, might not be in the best interests of anyone except the shareholders. If you feel your existing healthcare system isn't quite adequate, email your nearest representative.

When I was explaining to people at NAMM WTF was happening with the magazine, I realised this issue had become a bit of an intense one. Leah Shapiro of BRMC had to have life-saving brain surgery only to find her insurance wouldn't pay for it, and so was forced to crowdfund it through the band. Because of this, she's thankfully still alive. Bill Bruford looks at the role of creativity and talks about a time when his confidence as a musician had deserted him. Not as extreme but still quite intense. On a lighter note, Fred Armisen talks about the intersection of his two main passions, comedy and playing drums. It was a nice reminder that sometimes, you need to be able to laugh at yourself, even if things aren't going great.

This brings us full circle. We laughed a lot making this one. Hope it gives you a kick, too.

Welcome to Issue 17 of The Drummer's Journal.

Kindly,
Tom



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A photograph of Fred Armisen standing in the center of a drum shop. He is wearing a blue button-down shirt and black pants, looking thoughtful with his hand to his chin. The shop is filled with various drum kits on display, including Tama, Gretsch, and Pearl. In the foreground, several wooden cajons are arranged in rows, serving as seating for an audience. The background shows shelves stocked with drum-related items and a sign that says 'notes'.

LASTING IMPRESSION

A conversation with Fred Armisen

Words & photography by Tom Hoare

Fred Armisen is looking pensive.

It's about 8 pm, and he's stood in the middle of a drum shop surveying the scene. Some of the drum kits which would usually populate the floor space have been moved to the edge, and anything that even closely resembles a seat – drum stools, cajons, amplifiers, and flight cases – have been set out to accommodate an audience.



Outside, there's a queue of people. You might think that you don't usually need to queue up to get into your local drum shop. Well, this is Britain. Especially at night, queues in London are a highly prized commodity. They signify the carnal desire of the consumer, waiting, rain or shine, to gain entrance to whatever exclusive event or establishment that happens to be viscerally on trend.

Have you ever queued to gain entrance to a club or bar only to find that it's practically empty inside? That's the appeal of the queue: it suggests there's something worth waiting for, even if, ultimately, there isn't. Don't tell me you've never joined the back of a queue without fully knowing what you're queuing for.

This queue, however, is the real deal. Fred Armisen is a writer, comedian, and drummer known for his work on Saturday Night Live, Portlandia, and Late Night with Seth Myers. On this particular evening, he's performing a very specific stand-up set for drummers only. It's so exclusive that you have to actually prove you're a drummer on the door. In the absence of a universal drummer ID card, acceptable forms of identification include photos or a used pairs of sticks.

It's fair to say this isn't your average comedy gig.

RIGHT: FRED'S INTIMATE ROUTINE GETS UNDERWAY.

The Drummer's Journal: Before you became a well-known comedian, you spent a lot of time as a touring drummer. In fact, you dropped out of college to play drums, right?

Fred Armisen: That's right. I drummed in a punk band called The KGB then another called Trenchmouth. I wanted so badly for us to be famous. And we never got there. I mean, we did ok, we toured and I had great experiences. I'm grateful for all of it. But we just moved in the same circles for years. As I got older and was still going nowhere, other bands we knew were getting more popular. It was a struggle.

What were you struggling with?

There was a lot of struggling because I wasn't satisfied enough with playing music, I think.

Trenchmouth were playing shows with bands like Smashing Pumpkins, right?

Yeah. Luckily, I wasn't in denial, it's not like I was like, "One day everyone will see what a genius band we are!" So I thought, "Hey, let's try something else." I'm glad it took me this long. I'm glad we didn't become that popular.

Then you joined Blue Man Group. That's a massive gig to land.

To actually get paid to play the drums, I thought I was making a million dollars. I learned a lot at Blue Man Group, about audiences, about performance. It was always relentless and frenetic. The other drummers there were way better than I was.

How did you end up pursuing comedy?

After Blue Man Group everything changed. My wife at the time started getting me into comedy. She showed me a video of a comedian called Dennis Pennis.

Ah yes. Dennis Pennis. Didn't he terrorise celebrities? I think my favourite Dennis Pennis quote is where he calls Hugh Grant "wooden" and then asks him if he gets psyched up by going



into the forest and staring at a few trees.

Ha! That's him. Watching him totally put my mind and ambitions in a different place. That's when I stopped playing drums professionally.

It sounds like you'd been on a bit of a rollercoaster then in terms of your relationship with music?

I'll admit I did become disillusioned. Even though I'm an optimist, really I just wanted to be in The Red Hot Chili Peppers or something. I was frustrated. Also, I couldn't deal with the recording studio. It was where my shortcomings as a musician were really

I think that's the case with a lot of people. It's probably a healthy way to be. It's good to have goals, but I think there are so many arbitrary things that can happen that can send you in a different direction. My plan would never have been: drop out of college, join an unknown punk band, then get a job on TV. There is no logic to it. To this day I'm still the same. I have things scheduled, but I'm living pretty much month to month really. When I did Stand Up For Drummers with Netflix, it all happened very quickly. It wasn't in the pipeline for ages or anything.

"I couldn't deal with the recording studio. It was where my shortcomings as a musician were really evident."

evident. When I go to a studio, I just want to leave. I wanted to record something and get out.

Do you think it was because you were under scrutiny?

I'm just impatient in general. I like being done with stuff. Even the stand-up comedy thing. It's not that I don't love it, it's just that I don't like lingering.

If you feel like I'm lingering feel free to say.

You're allowed to linger.

When you were younger, did you ever have trouble thinking about your own future?

Ages ago, didn't you also do a spoof educational drumming DVD?

Yes. I was obsessed with those drumming DVDs. There's a whole library of them. When I would see them, I was like, "Who is buying these?!"

I bought one. I ordered it from eBay but it was when DVDs still had regions, and it was the wrong region, so it never really worked.

I'm really sorry to hear that. But, with all due respect, some of the people making these DVDs don't really exist in the real world, they're just like super drummers. And they all have this weird, specific type of music on these DVDs. It's like drumming just for drummers. There's absolutely nothing wrong with it, I just find it a bit odd.



**"Comedy makes
me happy to be
alive. It's not a
distraction, it's
not amusement,
to me it's the
reason to live."**

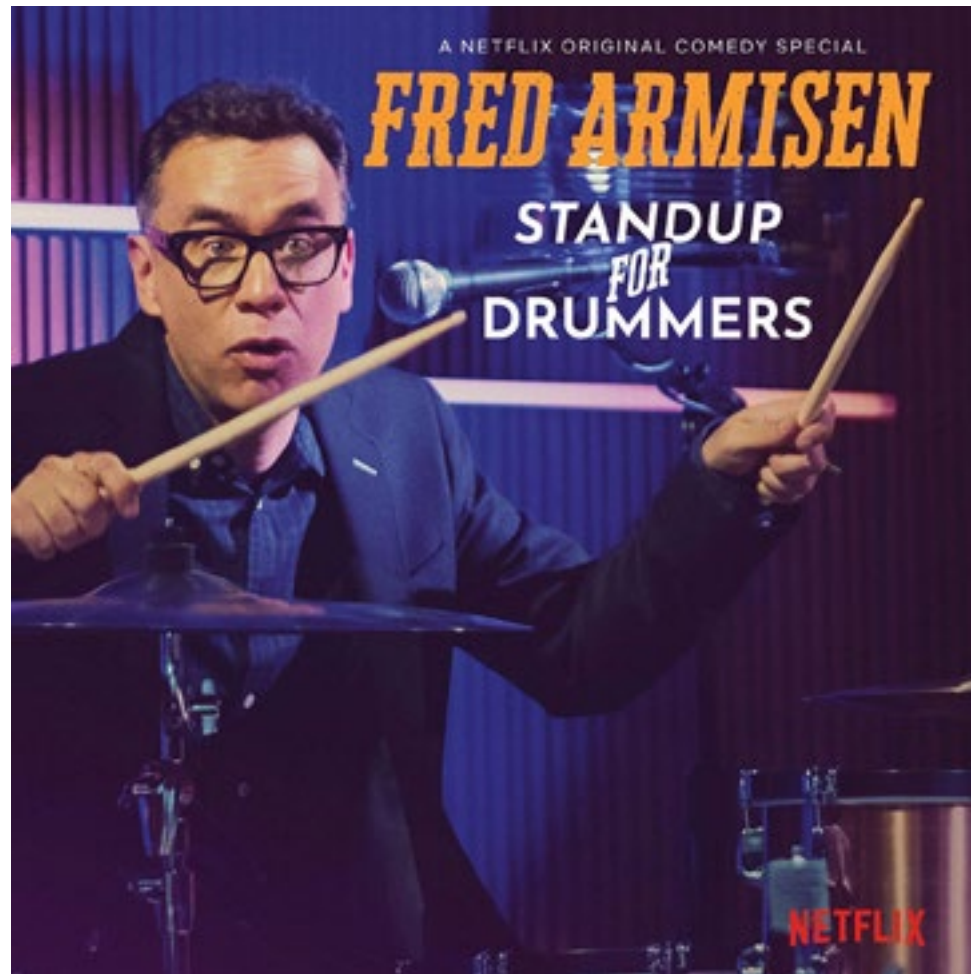


Which leads us nicely into doing comedy just for drummers. Are drummers easy to parody?

Yeah. It is super easy. Honestly. There's so much material. All you have to do is walk into a drum shop and watch what people are doing. Drummers have very specific personalities, I think.

I do see parallels between drumming and comedy though. I think drums mirror what a lot of sketch comedians are like. Sort of like: "No, don't look at me." Then, "Ok – look at me." There's a distance and also a closeness, I think that's very much related to comedy.

IMPRESSIONS. OBSERVATIONS. LOLS.



When it came to the Netflix special, were they a bit like, “Tell us one more time. You want to do stand-up... but for drummers?”

A little at first. But I'd noticed that whenever I did stuff about drumming in my stand-up routine, it was always the part which had the most emotion and momentum attached to it. I loved those parts of my show and I kept expanding them. Before long, I realised I had a full show about drummers. Netflix said, "Fred, everything you do is kind of odd anyway." They're right. Portlandia is a little odd. Speaking of odd things, I was looking at a picture taken during the American Revolutionary War. It was of a soldier with a flute, another with a flag, then someone with a snare drum. That's just such a weird band.

Up until about WWI, the British Army would have big kettle drums mounted on horses. Surely massive drums and horses is a terrible combination?

God, just imagine what the horse was thinking: "There's already a person sat on me, making me run in all these random directions, and now I've got to haul around these massive drums too?" Why do you think they did that?

Maybe drums made people march in time?

Oh, I thought of it as war drums. You know, like to frighten the enemy. But I think your explanation makes more sense. People can march to a rhythm.

Can we talk about Saturday Night Live? How long were you a cast member for?

Eleven years.

How would you describe the role of Saturday Night Live in American television?

As far as TV goes, if it was an art gallery, SNL is the Mona Lisa that everyone is gravitating towards. It's a part of a lot of people's lives in America. Not everyone, but most people, I'd say. This isn't my comparison, but SNL is like the New York Yankees.

It's something everyone knows, even if they don't watch it directly.

How did it feel to be a part of that?

Astounding. Even when I auditioned I was amazed to be in that room. I'd always watched SNL. It was always a huge part of my life. I felt a connection to it. It's how I was introduced to a lot of bands.

And the frustration you'd felt with music, you never got that with comedy?

For me, comedy makes me happy to be alive. It's not a distraction, it's not amusement, to me it's the reason to live. If I see something that really makes me laugh, I'm like. "Well, what else is there?"

What do you mean by “it's not a distraction”?

To others, sure – it can be a distraction. I just meant for me it's not something I'm using just to help me forget about negative stuff or everyday life. It is my life. To some people, it's also about political expression. To some people, it's about rebellion

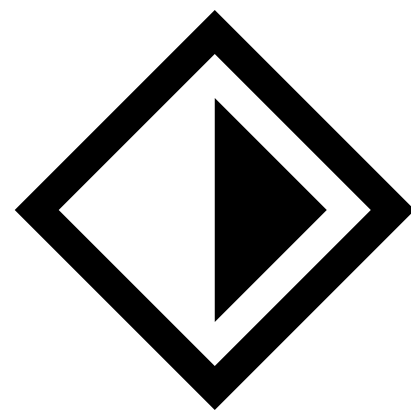
Speaking of political comedy, you are a bandleader on Late Night with Seth Myers, right?

Yeah, not every week. I just drop in occasionally.

The political situation in the US has galvanised a lot of comedians recently. Has it impacted you?

SNL is very political, although it always has been. In terms of how it's impacted me, I played Michael Wolff on SNL recently – the guy who wrote a book about Trump. I do feel like it is less easy to read the news now. But when it comes to my actual life, everything is good. I have friends, I travel, I work with people I love, and politics doesn't come into my ability to do comedy. I've always had faith in human beings, in the good in people. And that's what I lean in on.

FIN.



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BENEATH THE WAVES

A conversation with Mark Heron

Words & photography by Tom Hoare



I was shit scared of Mark Heron for the best part of a decade. When I was about 21, Mark was playing in a band called Oceansize. I was into Oceansize in a way that was borderline obsessive. *Unhealthy*. I listened to little else for about five years. I'd liken it to an addiction but for reasons that will become clear, that would be largely inappropriate.

I always found Mark a bit intimidating. He looked very serious on stage. Stern. I'd read somewhere that he was a black belt in some sort of exotic martial art. It made him even more formidable. His playing style wasn't necessarily aggressive as such, more just full on. In your face. The drums in Oceansize weren't just keeping time, they were backing it into a corner and taking its lunch money. As a drummer, you can take the path of least resistance in a song. This wasn't Mark. Mark was going places that were uncharted. No more road? Fuck it, take a hard right through that tropical rainforest. Don't make it easy for yourself.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: I think Oceansize are one of the best bands to have ever come out of Britain. Musically, lyrically, they were the complete package. A sort of alternative, progressive, post-rock hybrid that spanned four studio albums and five EPs, before dissolving like a soluble tablet of animosity in 2010. I wasn't happy about it, mainly because if Oceansize weren't putting out any more albums, I'd have to start listening to other music.

After the split, Mark sort of fell off the radar for a while. By "a while", I mean around eight years. By "sort of", I mean totally

vanished. I tried looking him up from time to time, wondering what he might be doing. I could rarely find anything. Then, one fateful night as I lay sleepless in bed with my eyes burning from the brightness of my phone, the continual violation and exploitation of my personal data finally paid off as Instagram, in the only creepy way its algorithm can, alerted me about an account I might wish to follow: *@Mark_Heron_Drummer*. I sat up in bed. I'd spent untold hours combing social media to try and find even a trace of Mark. The account was almost brand new. There were no posts, and only a single line of copy in the bio: "*Mark Heron: drummer for Oceansize.*" I felt like Begbie from *Trainspotting*. "*Yes! Ya fucking dancer!*"

When I met Mark a few months later in a pub in the Northern Quarter of Manchester, I quickly realized that I'd been wrong to find him intimidating. He shook my hand with a huge smile. What he had to say about where he'd been for almost a decade, and subsequently why he'd only recently resurfaced, however, was truly terrifying. I thought it might be bad. It was worse. Way worse.

Nightmare fuel

Mark grew up in Scotland in a small town just south of Edinburgh. As a kid, he admits that he wasn't overly academic. Instead, he was athletic and insanely competitive.

"I was far too easily distracted to do well in school. I was just not into lessons. I was into martial arts," Mark grins. I shift nervously in my seat.

"I was never allowed a drum kit when I was a kid. I always wanted one though. We lived in a semi-detached house and my parents wouldn't buy me one, so I didn't actually start playing until I was



“Apparently - I have no recollection of this - I opened his CD player, pissed in it, then closed it again. That was the last time he let me stay.”

about 21, when I could afford to buy one for myself."

I ask if those fifteen or so years of not owning a kit despite wanting one were emotionally frustrating.

"Yeah, a lot of frustrated emotion, I guess. But I sort of geared it towards physical activity. I did judo for two years, karate for two years, kung fu, taekwondo then boxing. Then I applied to join the Marines when I was 17."

"Sounds like you were cut for it?" I ask.

"I was told it's the hardest thing in the world to do. I don't know if you've noticed but I'm very competitive. It was only when I began the training I realised I'd have to kill people. That's when the penny dropped. It wasn't about who had the most endurance, it was about killing folk. I wasn't up for that. So I quit.

"One day I went to the Jobcentre and saw an advert for apprentice helicopter engineers. I went for an interview and got the job. I was one of the youngest qualified heli engineers in the country. I started playing drums when I was doing my training."

"So when you finally came to get a kit, that must have felt satisfying?"

"Oh man, yeah. I'd wanted one for years. I sold a car and made about 1100 quid. I thought, 'What do I want? I want a drum kit.' So, I bought one.

"As soon as I got the kit, I became obsessed with it. I started to get lessons, then I realised you could go to college and study it. There and then, a light came on, and the drums began to take priority. I'd almost crash driving to work because I was using the steering wheel as a snare and trying to get a fill in before I hit a roundabout."

"You just quit your engineering job?"



“Yeah, but it took a bit of deciding. I was on £25k a year in 1995. That was a good salary. To lose that and go to being a student wasn’t ideal. But it’s still the best decision I’ve ever made. Working on helicopters, you’ve got people’s lives in your hands. I didn’t like that. Signing on the dotted line to say something is fit to fly. You can be held accountable and go to jail for negligence if you fuck up. It’s high stakes. Most crashes are pilot error. Occasionally there’s a negligent engineer who might not do something properly. I loved it, but I wasn’t geared up for it.”

“I put every aspect of my life into that band. Then when it stopped, I was like, ‘Wait. Who am I?’”

“I started to take my drums into the hanger, and I used to play after work before I went home. A couple of guys I worked with would hang around and have a few drinks and a joint. It was like a wee party. I focused on practising, found a college course in Edinburgh, then just blagged it on. And it was an absolute blag. I couldn’t read music or anything. Once I’d done that, I blagged it onto a degree course in Salford.” Mark grins. “Another blag. You’re going to hear about plenty more of them.”

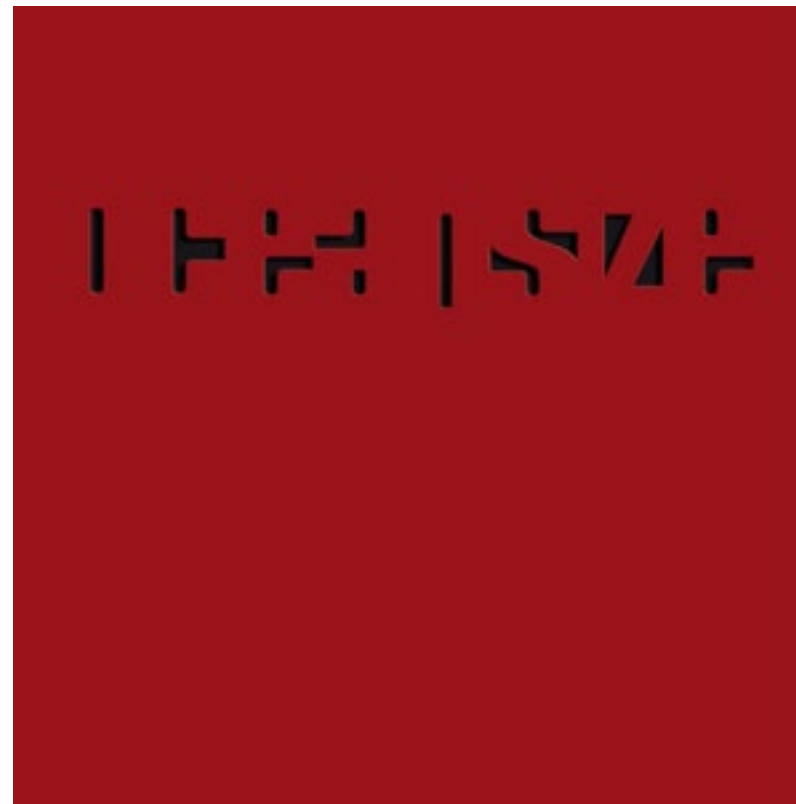
OCEANSIZE STUDIO ALBUMS:
L TO R, TOP TO BOTTOM

EFFLORESCE, 2003

EVERYONE INTO POSITION, 2005

FRAMES, 2007

SELF PRESERVED WHILE
THE BODIES FLOAT UP, 2010



“Instantly, I knew I’d broken my back. I thought it was too much fuss to get the air ambulance out, so I tried to get up to show everyone I was ok.”



Oceansize

Mark moved to Manchester. At college, he met Mike Vennart, Steve Durose and Jon Ellis, who would become his bandmates in Oceansize. Vennart had a skill for writing introspectively astute lyrics with the added benefit of being able to sing them with heartfelt sincerity. He wasn't necessarily a charismatic frontman, he was almost subdued in a way, but through performance he was captivating to watch. You got the sense that everyone in the band, as individuals, had spent a lot of time in their bedrooms practising to the point of virtuosity, but when it came to performing as a band simply wanted to make good music. What I ultimately learned from Oceansize was, if you're going to play something complex, don't forget to make it easy to listen to.

"I didn't even want to be in a band initially," Mark continues, "I just wanted to play drums. It wasn't until after we graduated that I got in touch with Mike over the summer and asked if he wanted to put a band together. He said yes. That's what we did. October 1998, we found a rehearsal room, and we had our first rehearsal. It was monstrous. Right from the first noise. 'Fuck,' I realised, 'this is huge.' We wrote Amputee that day and a couple of other songs that made it onto the first album. Magic mushrooms were involved."

"What were you doing for work?"

"I got a job as a bike courier. We were all working. Steve and Mike were transcribing songs for some online tablature company. Jon was writing music for fruit machines. So everyone was involved in music. Except me, I was on the bike. It was cool. Until I broke my leg."

I raise my eyebrows.

"Getting run over by taxis, that's how that happened. So I started

cycling on the pavement. I used to get tickets quite a lot. I had an ongoing feud with this one particular policeman. He'd chase me down the pavement on his motorbike." He laughs.

"The whole point of being in Manchester was solely to get the band going. At one point, we ended up practising in the courier company's basement. It was only 10 quid a week as well. Absolute bargain.

"When we started gigging we weren't the most palatable band. Every record company at some point came and saw us. They all said, 'We're not sure we can sell this, so we can't sign you.' Then a guy called Roger Trust who worked for a label called Beggars Banquet got hold of our EP. He came to a gig, and afterwards said, 'Listen, I want to sign you.' We all just thought, 'Oh...yeah?' We didn't believe him.

"We had to go to London to sign the contract. We came back on the train and it was like a party. That night, back at a friend's house, I was worse for wear. Apparently – I have no recollection of this – I opened his CD player, pissed in it, then closed it again. He woke me up in the morning like it was a crime scene. 'Look! Look what you've done!' That was the last time he let me stay.

"Beggars said specifically, 'Look – this isn't the big time. You CANNOT give up your day jobs.' We all did, immediately. They weren't happy.

"It was brilliant. I loved every minute of it. It was all I wanted to do. I used to love being on a bus, driving around going to different cities. My favourite thing to do at night is to play a gig. My next favourite thing is to watch a gig. When you're touring, that's all you do. That's why it was so weird when it went away. When it all ended..."

He doesn't finish the sentence. He looks visibly pained.



Keep It Centred

Round the corner from the pub is Mark's rehearsal room. He's the first to admit it's spatially challenged, but there's just enough room to set up Mark's sprawling kit. To get behind it you have to shimmy between a few cymbals and the wall.

As an engineer, Mark spent a lot of time creating a unique set up. On the floor, there's a toolbox with a hacksaw and a few other drastic tools sticking out of it. Mark pulls out a tool that lets you remove the cracks from cymbals and waves it around like a wand. Under a chair is a small pile of bass drum pedals that have been bastardised into Frankensteinian objects; the sort of experimental creations that, if they could speak, would probably say, "kill me."

But when Mark gets it right, he gets it right. His kit is so ergonomic it's like the instrumental equivalent of the standing desk, except without the presence of your insufferably health-conscious colleague who eats nothing but kale. Not that I've anything against kale. Or colleagues.

"One night I had a dream that I was playing a kit that was symmetrical. The key was that the hi-hat was in the middle, so I sketched it out. I managed to make a double pedal out of a few old pedals I had, so I could centre the kick drum too. It's not a traditional double pedal, it's really two slave pedals essentially. But now I could put the hi-hat, snare, and kick drum all in a line, with toms on the left and right. I think it's the martial arts influence. Symmetry and balance.

"I never really took brilliantly to lessons. I'd do what needed to be done, but what I was doing in my spare time was my own type of practice. Trying to think of things differently, to approach the drums in a visual way. In hindsight, I don't know how I got through college. The teacher would say to me almost on



a daily basis, 'I don't know why you're on this course.' Maybe he thought that if you rip people down they'll push themselves harder, but that didn't work with me. I used to practise how I liked to practise. Like visual things. Moving in shapes.

"That's when I started developing this idea about having zones, or shapes. If you think about a line between any two noises on a kit – the snare and the tom for example – it's a straight line. You can move along this line. If you can make one straight line, you can incorporate another two noises to make a triangle. And another to make a square. This idea made me orchestrate things visually. It's a bit like putting scaffolding up. You do everything bit by bit and build it up. Counting everything really slowly, and then the more you do it, the less you have to count, and it becomes about muscle memory.

"I wanted to try and develop it into a system or a method, but..." Mark trails off again. "Things took a bit of a turn."

Decline and Fall

Oceansize never really gave a reason for disbanding, and I wasn't about to go fishing for one. To be honest, as a fan of the band, I think I didn't really want to know. What I was interested in, however, was how it affected Mark.

"I suppose during the last year of Oceansize, I had to bite my tongue. It became more apparent that it wasn't a priority for everyone, and that caused more abrasiveness. It was obvious what might happen. I didn't think it actually would. But it did. I thought we'd go on hiatus or something.

"I didn't play for over two years when Oceansize split up. I didn't touch a drum kit. At all."

"Were you apathetic at that point?"

"Yes. I was just really down. I went to Mallorca for a bit to get away. In Manchester, people would be constantly like, 'What's happened? What's going on?' I couldn't deal with it. So I went to Mallorca and worked fixing luxury power boats for about two years."

"That's soured your memory of the band?"

"Yeah. It was my life. I put every aspect of my life into that band. Then when it stopped, I was like, 'Wait. Who am I?'"

"You had an actual identity crisis?"

"Yeah. Absolutely. I didn't know what to do with myself. Didn't have a clue. I couldn't get my head around it. That's why I went to Mallorca and tried working again. I realised I wasn't geared up for engineering anymore. I should have really enjoyed it. It's a beautiful place. But in the end, every day that passed I was aware that I was doing something that I didn't think I was meant to be doing."

"That sounds traumatic."

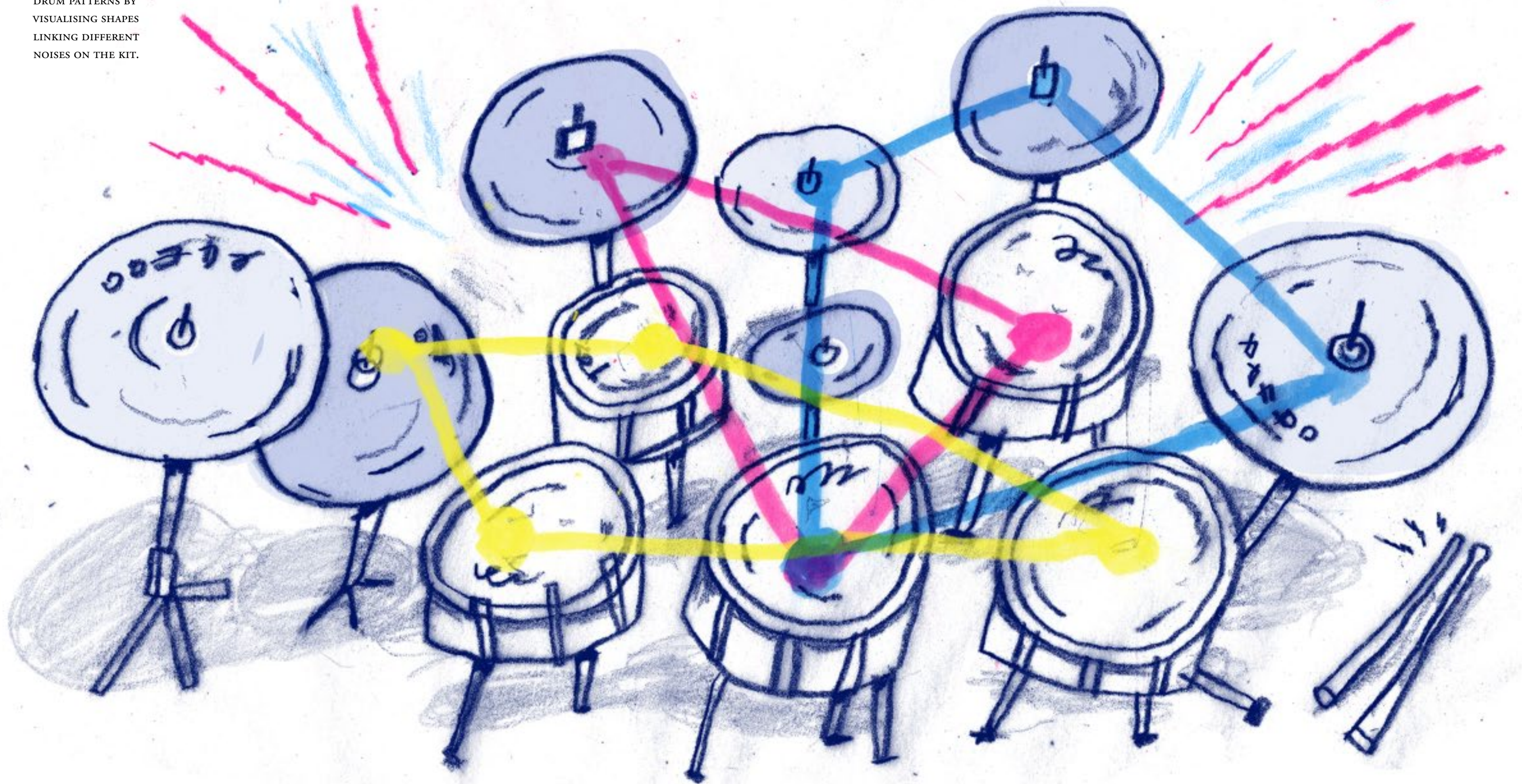
"It was hellish to be honest. It was bad. Really bad. When you question who you are – I was in a very bad place. I remember when Oceansize split up, it was November. Kong, another band I was playing in, were going to Japan in January. That was what kept me alive. That was my focus. In hindsight, I barely made it through that. In Japan, I was drinking heavily. I don't remember much of it. The only thing I can really remember is seeing Mount Fuji out of the window of a bus. I can remember the gigs, but that's it.

"After being in Mallorca, I came back to Manchester. I started

ERGONOMICS IN ACTION:
CENTRED HI-HAT AND SNARE,
WITH TOMS EITHER SIDE.



MARK CREATES
DRUM PATTERNS BY
VISUALISING SHAPES
LINKING DIFFERENT
NOISES ON THE KIT.



MARK'S SETUP IMMORTALISED IN INK.



to feel better. I was playing drums again. For the first time in a while I felt good. It didn't last long, maybe six months.

"It was winter. There'd been a lot of snow so I went sledging near a place called Buxton. I was on a shitty little board, and I remember flying down the hill, and all of a sudden I was in mid air, and I landed straight on my arse. Instantly, I knew I'd broken my back.

"I shat it. I was scared to move for a couple of minutes. I was terrified to even attempt to move anything in case I couldn't. I thought it was too much fuss to get the air ambulance out. I know how much fuss it is to get helicopters ready, so I tried to get up and show everyone I was ok."

"That does not seem like the best way to handle that situation!"

"No. I wasn't ok. At all. I was in agony. I ended up driving myself to hospital. When I arrived, they didn't believe I'd broken it at first. They checked me out and were like, 'Oh – it is actually broken!' I had to lie as still as I could for three days. When they told me I was stable, they put me on a painkiller called OxyContin. I was on it for nine months. When it came time to stop taking it, I felt like I'd been plugged into the wall."

OxyContin

For over two decades, the US has been in the grip of an opioid epidemic. The reasons for its existence are complex but can be traced back, in part, to the rapid growth of prescription opioid painkillers.

Overdoses as a result of opioid addiction have begun to lower the average life expectancy of the American citizenry as a whole.

The problem is now so severe that drug overdoses are the leading cause of death among Americans under 50. Two-thirds of these deaths are the result of opioid abuse.

In the late 1990s, over a third of the US population was estimated to be suffering from chronic pain, and pharmaceutical companies were quick to pose a solution. Between 2001 and 2016, prescriptions for opioids increased from 76 million to 289 million. As of 2017, for every 100 Americans, there are 58 opioid prescriptions. A drug called OxyContin quickly became one of the most commonly prescribed.

is until you've been addicted to opiates. The doctor told me to stop taking OxyContin after nine months. So I did. No one explained that you're supposed to taper it off. The day after I stopped, I started fitting. And that carried on for a month. I went back to the doctor, and he said, 'You're lucky to be alive. You're having seizures because your body needs OxyContin.' So they put me on Codeine, and it took me a year to come off that. After that, I was in pain for another year and a half. I couldn't sit on a drum stool. Everything went. No fitness. No power. Nothing. I couldn't play. It was hard going.

“I didn’t play at all for about three years. There was trepidation. There was fear. It was about getting over that.”

OxyContin was brought to market in 1996. At the time, it was heralded as a breakthrough. According to its manufacturer, Purdue Pharma, the risk of patients becoming addicted to the drug was small. Specifically, the company stated the risk of addiction was “less than 1%”. Between 1996 and 2001, sales increased from \$44 million (316,000 prescriptions) to \$3 billion (over 14 million prescriptions).

In 2007, Purdue Pharma were found guilty of misbranding OxyContin by claiming that it was less addictive than any other opioid, including heroin. They were required to pay \$634 million in fines.

Mark is now sat up very straight. “You don’t know what addiction

“When you can’t do anything physically, it fucks with your brain, especially when you’re on heavily addictive painkillers. I was still trying to deal with not being in a band anymore. Physically, mentally, after three years worth of addiction and no activity, you just waste away.

“Breaking my back was a piece of piss compared to the painkillers. I would gladly have broken my back 50 times, one time after the next if I didn’t have to endure three years worth of shite after it. I’ve got goosebumps thinking about it. It’s a disgusting type of drug.”

"When did you realise you were addicted?"

“I realised about six months into the prescription. The idea of these drugs is you don’t feel pain. You don’t feel anything, really. Then, after about six months, I started feeling pain again. The doctor said that it’s likely pseudo pain – that my brain is creating it just to get more of the drug. Your mind starts tricking itself to get more. One day, I missed taking a pill. I felt like I was dying. Have you ever electrocuted yourself? Like, proper 240 volts?”

I tell Mark that I touched an electric cattle fence once.

“Right. Well, multiply that by... a lot. It felt like something was in me trying to explode in every direction at once. Day and night. You can’t escape it. It’s fucking agony.”

“That’s the withdrawal?”

“Yes. The only thing I could think about was alleviating this electrical feeling in my body. You can’t find anything to sort it. You just can’t escape yourself. You can’t escape your body. It’s almost like being possessed by something that isn’t you.”

“How did you get through it?”

“Barely. Even trying to sit at a drum kit again was too much for a long time. I couldn’t even set the kit up. I’d come down here and not even be able to do anything. Then I became scared to come down here because I knew I wouldn’t get anything done. I didn’t play at all for about three years after the accident. There was trepidation. There was fear. It was about getting over that. I think I might have had PTSD, but I’m done with pharmaceuticals, so I wasn’t going to look into drugs to treat that. Instead, I knew I had to focus on my lifestyle and physical activity to get me through it.

“It was getting back into drumming which refocused me. I knew it’s what I should be doing. It’s the only thing I’m good at. I just knew I should be doing it, in some form or another. Whether it’s session

“One day, I missed taking a pill. I felt like I was dying. The only thing I could think about was alleviating this electrical feeling in my body. You can’t find anything to sort it. You just can’t escape yourself.”



work, teaching, playing in another band. I just want to be playing. That's always been my drive for anything I've ever done: to get better."

The idea that Mark has to push himself to the limit has been a prevalent part of his life both for better and for worse. The 17-year-old kid joining the marines. A 21-year-old with the tenacity to dedicate himself to something completely new – music. It was the same tenacity which saw him struggle to come to terms with the end of the Oceansize – to his detriment – but would then save his life only years later when faced with a crippling drug addiction.

I admire Mark in a lot of ways. In my early 20s he inspired me to try and become a better musician. A decade later and the same is still true, although, now I'm grateful he's around for slightly different reasons.

He seems like he's in a good place at the minute. As I leave, he mentions he's been doing a bit of teaching. "I couldn't listen to Oceansize up until last year. It was too painful. But now I sort of have to. People will ask me, 'How did you play this song?' So, I'll listen and figure it out. I can look at it more objectively now, Oceansize I mean. We were a fucking good band." He smiles.

I'm inclined to agree.

One Year Later

Mark and I kept in touch. Every so often, he'd email me about what he was working on. As you might expect from Mark, his projects all sound slightly leftfield. "At a studio in Germany recording with a Macedonian hip-hop artist!" read one email. "Working with a guy from a Balinese gamelan inspired metal band!" read another.

Almost a year after I first met Mark, I was visiting a friend who builds custom drums in Stockport. It's the first time I'd been to the workshop, and, during a tour, I turn a corner to find Mark holding some drum shells. We exchange a mutually surprised "What are you doing here!?"

We chat for a while, and Mark mentions that he'd started working as a drum builder about ten months ago. He's enjoying it. He's also been playing a lot too. "Whatever happened to that interview we did?" He asks. I tell him that I'd just finished writing it up a couple of days ago.

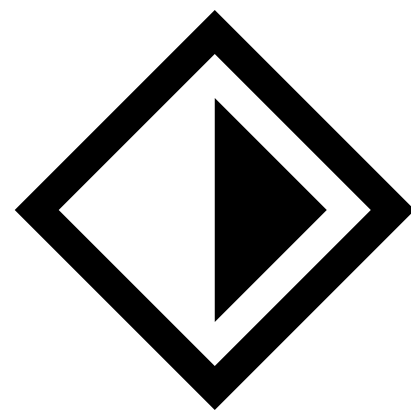
"That's pretty good timing," Mark grins. "I don't think I've told you about this new band I'm in called Binge. We've just recorded some songs. We're hoping to start gigging before the end of Summer.

"I was thinking about the interview too. It was quite heavy. When we spoke – I was just coming out of that phase. I'm conscious we spoke about it a lot. I feel like I'm in a very different place now."

Mark's right. It seemed incomplete to leave the interview in a place where Mark no longer was. Writing. Recording. Gigging. It's what Mark's about. It's exactly where he should be.

FIN.





— THE —
DRUMMER'S
— J♦URNAL —

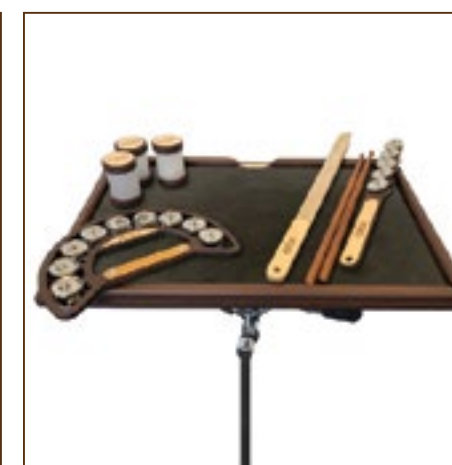
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MADE IN
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The Death of a Drum Magazine

OBITUARY: RHYTHM MAGAZINE 1985 - 2019

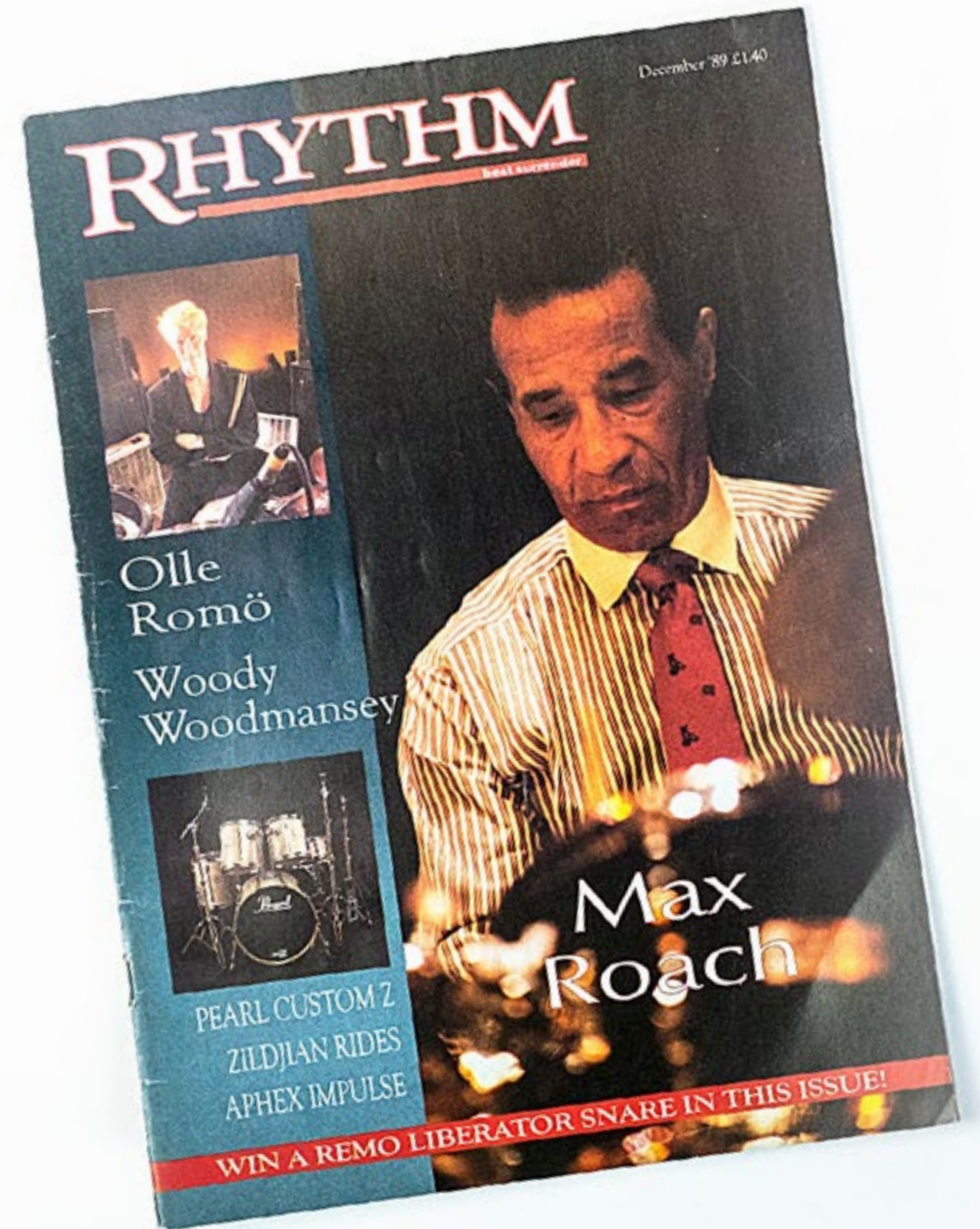
My local newsagent used to stock *Rhythm*. I remember going in and seeing it on the shelf above all the penny sweets.

For many years, the penny sweets in this shop were the focal point of my attention. Specifically, I would cram as many of them as humanly possible into a small paper bag before telling the nice lady behind the counter that I'd only selected about 20 pence worth, despite the bag visibly bursting at the seams.

As I got a bit older, swindling penny sweets began to take a bit of a back seat and I would go into the shop to buy a copy of *Rhythm*, and *Official UK PlayStation Magazine*.

In hindsight, *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* was a bit of a shit-fest, and really it amounted to little more than some incredibly aggressive marketing on Sony's behalf. Did I really need a Lara Croft beach towel for £40? No, not really. Did I, for some inexplicable reason, want it? Yes, badly.

The downfall of *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* was the meteoric rise of *Official UK PlayStation 2 Magazine*. As people transitioned to playing PS2, they didn't really feel the need to keep reading about the PS1. Fair enough. That's almost like natural selection. I guess what I'm saying is that maybe some magazines have a natural life span.





RHYTHM, DECEMBER 1989, VOLUME 5, ISSUE 6. MAX ROACH IS ON THE COVER.

MASSIVE DRUM KITS, POWER TOMS, AND HIGH WAISTED TROUSERS ARE THE ORDER OF THE DAY.

ALSO FEATURES: OLLE ROMO (EURHYTHMICS), WOODY WOODMANSEY (BOWIE), AND DAVE WECKL.

Rhythm, however, is one of those magazines I thought would be around for a long time. I suppose in magazine years it was. It started in 1985 and ran for 34 years. When I found out that it was going to close, I genuinely felt a bit shocked. I also wasn't sure what its closure meant.

You can point the finger at the usual suspects. The general decline of print. The flight of advertisers to social media. But what if there was a bigger shift.

Do people even really like reading about drums anymore? What if the drum kit was like the PS1, now just gathering dust in the attic? Even worse,

I'm not saying that the closure of *Rhythm* suddenly reinvigorated my interest in the instrument, but it made me realise with certainty that I did still care. It wasn't about nostalgia, either. In reality, I was part of the problem: is it a bad thing that the UK now no longer has a print drum magazine? Yes. Did I, at any point in the last five years, buy a copy of it?

My assumption that *Rhythm* would always be around was the issue. As a general rule, assumptions are fucking useless.

Rhythm's real strength was its ability to assemble quite a fearsome panel of industry expertise around

"I owe *Rhythm* a lot. Certainly, *The Drummer's Journal* wouldn't have existed without it."

were the drums a fad, a product of my childhood that I clung onto without realising it? How many fucks do I still give about them?

I dismissed all of these thoughts, mainly because I believe them to be untrue. The last one – do I still care – was the worst to deal with, mainly because I wasn't entirely confident in my own answer. Before I found out about *Rhythm* closing, it was a sort of, "Yeah I still like drums but to be honest I haven't really played them in a while and I'm just always busy doing other things and..."

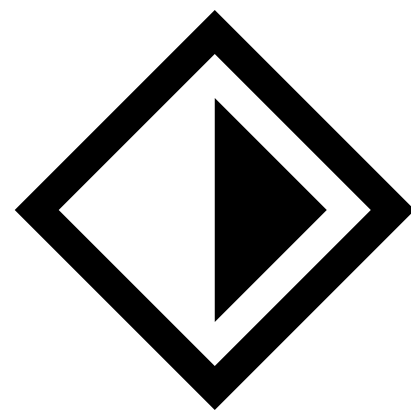
any given topic. It also dedicated a lot of time to showcasing new and upcoming bands, a trend which has become pretty rare in the modern music press.

I owe *Rhythm* a lot. Certainly, *The Drummer's Journal* wouldn't have existed without it.

At the end of the day, it was a beacon for the UK drum scene. It feels a little darker without it.

FIN.





— THE —
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BREXIT. BLUE JACKETS AND MICROCHIPS

Building the World's Most Advanced Drum Module

Words and photos by Tom Hoare

Before the fall of the Berlin wall, the area surrounding Dresden was a major producer of microchips. East Germany, then formally known as the German Democratic Republic, invested heavily in its electronics industry due to trade restrictions enforced by the West. The GDR couldn't import microchips directly from the US, so they had to make their own.

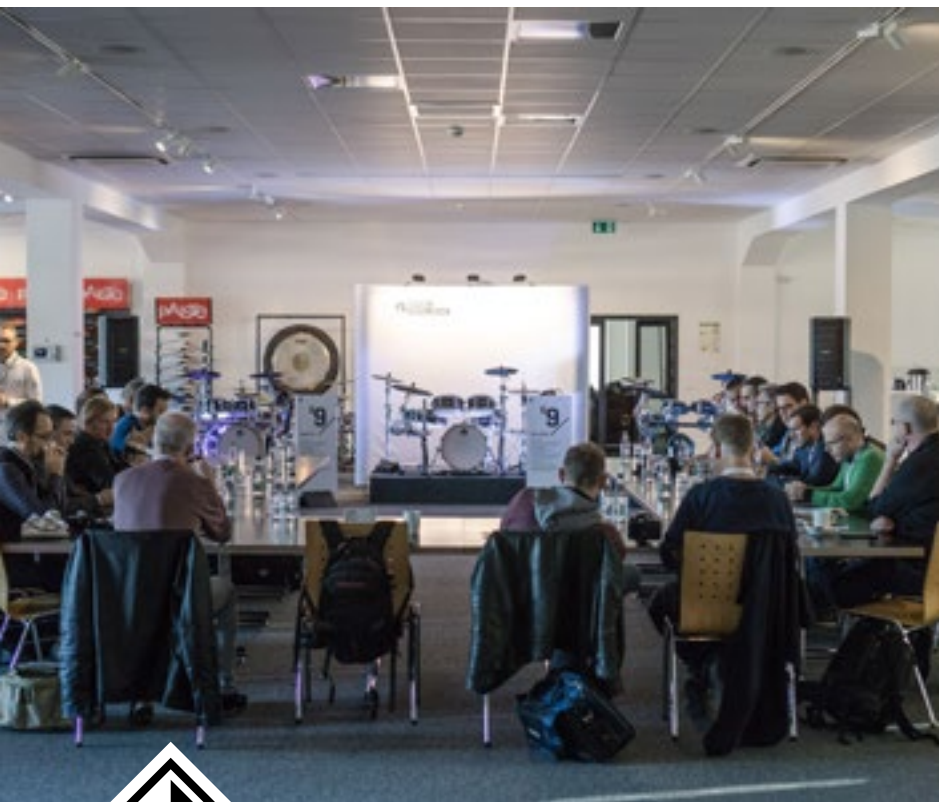
The reunification of Germany involved merging two very different economies - the capitalist economy of the west, and the socialist economy of the east. It proved to be very problematic. A deep recession took hold in the former GDR, but Dresden's electronics industry was earmarked for protection by the German government.

This area is now called Silicon Saxony. Today, it's the European centre of microelectronics.





“Much of the bus ride consists of the handful of British gently being mocked about Brexit.”



**This is Dennis,
Product Manager
of GEWA's industry
leading e-drums.
Dennis likes coffee.
Lots of it.**

Everyone on the bus is heading to a press event. A local company called GEWA, famous for manufacturing violins, have developed an electronic drum kit. Keen to show it off, they invited a gaggle of people from the drum industry to come and take a look. Despite our insistence that The Drummer's Journal probably isn't really qualified to give any sort of opinion on it, they insisted we attend anyway, if only for the free buffet.

Much of the bus ride consists of the handful of British being gently mocked about Brexit. Everyone gets involved. Even the Swiss do not remain neutral on this.

The bus pulls up outside a large, industrial-looking building and we all file inside. In a huge conference room, three of

the company's flagship kits are set up and we're given a formal presentation by the company president. He talks about growing up behind the Iron Curtain during the 60s when the US and Soviet Union were vying to get to space. At the time, the space race was driving computational progression, and the microelectronics industry surrounding Dresden played a crucial role.

Adorf also has a tradition of musical instrument manufacture thanks to the expansive forests which dominate the surrounding hills. For GEWA, making an electronic kit seemed like a natural progression. "This was very much a European project", he says. "We're proud to have done this not in the US, not in Korea, but in Europe."

Throughout the multi-day event, there are numerous references to Europe as a united, collective body which must withstand competition from both Asia and the US. Every time someone says "Europe", I think about Brexit in a way that doesn't make me feel good.

The lead product engineer is next to speak. He's a guy called Dennis. He talks through all the product features in immense detail. After about two minutes, it becomes clear that Dennis is the type of person who is able to fixate on the smallest detail. Having devoted his life to this project, he's incredibly excited to finally talk about it. Occasionally, some of his co-workers have to interrupt him to ask him to explain something in a simpler way.

In collaboration with Drum Workshop, Dennis is pretty much responsible for creating one of the most advanced e-drum modules ever made. He's also an incredibly interesting guy. After the presentation, we sat down for a chat.

Dennis: I must say that my English isn't excellent.

The Drummer's Journal: I'm willing to bet that your English is way better than my German.

In that case, yes, please proceed.

A bit like a school trip, we toured the factory. We were warned: "Please do not push any buttons." Easier said than done. There were lots of buttons.





**Dennis occasionally looks concerned. Did he leave the gas on?
No – Dennis wouldn't do that.
In reality, he's just deep in thought
about a complex technical problem
only he can solve.**

You're relatively local, right?

Yes. I was raised in East Germany, before the reunification. This is why languages aren't my forté. We weren't taught English at school, but Russian instead.

“Such a product is never finished. It's a platform, ultimately. That's the difference instead of it just being a drum module.”

What was it like at school?

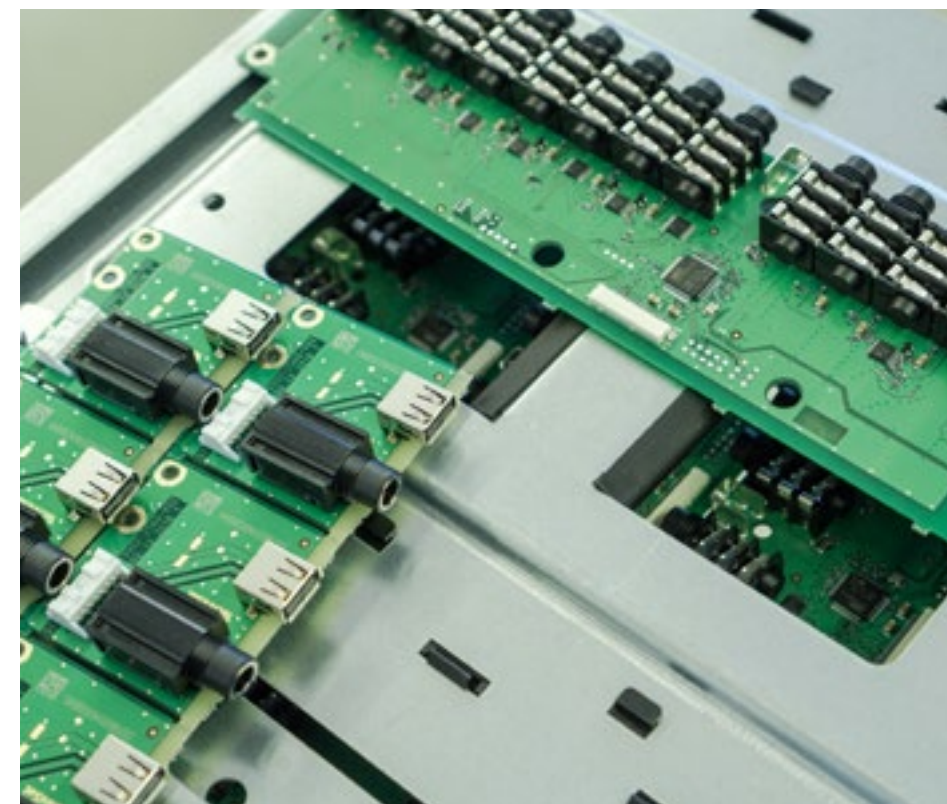
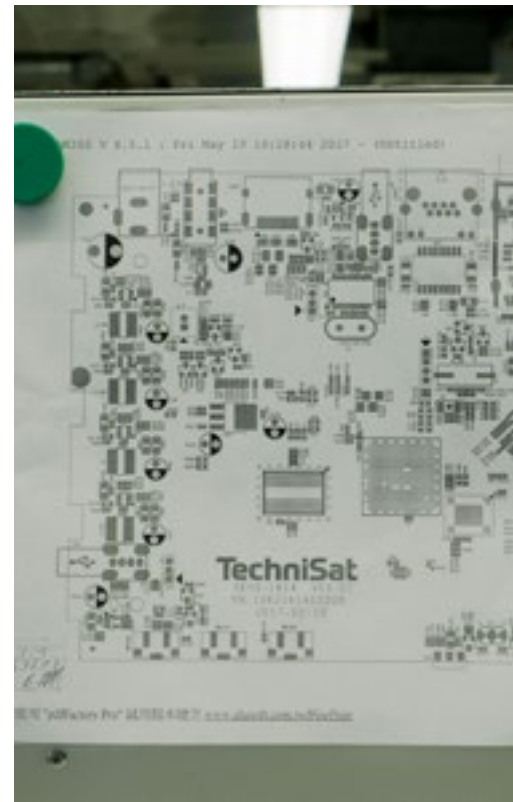
Actually, it was not bad, though it was a very strict system under communism. School was from Monday to Saturday. But I didn't mind the strictness as I wanted to learn.

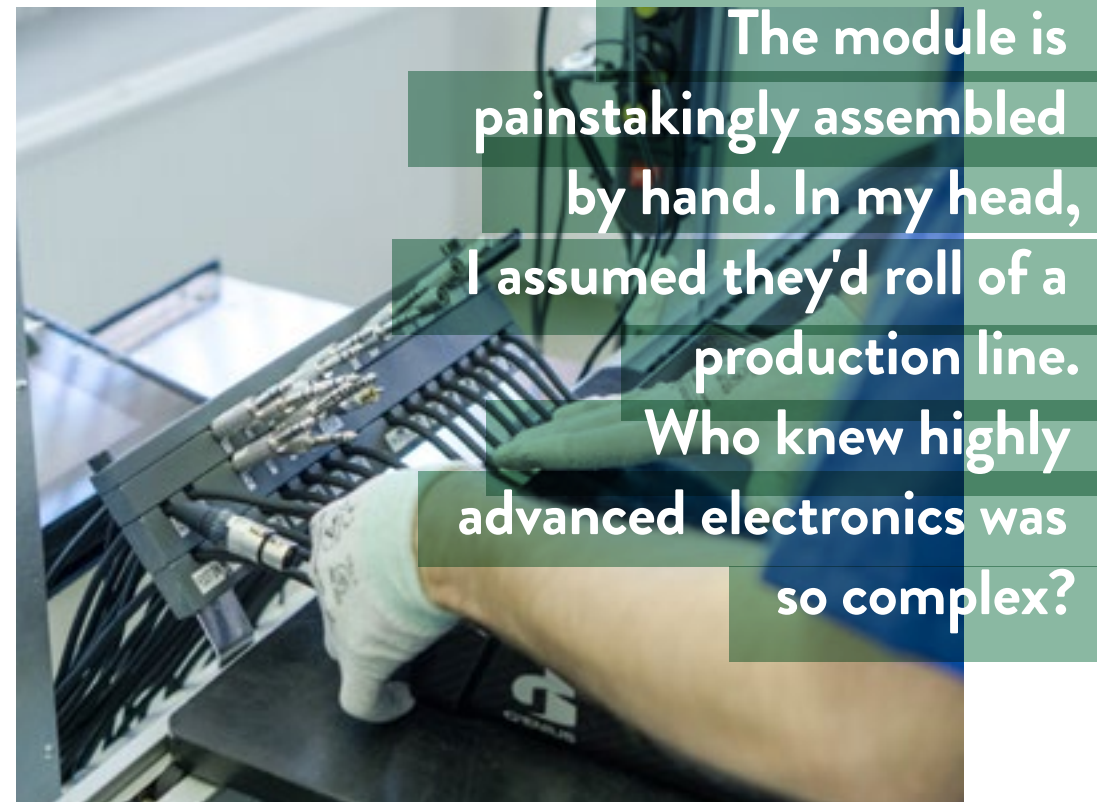
What did you want to learn?

Maths and science, and also music.

How old were you when you first went to the West?

Twenty. It was after the reunification. It was a new world. New possibilities.





The module is painstakingly assembled by hand. In my head, I assumed they'd roll off a production line. Who knew highly advanced electronics was so complex?



And you'd never left Germany before you were 20?

No. But I didn't mind that so much as I had a lot to do. It was easy to learn an instrument in East Germany because it was not expensive to go to music school. So most kids were learning instruments. I'm from Klingenthal, 30km from Adorf. It's good for winter sports. Ski jumping, you know Eddie the Eagle?

Ha! Yes. Old Eddie! A national treasure in England.

[Laughs]

So you wanted to be a musician?

Yes. I am a musician. I'm a piano player. I play drums. I was also a studio owner at one point and a producer. I recorded a lot of drums. They are my favourite instrument. Perhaps you are not surprised by this?

No – I had an inkling you might like them.

It's nice to play drums. It's my instrument. I don't know why. It just happened this way. Drums just felt correct to me.

And I suppose you got into software development through music? Through recording?

Yes. It's very interesting to record drums. If you record a guitar or singer, there will only be one microphone. But with the drums, there are lots of microphones. I forget the word... who is the man at the front of the orchestra?

Conductor?

Yes. With the drums, you are like a conductor at the mixing desk. The drums are very orchestral – that's what I love. But in the early 90s, I bought an Atari ST. Do you know a program called C-Lab Notator? It's now called Apple Logic Pro. Anyhow, for this program, I have serial number 03 *[gleefully laughs]*.

I think that's called being an early adopter. You taught yourself?

Yes. Oh, yes.

And now you've just designed a new drum kit.

Yes, more drums.

How many hours has that taken?

Hours? [*Chuckles*]. I don't know.

Can we work it out?

Three years ago, in my shed in my garden, I created the UI.

User Interface?

Yes. UI is one of the first steps. Then you define the firmware, how it reacts when you change or move a fader, for example.

What was the hardest part?

Trigger detection. It's a really hard part because all drummers have a different feeling. It's like with guitar players in the studio. You can create the perfect mix, and they will still say, "I can't hear the guitar."

How does it feel now you've finished?

I think such a product is never finished, and every day you have new ideas on how to move forward. We are going to continue to extend the functionality. We have a touchscreen-based system where we can add apps. It's a platform, untimely. That's the difference instead of it just being a drum module.

What are you working on at the minute?

I really want to make a digital drum builder. Where you select your shell and your head to create the basic sound. And then you can manipulate this sound and tune it however you like. So you can say, OK, I would like a DW Collectors Edition tom with a Remo Emperor head. It would be a game changer in the industry.

Have you ever made anything that wasn't an instrument?

No. Just mixing desks and microphones. I'm a microphone enthusiast. We are in the right country for microphones. The old Neuman factory, it's not far from here. It's maybe 30 minutes.



Sure – it's nice that it looks and feels like an acoustic set, but the G9's real strength is the quality of its pre-set sounds, coupled with the flexibility of being able to download and import additional kits and voices.



What do you like about mics?

The charisma. A mic is not only a reproducer, it's also a design part.

How many do you own?

I would guess at least 100 microphones.

They must be worth a bit?

I would never sell them. They're very precious.

Do you let your kids play with them?

Actually, sometimes yes I do. I have three children. It's good for me because I spend a long time working. And then I'll hear, "Papa!"

Do you have quite an intense focus?

Yes, very. But it's good to break it every so often, otherwise, it's all you do. That's not good sometimes.

How many hours sleep do you get?

Maximum five, I think. I'm an early bird. I'm the first here to the office, always. I get here at 7 am latest, I'll leave at 6 pm or 7 pm.

Is this your dream job?

Ja. For sure.

That must be very satisfying?

Yes. It's really cool to design a musical instrument. For GEWA, it's a big step to have e-drums. Pianos, cases, violins, cellos – but electronics? Not until now. This is the first time.

Is it good for Germany?

For me this is very important. We do it here. In Germany. But not just Germany. It's an important message to say we are European. Whether you're German or Czech isn't important to me. We are Europeans. We have to do this together. That's the very idea of Europe. I hope all people understand that.

FIN.

Out of all the G9's
ground-breaking tech,
we were most captivated
by its inbuilt PDF
reader, for obvious
reasons.







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BEYOND DIGITAL DRUMS.



COLLABORATION BETWEEN



TECHNOLOGY
PADS, E-SHELLS
E-CYMBALS



E-HARDWARE

GEWA
drums
gewaelectronics.com



**Pitch, Peart, practice pads, paradiddles,
phrasing, pulse, patterns, punk, pedals,
Phil (Collins), piccolo, peaking, Pearl,
para-paradiddles, popcorn snares,
Porcaro, polyrhythms & permutations.**

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VALUABLES

Things We Like, Summer 2019

Gear from Sabian, Keo Percussion, Cympad and Evans Drumheads





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As someone who lives in a terraced house in a big city where I can routinely hear the highs and lows of my neighbour's lives through the walls, I've never really been able to play acoustic drums at home without fear of reprisal. Muting drums with pads is chronically unsatisfying, and most decent e-kits cost the same as a year's rent.

A friend recently said that one of their goals in life was to be able to come home from the pub at 1am and play drums without waking anyone in the flat up. We had a laugh about what a pipedream that was. A few weeks later, I got a text that excitedly detailed how they'd achieved this elusive goal. It involved buying a very cheap second-hand kit, a second-hand e-drum module, a set of basic piezo triggers, and decent mesh heads. The heads in question were the Evans SoundOff Mesh Heads, specifically designed to reduce playing volume (they're single ply) whilst also triggering reliably.



Keo Percussion

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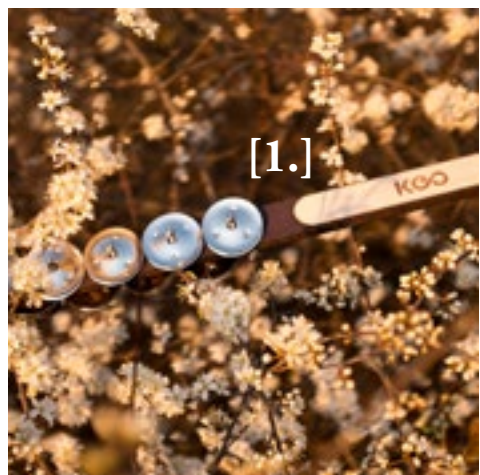
Straight outta Stockport, UK and brought to you by British Drum Company, Keo Percussion make an extensive array of hand-crafted percussive instruments and accessories. As someone whose experience with percussion consisted of filling plastic bottles with gravel, having visually appealing and painstakingly finished tambourines, shakers, cajons and woodblocks is disproportionately exciting.

It's nice to see a drum brand with some genuinely sustainability credentials too. The products themselves are made using the remnant wood left over from the British Drum Co. factory, and the packaging is minimalist and plastic free.

The master craftsman behind it all, Keith Keough, is one of the most meticulous people you'll ever meet. It's no surprise that the instruments themselves, namely the cajons, shakers, and various tambourines, all sound professional enough to feel at home on the percussion tray of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.



"WHY ARE YOU PUTTING ALL
THAT STUFF IN THAT TREE?",
ASKED THE GROUP OF LOCAL
YOUTH WHO WERE SMOKING
WEED IN THE PARK.





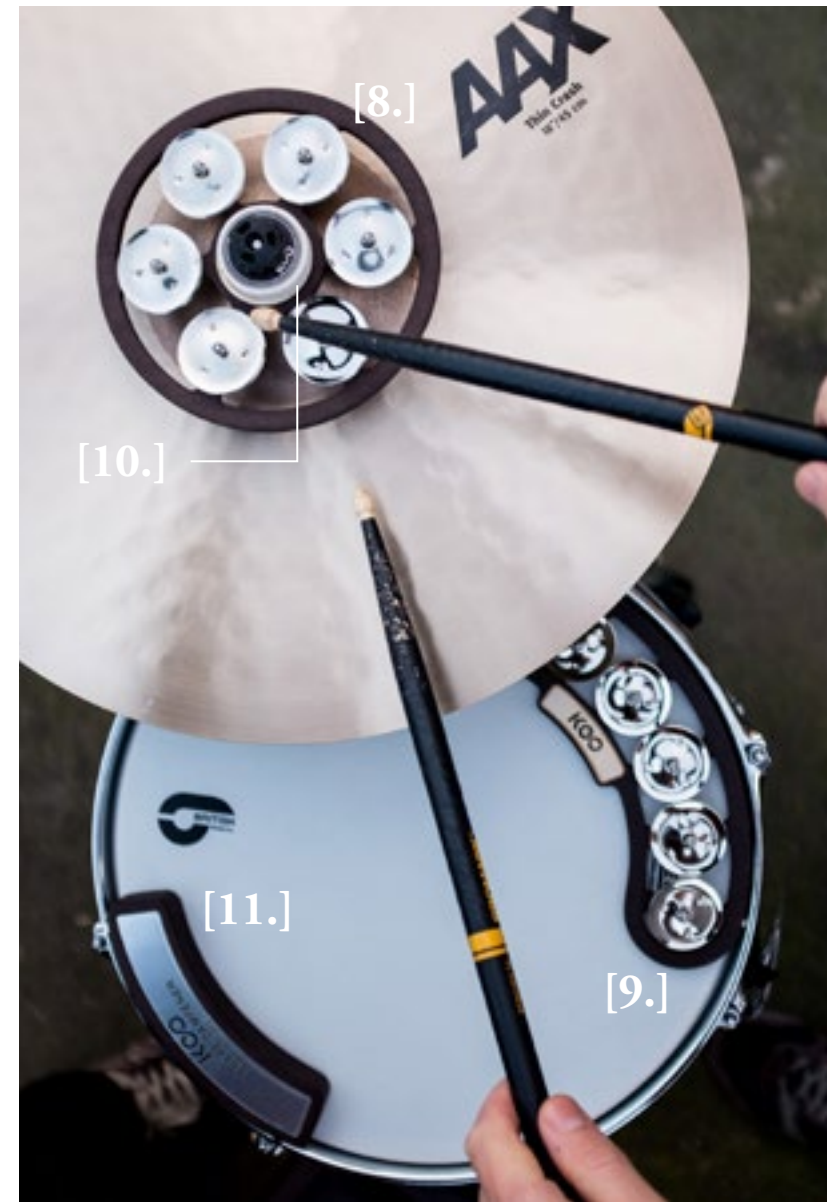
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PREVIOUS PAGE:

1. JINGLE STICK
£23.99
3. KEO TAMBOURINE
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2. FLUTTER STICK [PAIR]
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4. WOODBLOCK GUIRO
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5. SHAKERS
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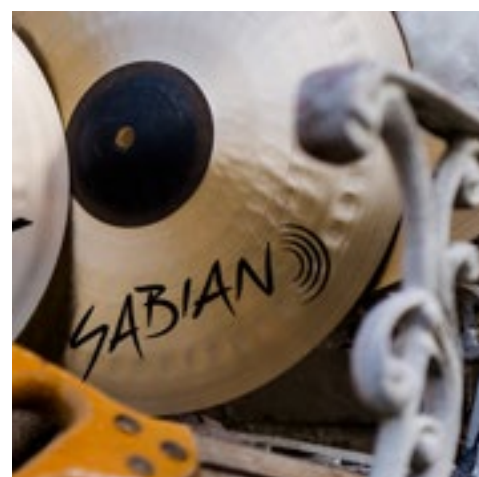
2019 AAX Cymbal Set

£608 / \$790

sabian.com/cymbals/aax

Achingly modern and brighter than that time you went to Germany on a school trip and bought a laser pen from a street seller and then shone it into your own eye (*not recommended*).

Since 1993, AAX has been one of Sabian's flagship lines, and developed a reputation as one of the most adaptable B20 bronze cymbal series out there. Hand-lathed and machine-hammered, new AAX crashes and rides are available in thin, medium and heavy weights making it less stressful to decipher what the actual visible differences between them are. Aesthetically, they've been cleaned up too, and the hammering is also more apparent than it was previously. I've always been partial to thinner cymbals mainly due to some laughably misplaced notion that they sound more 'delicate', but was still surprised that even the heavy versions still seemed pretty thin. Apparently, this is due to a change in the hammering process, which, marketing spiel aside, has created a remarkably full-bodied sound for a cymbal that was traditionally pitched quite high.



The AAX cymbal set:
18\"/>



DIFFERENT SIZES AND COLOURS
ARE AVAILABLE, INCLUDING
DEDICATED WASHERS FOR HI-HAT,
RIDE AND CRASH CYMBALS



Cympad

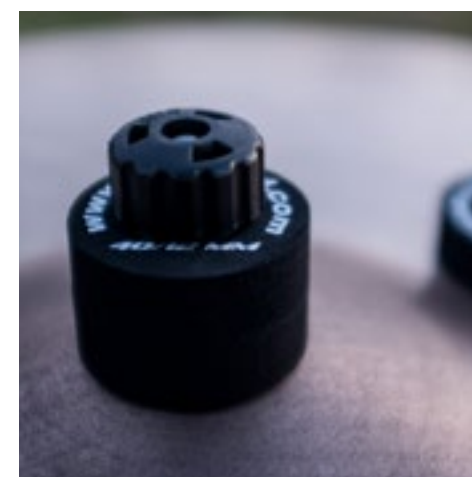
Cellular Foam Cymbal Washers

Sets from \$10.50 / £7.00

cympad.com

When I keyholed my old Zildjian K crash due to losing the cymbal felts and not bothering to replace them, I spiralled down into the uninspiring world of researching potential replacements. I did the honourable thing and ordered a set of four felt washers for 1p (*plus £2.99 postage*) from China. When they arrived, they had the consistency of a croissant. The moral of the story was to spend another couple of coins and order some that actually work.

Enter Cympad. As opposed to felt, Cympad's washers are made from cellular foam. Not only does this make them more durable, but they can also be used as cymbal dampeners too. Available in different weights and sizes, you can mix and match to reduce volume and decay. Tightening the wing nut dries out the cymbal quite significantly and reduces wash, also boosting stick definition. If you're also partial to losing this sort of item, they are handily available in bright colours that are easy to spot, even when rolling across the floor on their way to oblivion.

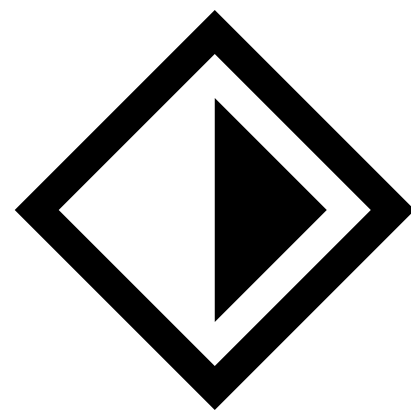




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AN INDEPENDENT DRUM MAGAZINE

tdj

TO THE POINT OF CREA- TIVE CRISIS

A Conversation with Bill Bruford

Words & photography by Tom Hoare

Bill's house is tucked into the hillside, hidden away by the trees. It's achingly quaint. I'd assumed that most retired rockstars would probably live in the type of residence that makes the gilded porcelain of the Trump Tower penthouse seem like the pinnacle of taste and decorum.

Apparently not.





It's a quintessentially English scene, and in some ways Bill Bruford is a quintessentially English guy. Tall, public-schooled, polite. "Cup of tea? Sorry, I've no biscuits in. Hang on – there are digestives. Are digestives ok?" Etc.

As Bill disappears into the kitchen, I can't help notice that the pictures I'd seen of this lanky, curly haired-kid from the 1970s aren't remarkably different from how he looks today. He's aged better than even the pestle and mortar, which is saying something given it was invented in 35,000 BC and is still appreciated by pesto lovers worldwide to this day. That's relevance for you.

Bill became a household name in the 1970s thanks to his tenures with King Crimson, Yes, and Genesis. Sure, the British economy was on the brink of collapse at that point, but the record-buying public pulled us through. In a career spanning over 40 years and multiple genres, he became renowned as a band leader with Earthworks. He earned a place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and a reputation as one of the most innovative drummers of the last half century.

In 2009, Bill retired from performance and turned towards academia. He undertook a PhD and now spends his time lecturing and writing.

I take my shoes off and two seconds later realise I'm leaving sweaty sockprints on the hardwood hallway floor. I don't usually get sweaty feet. Must be nervous. Thankfully, Bill's office is carpeted. On the walls and shelves, there's a lot of memorabilia – cassettes, CDs, books. In the middle of the room is a drum kit. Toward the edge, a piano.

Bill emerges with the digestives. I realise I'm probably nervous because I'm about to talk to Bill about a subject on which he's just written a book: creativity. Specifically, it's an exploration of how drummers can make better use of it.

Bill Bruford: Mic check. One Two. Are you getting a reading? Should I keep talking? Is this good talking? Check check...

The Drummer's Journal: Yes, that's some great talking.

I am talking right now and I am going to continue to talk...

Ok, I think that's a good level.

I think I might be getting the flu. [*Coughs, voice goes gravelly.*]

Ah – now I sound like the BBC.

“I began to lose the will to play because I couldn't hear what to play next.”

Creativity. It's such an abstract thing, isn't it?

Yes, although I never thought about it for the first 30 years of my life. I got interested in the topic as I began to lose the will to play music. I thought, “Why am I no longer being creative? Why have I lost the will to spend time behind a drum kit?” I decided to look into it.

Can you define it?

I personally see it as the quality of a relationship between two or more

people who are in a common search for understanding or meaning. So creativity these days is seen as very relational. It's not something that's just in me, I'm not suddenly brilliant on my own. I need you to tell me I'm brilliant. We are in a relationship, performer and listener.

One of the things you tackle directly is the role of the drummer, which seems to fall somewhere between keeping time on the one hand, and being highly creative on the other.

I look at it in terms of playing on a continuum of control. So at 9am at the toothpaste commercial, you have very little control. You're under specific direction. In your originals band at noon, you have much more control as you're expected to be original. At the free jazz thing in the evening, you might be required to improvise on the fly. Knowing what is possible at any given gig is a very important skill.

You suggested that drummers tend not to be associated with creativity?

Most studies have focused on people like the David Bowies of this world – major stars. The humble instrumentalist has received less attention, and the humble drummer, even less so.

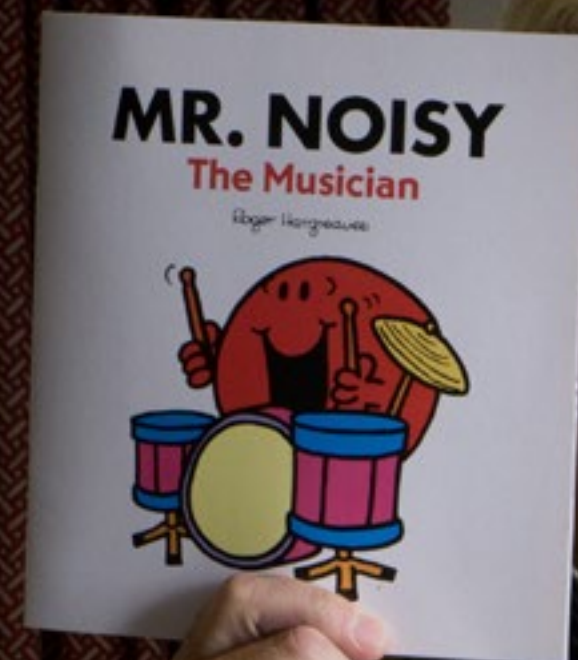
I think drummers tend to prioritise making the music work, over making it matter. To make it work, you have to do something well. Nothing wrong with that – it still is highly creative, but it's making it matter that is more elusive.

What do you mean by “making music matter”?

Making it new or different, for which creativity will be absolutely necessary. It's this ability to act on and communicate significant difference which is how I'm viewing creativity in music performance.

You also talk about the drummer being an underdog. Are you suggesting the drummer is misunderstood?

Drummers are misunderstood by the audience, they're misunderstood by their colleagues onstage, and they're misunderstood by producers, who expect rather little of them.



KING CRIMSON, AT THE
GREEK THEATRE,
LOS ANGELES, 1981
PHOTO BY: TONY LEVIN





A breed apart and a breed below, is the phrase I used. I think drummers also misunderstand themselves. Very little is expected of drummers. "Drums – just give us the basic beat and keep it steady!"

What's wrong with functionality?

There's absolutely nothing wrong with it. But not all drummers do that all the time. Let's take Mark Guiliana, who played for David Bowie. Mark is a classic case in point who can play in any style of music and is continuously making judgements as to what's possible and what's effective.

shows you how, to a new generation of kids, we have positioned the drummer.

Were you always confident of your role as a drummer?

Not always. In King Crimson there were two drummers, and the two of us couldn't really work out why there were two of us. Then, one day the penny dropped and we were able to adopt our relative roles. Pat's role was to provide a beat that would connect the music to the audience. My job was to play around on that beat and obfuscate it; to provide the hollandaise sauce to the meat and potatoes, if you see what I mean.

"Drummers misunderstand themselves. Very little is expected of us. That's a shame."

You say that Western music has a predisposition against the rhythmist. Is that a generalisation?

Yes. But I think I have the authority to state it, particularly in the distinction between pitched and unpitched instruments. Drums are classed as an unpitched instrument. We can all acknowledge that there are lower and higher pitches on a drum kit, but you can't necessarily sing to them. Drums have an association with noise: the clanging of cymbals, the beat of the drum, and this dates back to biblical times. The violin, by contrast, is associated with art and culture. Have you ever read the Mr. Men books? Mr. Noisy is inevitably a drummer. He's not a flute player. That

Delicious. Love hollandaise sauce.

It is nice, yes.

In King Crimson, why did you feel like you always had to avoid the obvious?

The obvious is well catered for by a vast army of drummers. In King Crimson, you were paying us to ask questions, to challenge assumptions, to see how far we might be able to go. My role was to challenge the obvious.

How did you respond when you felt you were playing music that had a lack of meaning?

CASSETTES. ONE OF THEM BEARS A SUBTLE SPELLING ERROR. SEE IF YOU CAN SPOT IT.



I once did a recording session where things were getting worse and worse until finally my limbs couldn't even knock out a standard rock beat because my brain was saying, "I can't hear any music here."

“Drummers tend to prioritise making the music work, over making it matter.”

That sounds a bit existential.

Yes. It is. I began to lose the will to play because I couldn't hear what to play next. For 35 years I knew exactly what to play next because my brain was full of what I thought were meaningful ideas. I don't care if you like them, I thought they were meaningful ideas. They gave me purpose and function. But slowly that idea began to evaporate.

And did you find a single answer as to why this was the case?

No. It's not black and white like that. It happened over time. Over a period of six years, I slowly realised I wasn't enjoying it. Then I realised I really didn't want to play. Then it became, "Why don't I want to play?" I'm sure many people will enjoy their drumming until the very end, but I have had a small coterie of drummers who, post-50 years of age, say to me, "I don't enjoy it much more either." Maybe they think it was something for kids. Personally – I don't think that at all.

Sounds like you've become a bit of an agony aunt?

For some people, if you strip away fame and fortune, they're not sure they want to be a drummer any more.

You reference using music as a vehicle for personal change...

Music is a vehicle for change, as King Crimson was. That's why I loved King Crimson. That whole band was dedicated to change, whether it was the musicians, the way the band worked, or challenging people's views on what groups should or could not do. I was happy there because I wanted to see what I could do. What would I be like after four years in King Crimson compared to the four years before? You can measure yourself through a series of albums and go, "Blimey – I would have never done that five years ago."

But presumably it can't always be a change for the better, though?

Oh, absolutely. No one is saying change is comfortable. It might lead to something great, it might lead to something awful. But the one sure thing is you won't be standing in the same place this Tuesday as you were last Tuesday.

Isn't that a bit stressful?

It's highly stressful [*laughs*]. It's exhausting. Because you're constantly being assessed and evaluated by your colleagues and your listeners and yourself. The first thing I recorded at 18 was reviewed in Melody Maker, and I've been reviewed nationally and internationally ever since. I'm exhausted of people expressing opinions on what it is I may or may not have done. At 60, I'd had enough. I decided to move over and let someone else have a go.

Your final performance, did you know it was your last?

Yes. But I didn't share it with anyone else really. My family knew. That's about it.

And there's still a drum kit here, in this room.

Yes, there is. I still have a noodle once in a while. Occasionally, worried Surrey mothers bring up their 16-year-old who they're terrified wants to be a drummer. They seem to bring them up for assessment.

You're a bit like the sorting hat from Harry Potter?

Exactly [*laughs*]. So that's partly what the kit's there for.

It's not an elephant in the room then?

Meaning?

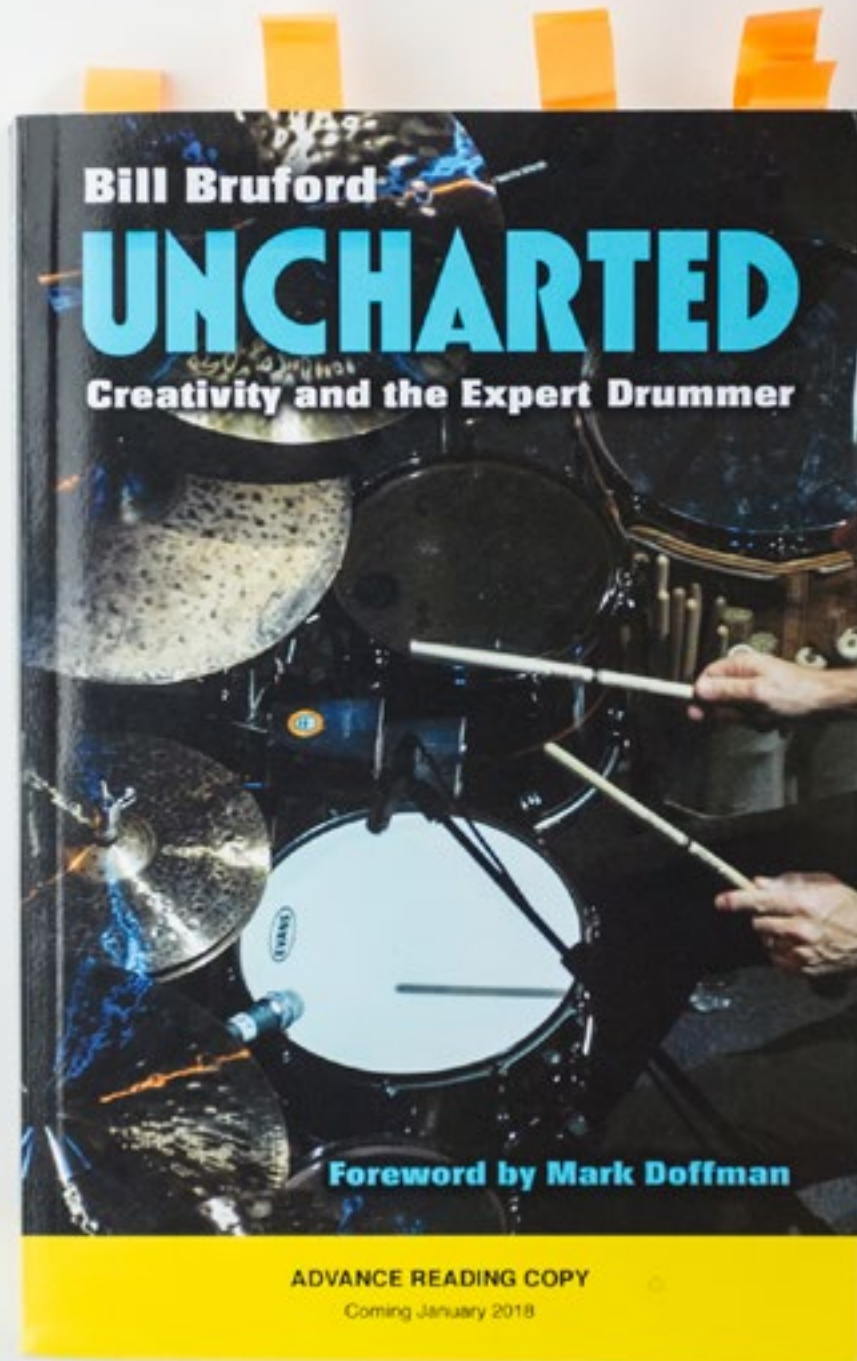
It's not there as a bit of a spectre?

No, not at all.

What about the future? Is the drummer going anywhere?

Isn't it interesting how the drummer still seems to be viable and necessary on stage and how people love a drummer. And how the drummer still seems to be the lightning conductor for the energy in the room. You can see the body movements, there's the downbeat. The





BILL'S BOOK IS AN ACADEMIC TAKE ON CREATIVITY AS APPLIED TO DRUMMERS.

IT DRAWS UPON EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH THE LIKES OF MARK GUILIANA, CINDY BLACKMAN-SANTANA, PETER ERSKINE AND MORE. IT INVESTIGATES WHAT EXPERT DRUMMERS DO, AND WHY THEY DO IT.

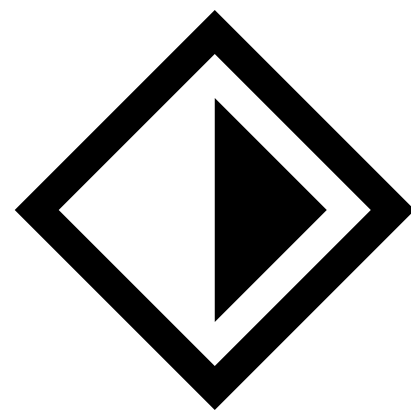
audience understand they're in the presence of music at that point and it's the drummer most of all who is showing that. The drummer has huge vitality on stage. I don't see that changing in the short term.

This idea that automation and AI is going to start creeping into everyday white collar jobs and create massive redundancy. Might this impact music?

A lot of stuff in society gets worked out on musicians first. In the studio in the 80s, we had robots in the form of electronic drum machines. We had to learn to play in a computer's view of time. So drummers and musicians go through a lot in a modern sense. I'll cite you that phrase, "the gig economy", which is directly descended from instrumental practice. Yes – it's a strain. Welcome to our world, everyone. We were there first. I'm sure software will continue to advance, but that's not doing my heart and soul any good. When I write the music, when I write the book, it's what gives me purpose in life. What I'm arguing for is the messy, difficult business of people playing music together in a room. It's always been meaningful to me. That said, it's time consuming and expensive. But in a way, what I'm saying is: get uncomfortable. Get out there. Be comfortable being uncomfortable. Not knowing is very important. Care for another biscuit?

FIN.

*There's more from Bill at billbruford.com
The new Earthworks Complete boxset arrives June 2019.*



— THE —
DRUMMER'S
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


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Reimagining a New Sonic Inspiration

IT IS BRAIN SURGERY, ACTUALLY.

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club's Leah Shapiro

Words and photography by Tom Hoare



I'm stood with Leah on the roof of the O2 Forum in Kentish Town, London. From here you can see the city stretch out for miles in every direction. Looking south, the Shard, like something straight out of Middle Earth and missing only a giant all-seeing eye, glints in the sunlight. It's hot, one of the hottest days of the year, and Leah leans against the rusty guard railing smoking a cigarette.

Today, The Forum has the words "Black Rebel Motorcycle Club" above its front door. An old art deco cinema, it closed in 1970 and became a bingo hall, then a dance hall, before earning a cult status in the 80s and 90s as a place to see underground indie bands. Eventually, it became a calling point for international touring artists. Like most London venues, backstage, in a way which is almost endearing, it's had the absolute shit kicked out of it. There's a series of incredibly narrow passageways that weren't really designed to have 40 road crew tearing through them like a tide of timber-laden flood waters.

Towards the back of the building, on the fourth floor, is the green room. Another door leads you outside onto a little balcony that's littered with cigarette butts. From here, there's a steep set of metal stairs leading to the roof. They feel a little sketchy and creak ominously. Directly below, the Overground trains lumber by with regularity. The tracks twist away to the west, disappearing behind a 70s prefab which looks like a block of flats.

This is the Royal Free Hospital. It was founded in 1898 with the purpose of offering free healthcare to those who couldn't afford medical treatment. Out of all the buildings visible from this roof, it's certainly the ugliest. It's also, however, the most relevant to Leah's story.

The NHS was created during a wave of social reforms following the Second World War. The United States, by contrast, developed a healthcare system based around privatised health insurance. During World War II, Roosevelt introduced a cap on wages to ensure the country could manufacture goods needed for the war effort at low cost.

Employers, therefore, tempted prospective employees with other fringe benefits. Health insurance was one. The wage cap was eventually lifted, but health insurance remained something your employer would offer.

"I had a year and a half of having horrible show after a horrible show, night after night. It drove me completely insane."

In 2014, Leah was diagnosed with a condition known as Chiari malformation. It's a severe brain condition where the lower part of the brain begins to push down into the spinal canal.

Those who advocate for privatised healthcare state it offers an unparalleled standard of care. The drawback is this comes at immense cost. The cost of Leah's surgery was so high that it was met by crowdfunding through the band.

"I'm well aware not everyone has that option" Leah states.



“You know Dr. Nick from The Simpsons? I had one guy tell me that he could do the surgery and I’d be able to go back on tour a month afterwards.”



The wind has picked up and she has to keep sweeping her hair out of her eyes. “But the truth is,” she continues, “without the band, I’d never have been able to afford it. I’d be in debt for the rest of my life, pretty much.”

“I’ve never had a proper nine-to-five job. I remember, even when I was a lot younger, the idea of having one freaked me out. The thought of going into the same office every day and not being able to do what you want was unappealing. Following the manual for life the way you’re supposed to: get married, have kids. It gave me an allergic reaction. I was always thinking about ways to avoid that.”

“Options? I didn’t really have many options until I started playing drums. Then I figured, ok, this is coming naturally to me and I’m going to stick with it. It’s the only instrument where I’ve ever felt like that. I decided to go with it – not that it was the most genius career path.” She laughs.

“I didn’t really have a backup plan. And as scary as that can be, it can help you get off your ass. It made me work a little harder than I otherwise would if I’d had some sort of cushy fall-back. My parents did force me to get a college degree just in case. I studied Music Business. It was sort of useless, but at least I have something on paper that would look halfway decent in the real world.”

“I always say that I didn’t choose drums, but that they choose me. I don’t know if it was the way my brain works, but I’ve always just felt at home playing drums. I still love it.”

“Back in 2013, after we’d recorded *Spectre At The Feast*, that whole touring cycle, for a year and a half, I could tell something wasn’t right. Usually, when I play the drums, they just feel like an extension of myself. Everything just has a certain fluidity to it. But that completely went. In terms of how I felt, I had a year and a half of having horrible show after a horrible show, night after night. It drove me completely insane. Initially, I just thought I was getting

worse at playing drums with time, as opposed to getting better.”

“I always got a lot of headaches growing up, but with Chiari, a lot of the symptoms are really vague. It starts to affect your motor skills. Your balance gets a little weird. Stuff like that.”

“As a condition, there are different variations of it. There’s the really nasty version where your cerebellar tonsils start to herniate out of the base of your skull. My case wasn’t as severe as this. Typically, it’s your late 20s and early 30s when you start to notice the neurological symptoms. I definitely did.”

“It’s just a corrupt,
fucked up system.
It’s unfortunate.”

“Something clearly wasn’t right, and I ended up having an MRI scan. The doctor who gave me the MRI was actually an eye doctor. He looked at my scans and said, ‘This is way outside the area of my expertise - you need to speak to someone in neurology right away.’”

“I freaked out. Emotionally, it was weird because there was no one to explain what was going on, or what I should do. But I’m quite





pragmatic, and I spent a lot of time on the internet trying to figure it out. Because of the way the US healthcare system works and the way doctors behave, especially surgeons, it can feel a bit like a used car dealership. Rush into something and you can end up getting the wrong surgeon who is not really properly equipped to do the surgery. Maybe they just want the money, or don't have the correct experience. If they get it wrong, it can fuck up your life."

"You know Dr. Nick from The Simpsons? I had one guy tell me that he could do the surgery and I'd be able to go back to touring a month afterwards. When he said that, I thought it sounded like bullshit. I could barely turn my head a month after my surgery. I've no idea how I would have gone on tour and played drums."

"You have to educate yourself. But, there comes a point where you are not educating yourself and you're just watching terrifying videos of the surgery being done. I don't recommend this. You just freak yourself out. But I knew I just wanted to get the best surgeon possible."

"It was an eye-opening look into how fucked up those insurance companies are when you've got something beyond a common cold. They're looking for any excuse to drop you like a brick."

"They don't want to touch you. I had to work with a company to put pressure on the insurance company to cover basic things like MRI. My insurance told me an MRI wasn't medically necessary, and they tried to push to have the procedure done at a cheaper hospital that wasn't equipped to handle that kind of surgery. My surgeon stepped in to say what they were proposing was absolutely unacceptable, and really he was the one who forced their hand. It's terrifying to think about how many people have to go through that but don't have the resources or support system that I had."

"Then there was the massive financial burden. It's not just the surgery, but the whole period after with check-ups and physical therapy. It's just a corrupt, fucked up system. It's unfortunate. It's good more



LEAH DURING SOUNDHECK
AT THE FORUM, LONDON.



people have access to basic care, but unless you have an insurance company that's there for you when you really fucking need it, you're going to struggle."

"I was lucky to find a good surgeon. If I hadn't, the neurological issues would have progressed further and further. The longer you wait, the longer you run the risk of damage being irreversible. Lots of people, total strangers, reached out to me over Facebook offering advice and help. I spoke to one girl who couldn't get even a spoonful of cereal up to her mouth because initially she'd been misdiagnosed."

"After the surgery, I did physical therapy four times a week. That was my life. Three months into it, my surgeon put together a plan so I could start to play drums again without ruining his work. I was supposed to be going on tour in another few months. When I was cleared, it was a massive relief because I'd started to lose touch with reality."

"The tour was very cathartic. I'm glad we did that tour, I think we all needed it."

"It's not like I started going to church or anything, but the whole experience was a massive wake up call. You don't really take ill health into consideration in terms of how quickly it can change your life plans or dreams. It can take everything away in a heartbeat. Quite easily, I could have never been able to play drums again. I do consider myself very lucky that I'm still able to do this. I'm incredibly grateful."

"It was my tenth year in the band recently. I'm not sure too much has changed, I just feel ten years older and have a few more battle scars to show off. As a band, I'm proud of what we've done, but I also recognise I won't be able to do this forever. I try to be as level-headed as possible. Currently, though, I'm really happy, despite a few bumps along the way."

FIN.



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What it means to be independent.

The Drummer's Journal is free.
This is because we want everyone to be able to read it with no barrier to entry. It could be argued that not assigning a monetary value to something like this devalues it. *We politely disagree.*

One of the benefits of being an independent publication is not bowing to any sort of editorial pressure or expectation.

That's quite satisfying.





In Appreciation:
Jo Jones Trio, 1958

Words by Tom Pierard, photography by Luke Douglas



It was the famed music journalist Chip Stern who, after meeting him in person, said of ‘Papa’ Jo Jones: “He is a web of contradictions, yet as consistent as the morning sunrise”. That’s the thing about Jones - it’s hard to pinpoint the specifics of what makes his playing so special from a technical standpoint, and yet he’s been called one of the most influential drummers of the last century, boasting an impressive range of devotees from Buddy Rich to Roy Haynes. His performance in this – his first solo album – is a display of being somewhat tethered yet boundless; the palpable energy, simmering just below the surface, of his hands and feet is being contained in the sweetest way possible.

It can be difficult to comprehend the enormity of Jones’ influence because of this degree of subtlety and lack of ostentatious virtuosity. Apart from being widely credited with pioneering the technique of playing time on the hi-hat (as opposed to the omnipresent ‘2 beat’ kick drum pattern of the preceding era), his legacy, at least in this author’s mind, is simply to keep the message true - play however you can to give the melody and harmony the most meaning for the listener, which this album so aptly demonstrates. As a youngster, Jones learned to play an array of instruments including the piano and vibraphone, which had a major influence in the melodic approach to his playing. He was described as “the man who plays like the wind” – a sound he further refined and cemented into jazz nomenclature during his tenure with Basie’s band from 1934-48 within what has to be one of the most genre-defining rhythm sections of the old-time swing era.

This album paints a vivid picture of Jones’ preference when it comes to brush vocabulary. He mixes bog-standard with unorthodox, incorporating a full spectrum of techniques whilst remaining stylistically faithful to the drumming ethos of the times. It’s this which makes it such a refreshingly different listen in comparison to more modern recordings. His interaction with bass player Tom Bryant and pianist Ray Bryant is both respectful and brilliantly playful while never quite overshadowing the others.

There’s humour and a humility in his playing which is infectious, and his trades in *‘Jive at Five’* and solo (featuring dazzling brushwork) in *‘Philadelphia Bound’* are a rare breaking of rank during which he exhibits abundant chops - it’s clear his minimalist approach to support playing is a reflection of his sheer musicality rather than out of necessity.



The decision to include a drumless ballad (*variations on Greensleeves*) is another indication of Jones' musicianship and sensibility as a band leader. Actually, much as I enjoy the entire album, I've found myself going back to this brief interlude frequently, and though Jones sits this one out, it's as if he can still be felt in the track thanks to Bryant's sophisticated yet accessible rhythmic approach.

Maybe it's because of the nature of my work or just simply that I haven't made the time - but my jazz set has been gathering dust of late. There's a feeling of raw exuberance in Jones' playing that has taken effect; it makes me want to play just for the sake of it, not to be technical or loud or fast, just to feel time - it's a little piece of inspiration I never knew I needed, and as a result I've enjoyed a revitalisation in my jazz studies.

So my advice is this: if you've been feeling guilty for not looking at your drums for long stretches, or you find your enthusiasm dwindling, then declare this next week 'Papa Jo Week' and find a copy of this golden album or pull up a Spotify list of his playing with Basie, Lester Young, Sonny Stitt or the countless others. Do some reading (I recommend 'Rifftide: The Life and Opinions of Papa Jo Jones') and get to know and understand this true exponent of the modern drumset. If nothing else, you'll be glad of the opportunity to hear jazz drumming at its point of origin - played melodically, ferociously and tenderly in its purest form.

FIN.



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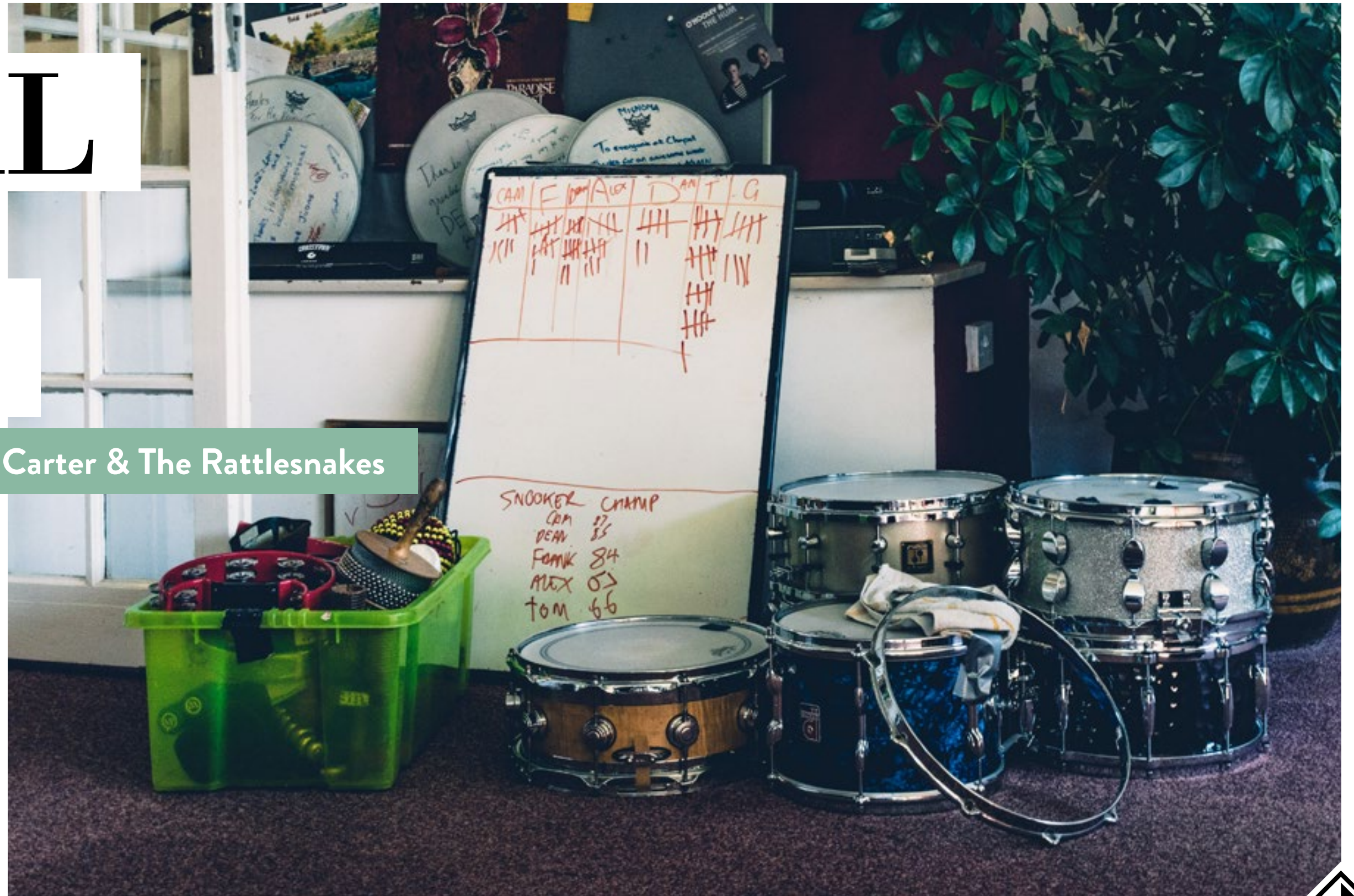
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TRIAL BY FIRE

In the studio with Frank Carter & The Rattlesnakes

Words & photography by Gareth Grover

I'm sat in a hotel room in Milan, my feet and my camera both buzzing from a day of exploring the city. I'm hoping the pictures I took do the blisters justice. I'm still really a beginner with the camera, sort of fumbling my way towards understanding it properly, but I love the process, and, much like playing an instrument – something I remind my drum students of all the time – you never stop learning, frustration and elation all rolled in.



I'm thinking hard of a way to tie together and explain the series of photos presented here, and it struck me, that's what every one of them represents - a learning process.

These shots were taken during recording sessions for the new Frank Carter & The Rattlesnakes record back in September 2018. The album is called 'End Of Suffering' – a translation of the Buddhist state of enlightenment, Nirvana – and lyrically includes much about struggling through mental health challenges and the journey towards taming these states of mind. I personally identify with a lot of what the songs entail, and my own journey has been a constant learning process. It's led me to try and identify any opportunity in my life to learn something valuable, and the recording sessions documented here are a perfect example. The photos act as a great reminder of all those opportunities.

A big learning curve for the band was working with a production team, Cam Blackwood and Tom Visser, who have produced a lot of big pop records and therefore brought a very different angle from that of the first two self-produced Rattlesnakes records. We had loads of fun; those guys had endless energy and the sessions were fast-paced and full of experimentation. They helped us to think beyond the confines of just a 4-piece rock band.

We built some of the tracks around simple guitar/vocal demos, layering sounds to create a couple of the grooves like on the title track 'End Of Suffering'



which, with a bit of trial and error, ended up including a few passes of the entire song playing constant 32nd-note single-strokes on a ride cymbal. Double strokes didn't achieve the same effect and looping gave a weird lumpiness to the sound, so we just went for one uninterrupted pass that was a real challenge to keep dynamically consistent. For that track, we also ended up sampling the sound of a piano sustain pedal being pressed and released rhythmically along to the song. I enjoyed learning from the way Cam and Tom thought sonically about each step of the process.

A lot of the experimentation happened using guitars and synths. The floor of the control room ended up a mess of cables and guitar pedals being switched in and out, searching for the right kind of tone or effect. It was very hands-on, manipulating synths and pedal controls live to get effects modulating sympathetically with the track at the source of the sound, rather than automating effects later on.

The first single from the record was a song called Crowbar. While tracking it we wanted to try for a percussive industrial sound to add as ear candy throughout the song. So, aptly, we sent our assistant engineer to find a crowbar and went about hitting it on everything solid we could find. In the end, the sound didn't make it into the final track, but it was fun trying, and unless you try things, you won't know where they could have got you. It's one of my favourite photos *[previous page]* from the sessions; it just looks bizarre.

Something I've always struggled with, in the studio especially, is anxiety over tuning drums. Not the



"The most lucid lesson we learned from these sessions was to take a pause, stand back from the process and make sure to keep everything in perspective."



tuning itself, I understand the principles and have always managed to get the drums to sound great for tracking. But, it has its own special alchemy. It never seems like the same process twice, and the anxiety over whether it'll happen right the next time is real! But these sessions definitely taught me not to worry so much, and confirmed that it definitely isn't a precise science.

Our engineer Daniel Moyler was endlessly knowledgeable and very hands-on. As well as the guitar set-ups he's doing in some of these shots, he (along with the studio tech Alex Copp, also seen here) was tuning drums to the key of the songs, damping, taping and blanketing in ways I'd never

Everyone in the band learned something new from these sessions. Our guitarist and songwriter, Dean Richardson, is a keen pianist and has always expressed a desire to play more, further his knowledge and use the instrument more to write with. He worked a lot with our assistant producer, Tom Visser, to translate the original guitar demos onto the piano. It gave him a different insight into how those song parts worked, and opened a lot of doors to developing the songs further and widening the sonics of the record.

Probably the most lucid lesson we learned from these sessions was to take a pause, stand back from the process and make sure to keep everything in

"Something I've always struggled with, in the studio especially, is anxiety."

have thought of, and showing off all sorts of studio tricks. In one shot, you can just make out a small cube mono speaker positioned over the snare drum. He played back the snare track of an entire song, firing the speaker cone directly at the batter head, recording the results and adding it into the drum mix to give a subtle presence lift to the snare. I remember watching him, thinking he'd gone mad, but the result was clear and again reminded me how much there is to learn if you watch and listen.

perspective; it's easy to lose sight of direction when you're picking apart details and getting so engrossed in a creative process.

I distinctly remember finishing a session halfway through our ten days away, all feeling totally drained of energy. One of the songs that day had taken a lot of development time and had taken its toll on all of us physically and emotionally. There was a bit of an undertone through the evening,



everybody feeling a little deflated, and we just quietly sat back with a few drinks.

Later in the evening, the studio technician was in the control room prepping for the following day. Frank had wandered in and, after a few minutes, we heard the sound of one of the previous day's tracks being played. One by one we went to investigate, and by the end of the next hour, everyone was in the room, wielding bottles of wine and singing along at the tops of voices to everything we'd recorded so far. That night produced one of my favourite shots from the sessions – Frank looking right down the lens, air drumming along to a song [page 88], fully engrossed. It encapsulates that moment so well, having gone from a place of no perspective earlier that evening, to elatedly soaking in everything we'd achieved so far.

These shots candidly demonstrate the highs and lows we traversed to get to the finished record. It's the thing we are all proudest of in our individual music careers so far, and we've all embraced the learning experiences presented along the way – technical and musical challenges, eroding friendships by winning at poker against your best mates, converting expert pool skills to cunning snooker tactics, and, most importantly, making exceptional tiramisù.

As my first drum teacher in school always said of being a musician – as I think rings true all throughout life – the most important thing is to listen, and from listening, you learn.

FIN.



	TRACK	VOX	XGTR	SYN	BV
BUTTERFLY	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
TLK	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
STORIES	✓✓✓	✓			
HEARTBREAKER	✓✓✓	✓			
LOVE GAMES	✓✓✓	✓	✓		✓
SUPERVILLAIN	✓✓✓	✓	✓		x
CROWBAR	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	x
ED'S	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
ANGEL WINGS	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
LITTLE DEVIL	✓✓✓	✓			x
KITTY SUCKER	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	o
LATEX DREAMS	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	o
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SURFACE TENSION

The Push & Pull of Drum Tuning

Words and photography by Ben Smith



If you were to ask 10 drummers to identify the most challenging aspect of being a drummer you'd likely receive 10 different responses. But if you make mention of the challenges of tuning drums, you're bound to get most of them to agree that achieving your desired sound is often the most challenging aspect of being a drummer.

It's quite understandable. Tuning drums isn't at all like tuning any other instrument where the instrument is simply in tune or it's not. While there are all sorts of tried and true methods, the end result is often entirely subjective. What works for you in one room might not work in the next. What fits a particular genre might earn you a painful glare from your bandmates in a different musical context. This is both a blessing and a curse, though a large majority of players, from beginners to experienced professionals, will admit to feeling at a loss when it comes to achieving their desired drum sound at one point or another.

So we resort to buying the products that advertise an easier tuning experience, and we scrounge for some hidden secret that will be the key (pun intended) to curing our tuning woes. And then we struggle and settle with whatever is "good enough". We cling to this out of the fear that we might not be able to find our way back in the event that we muster up the courage to experiment further; that we have no way of leaving a discernible path of breadcrumbs to follow. This is a major issue for developing your sound as a drummer. If you're fearful of trying different sounds and honing your skills with a drum key, then you're not going to make any progress when it comes to tuning.

A year ago, Cody Rahn and I decided to take a fresh approach to the concept of the tuning tutorial video. Cody, a full-time, blue-collar

“We struggle and settle with whatever is ‘good enough’. We cling to this out of the fear that we might not be able to find our way back.”



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musician in New York, is super methodical about tuning, and we first met while geeking out over drumheads and drumsticks at the 2013 NAMM show when I worked for Evans Drumheads. Over the years, we often discussed issues related to tuning and the presentation of tuning videos. Quite simply, we thought we could do better. Rather than a three-minute-or-less rush through concepts that are intricate and deserve some attention, we tackled hyper-specific topics in detail.

For instance, we dedicated an entire 13-minute episode (*Ep. 28*) to the topic of over-tensioning your snare side head. Unfortunately, the echo chamber of the internet often breeds bad advice. People will tell you that tuning your snare side head is as easy as cranking it up “tabletop tight”, regardless of the sound you’re looking for. While this can work with certain drums, staying within a medium tension range does more to allow the instrument to speak and work in conjunction with the batter head and snare wires.

We planned to create as many videos in the series as we felt were needed. We also decided to present the sound of the drum as we heard it in the room by using a single microphone, ear-distance away from the drum (*rather than close-micing it*) and without any EQ or compression. We would be completely transparent in order to provide the most realistic representation of the drum sounds as we achieved them. There wouldn’t be any reverb either.

Our YouTube channel is aptly named Sounds Like A Drum, and we release a new episode every week. We cordially invite you to join in, geek out, and feel inspired to invest in your drum sound.

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DISAPPEARED BEHIND THE HILLS.
IT FELT GOOD.

