THE DRUMMER'S JOURNAL

AN INDEPENDENT DRUM MAGAZINE

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AN INDEPENDENT DRUM MAGAZINE

THE DRUMMER'S JOURNAL

an independent drum magazine

CONTENTS

Issue Four, August 2013

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If you're viewing in full screen mode, which we'd heartily recommend, you can use your keyboard's arrow keys to access the next or previous page. Ads are clickable too, so if you see something you like, you can click it for more information.

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an independent drum magazine

MASTHEAD

Issue Four, August 2013

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Cover: Veneers

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SUMMER BREAK

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Vacation responders are those automated messages which, if you've just sent an email, bounce back and inform you the person you're trying to contact is on holiday. Whilst it may suggest your message is still important to them, they're a polite way of stating that, in actual fact, it isn't.

Sitting in a sweltering office, my enduring memories of summer are not learning of other people's holidays, but going away with my parents and then, latterly, friends. Of course, we're not complaining. This summer we too have had a nice - albeit swift - break of our own; a Type I fracture of the clavicle.

Whilst the day's events hadn't exactly proceeded as planned, we ended up in an Accident and Emergency department in the East Midlands simply because predicting the future is difficult. Best laid plans and all that.

In some ways, waking up without a broken bone then going to sleep in the evening with one isn't too dissimilar as to how the magazine comes together. Things can change immeasurably on a day-by-day basis; one morning there might be no articles to run, but by the end of the day, someone has stated they want to dredge round New York City's Subway stations to interview buskers, or that they know a guy in Canada who notates everything he plays. This is how it comes together - interviews and articles arranged through sincere emails, anonymous tweets, lengthy phone calls or handwritten letters. They're conducted on park benches or station platforms; at theme-parks or rehersal rooms. We hope this keeps it diverse and ever interesting.

As yet there is no grand master-plan. We don't have Neil Peart's name circled on a giant calendar alongside the words "Volume One Finale!" Not yet at least. We've always felt conscious that much of what is offered up in terms of drum related media is a bit like how certain gulls feed their young by regurgitating what the chick must then consume. Not that this is a bad thing – it's just quite specific way of ingesting something.

Enough about wildlife. Welcome to Volume One, Issue Four of The Drummer's Journal.

Enjoy, Tom.

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SUBTERRANEAN ROLLING STOCK

An interview with Larry and Sonia Wright

Words and photography by Julia Kaye

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Starting down the steps at 59th street subway station, the heat hits you like you've opened the door to a cavernous clay oven. There's no turning back because attempting to fight the tide of suits flowing underground at 5pm would be futile – each briefcase and stiletto heel eddying slightly because someone, like the limb of a tree, appears caught in the turnstiles. Inconvenienced, irate, and reddening like salmon, people pack into the air-conditioned carriages as quickly and tightly as possible. Whoever put the advertisements for John West's Sardines in subway cars understands the human condition all too well.

Stations are places of feverish movement. They constantly change in a way akin to how sand dunes perpetually migrate across the dessert. Those that are still are only as such for a matter of minutes before their train arrives and they leave, only to be replaced with more people in configurations entirely different to the one before. Of course, people have little reason to stay - the station itself is never the ultimate destination. But, there are those who are still - staff, usually in some sort of booth or shooing away the homeless, and buskers. I was here looking for the latter.

This was to be the fourth and final day of searching New York City's Subway stations for someone I was ninety-nine percent sure I would not find. The last three days had proven markedly similar – getting the train from one station to the next and then sweating profusely whilst walking along platforms and around concourses, listening in vain for the sound of wooden sticks on plastic buckets.

The man I'm looking for is Larry Wright. I first came across his name back when a considerable amount of my time was dedicated to watching videos of anything drum related online. I happened upon footage of a man in Times Square sat before a set of buckets which he proceeded to batter in a fashion that made me re-evaluate the recent decision I had taken to spend the money I'd saved up for a car on a lavish drum set.

Larry is one of the world's most famous bucket drummers having busked on the streets and in subway stations since he was a teenager. He can play complex polyrhythmic patterns at blistering speeds, regulalry attracting crowds so big that platforms and stairwells become blocked. He has the ability to make people stop and listen – in the subway this is no mean feat.

Larry's life has been sporadically documented for reasons both good and bad. As a young kid he had a turbulent upbringing in New York. His mother, whom relied on the income Larry made busking, was murdered inside the apartment in which they lived. Larry went to live with relatives and continued to play on the streets having

given up on school. After a while, his reputation grew and people who had seen him on the street began offering him paid work in music videos, advertisements and Hollywood films. In 1991 Larry was awarded the Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship – a prestigious award for upcoming performers to help them establish a career as a working musician. He received a drum set, and was offered $1,000 worth of lessons at a Manhattan based music school.

Larry, however, never took the lessons. Some dismissed him as undisciplined and uneducated, unable to help himself. The truth was, in contrast, that he was happy doing what he enjoyed: Playing on the streets.

The problem was that this information came from an article in the LA Times published in 1992. The only evidence Larry was still playing were the occasional videos filmed by keen tourists which intermittently surfaced online.

After over 20 combined hours of roaming the stifling subway, I'd all but given up. It's inevitable, however, that when you're searching for something, it's always in the last place you look.

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"Drummers are always at the back of the band. I wanted to do something to bring us forward."

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The Drummer's Journal: Can I sit on this bucket?
Larry Wright: Yeah, that's cool.

I only ask because I guess you see them as proper instruments right? You seem to be able to get a lot of tones out of them.
Yeah - they are instruments - no doubt. I'm stepping on the buckets to get different sounds, using my feet to dampen them. My wife,

...

"Down here there's a rich acoustic sound that you can't get outside. In here, it's loud. That's what brings the flavour out."

...

Sonia, mainly does the bass to coordinate with my tom type sound. She uses a seven gallon so it's a lot deeper sounding.

So the rims act like the high end?
Yeah! They're like the hi-hat. High sounding - good for the timing. The centre is more like a snare.

There's a whole host of buckets here. Are some different sizes?
Yeah. They're mainly either five or seven gallon buckets. I usually play a five gallon.

What about some of the rhythms you play - are they your own?
I make my own rhythms up. I take a little piece of a rhythm I hear someplace and I mix it into my own style. That's what makes it unique.

What influences you in what you're creating? What are you thinking about when you're playing?
Most of the time I ain't even thinking! I just play from here (he points to his chest). It just comes out fluent.

You've been doing this for a while, right?
I was the first person to do this - to come and play using buckets. I've been doing this since I was five years old.

How did you start out playing?
I play all percussion – I play drum set too. I just wanted to do somthing different. Drummers are always at the back of the band. I wanted to do something to bring us forward. So that's why I'm doing this. It's something unique, something creative. I started this back in '83.

You grew up in New York?
Yeah. Born and raised.

Where specifically?
The Bronx. It was cool. But when I started on the buckets I was living in Harlem. That's when I started doing different stuff. I did

a Levi's advertisement. I did a Mariah Carey video too. It's called Someday.

So you and Sonia met doing this?
Yeah.

(To Sonia) So you were busking too?
Sonia: No, I just saw him playing one day. It was Larry who taught me how to play.

Larry: We met at 42nd Street. That's where I always used to play. She used to hang down there. Then we got together and I showed her how to do this.

(To Sonia) What were your first impressions of Larry?
Sonia: (Looks at the ground, smiling) That he was OK.

Larry: OK?! Just OK?! (Larry laughs.) She's the first girl to be playing the buckets. I'm proud.

What does it mean to you guys specifically to play in the Subway?
This is the greatest. This is what we love to do. Down here there's a rich acoustic sound that you can't get outside. In here, it sounds like it's mic'd. It's loud! That's what brings the flavour out.

When you were a kid did you want to be a drummer and nothing else?
Oh yeah. All I ever wanted to do was be a drummer. I wanted to take it as far as I could.

And that's still the goal - you still want to do that?
Oh yeah! I'm always looking for opportunities. I'd like to start doing more magazines. More commercials.

So all the work you've done has come from people spotting you on the street?
Yeah. Right here.

How does doing the stuff like commercials or music videos compare to doing this?
I mean, it's different of course. With the music videos and stuff, you're dealing and working with other people who are the stars. But besides that, to me it's the same. Out here, on this platform, I get the same recognition. I have a lot of people watching me every day and I'm grateful for that.

Do you see yourself as providing a service?
Yeah. Without a doubt. A lot of people come up to us and say we've made their day better. They look forward to seeing us everyday.

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"This is everything to me. There's nothing else I can really compare it to. After my family, It's the love of my life."

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Is it quite competitive to get a spot to play?
Yeah. Back when I started, it was easy. Now, there're so many more people down here looking for a spot. So many more performances. You gotta get here early. It's first come first served.

From someone who used to busk a bit, what do you think the difference is between begging and street performance?
There's a way big difference. As a busker you're doing something that's creative. If you're playing, you out there showin' your talent. No one can compare that. Begging and showing talent are two totally different things.

Sonia: That's why we keep our bucket a little away from us, so people can just give something if they like what we're doing. We're not out here asking people for their money - it's their choice whether they give it.

So you do this every day?
Larry: It's a full time job. We're doing this every day.

So what's an average day?
Some days we get $175. Others $200. Some days we get lucky and we get more. But whatever we get, we always thank god because it means we can survive. We need to take care of our families and our kids. This is why we strive. Our kids are our first priority.

What time do you usually come down here?
Around 3pm. We'll play constantly until about 10pm.

That's seven hours. It's like a proper shift.
You gotta put in the work.


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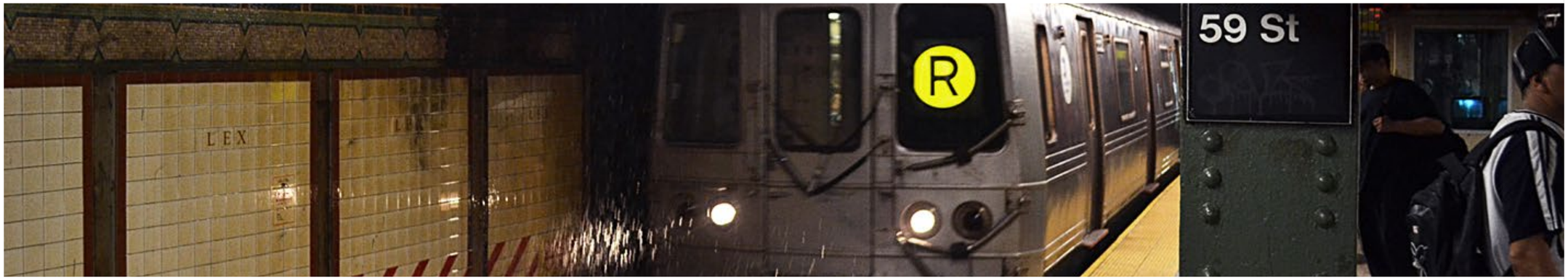
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"Max Roach - he personally bought me my own drum set."

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Was there a point where you were gigging professionally?
Sort of. I used to own a drum set. I don't own one now though.

Can you tell me about the Buddy Rich Scholarship?
I won that in 1992 when I was 19. That was nice. I got to meet all the drummers in the world who I respected. Max Roach - he personally bought me my own drum set. I did a big concert with all these other famous drummers. That was an unbelievable experience.

Do you think you could summarise what playing means to you?
This is everything to me. There's nothing else I can really compare it to. After my family, It's the love of my life. It's everything.

You're still looking to take it further?
Yeah. If the opportunity comes I'm ready. I'm more than ready, a'ight?

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THE ART OF SELF DEPRECATION

A Conversation with Kliph Scurlock of The Flaming Lips

Words by Tom Hoare
Cover image by Michael J Fajardo

On stage, a ramp is being erected to intersect an ethereal, LED infused vagina. Needless to say, there's an air of anticipation. On-screen and abstract, the ellipse contracts and relaxes; pulsating, convulsing, faster and faster until a figure emerges from within and descends the ramp to rapturous applause. This man is Steven Drozd. He picks up a guitar and stands behind a set of keyboards.

The ordeal is not over. Once more it begins with a swell of angelic chorus, each pixel labouring fervently before delivering a second silhouette which follows the path of the first. This person is Kliph Scurlock, who skirts the stage and sits behind the drum set. Two more times the birth is repeated and the band becomes whole. Almost.

There's one missing. The ramp is removed to reveal a man, standing, encased in a transparent inflatable bubble. This is Wayne Coyne. With the screen from which the others did emerge now oscillating in concentric arcs, he starts forward, rolling off the stage and across the crowd's outstetched scaffold of limbs before returning to where he began in a shower of confetti.

As a band, The Flaming Lips have seldom been a stickler for convention. Zaireeka, the band's eighth album, is comprised of four discs all intended to be played on four different CD players simultaneously. In 2011, they released an EP on a USB drive encased in the brain of a life size gummy skull, and another similarly embedded in a gummy foetus.

There was a time when Kliph would have been assembling The Flaming Lips' stage sets instead of playing on it. He was originally a roadie who joined the band almost by accident a decade ago. It transpired he was a particulaly talented drummer and so now, emerging from light emitting genetalia is a decidedly average day at the office.

The Drummer's Journal: So you've been to get a new kit?
Kliph Scurlock: Yeah, my friend Ed had this Staccato kit and I've been trying to buy it for years. I've asked him a bunch of times, "hey are you going to sell me that kit?" and he's like, "Never! I'm never going to sell it!" I finally wore him down though.

How was Topeka as a place to grow up if you're into music?
Not great. There's only one live venue. I mean, they have a big arena, but that wasn't built until the mid '80s. It's mostly just country acts that come through, very few bands. There's no real music scene so to speak.

Why the drums?
I was interested in guitar first, but I just wasn't very good at it. Then I tried piano and sucked at that too. Basically I was just a big music freak. My mum was a musician and a big music lover, so I have quite fond memories of sitting round listening to music with her. She taught me to read from the liner notes of record covers. When I was about six, I was really into Led Zeppelin and I think it was then I started noticing the drums. I was just like, "Oh my God I wanna do that!"

So that was the goal - to be a musician?
One of my earliest memories is having an argument with one of my aunts who, to her credit, was only trying to instil some sense of reality into me, because she was telling me that my chances of making it as a musician were really slim. But at four years old I thought, "well, if I want to do it, why can't I do it?" And I've been lucky enough that it's true. At least for now. It might go belly up in six months and I'll be back to working shitty jobs. But at least for the last ten years I've been quote, unquote "a professional musician."

You never considered yourself a professional before joining The Flaming Lips?
Well, I wasn't paying my bills by playing music before joining The Lips. I've played in bands where we'd make 100 dollars a night and it's like, "whoo! I made 20 bucks!" I guess my attitude definitely did change when I started playing with The Lips because suddenly for the first time I was playing in a band where lots of people wanted to come to shows. It really did dawn on me the weight of the role I'd taken on. Before joining I'd never have been too concerned about getting drunk before a show, but now I'm absolutely sober every time we're on stage. I mean, - I've never gotten so fucked up that I've blown a show in the past, but… (long pause)

Kliph…?
Yeah!

You were saying something?
Oh right - yeah. Sorry. What was I saying?

Er, about drinking and playing shows I think.
Right! I mean, sometimes it's a bummer when we're on the road and I'll want to hang out with some friends but have to be like, "hey, yeah, I'm not going to drink as I've got another show tomorrow and I don't want to be hung over." Don't get me wrong - it's not a big enough bummer to the extent where I'm lying in bed saying, "ah man, I wish I could have gotten loaded tonight." But playing hung-over. Holy fuck. It sucks. Especially with all our strobe lighting. The night after Steven got engaged we had a show and I remember thinking "I don't know if I'm going to survive this." Thankfully Steven won't be getting engaged again so I'll never have to repeat that.

Can you remember your first kit?
Yeah, I was 16 and had managed to save up a bit of cash. I saw this ad in the paper for a drum kit. It was a 1964 Ludwig silver sparkle kit - the same kind that Ringo used. At the time I was just excited to get a drum kit after playing snare drum for so many years. It didn't matter what it was. But when I realised, "Oh my God it's the same type of kit that Ringo plays!" I was extra stoked.

That must be worth a fortune now! Do you still have it?
Er… (Kliph groans, as if in pain)

This sounds ominous.
(Huge sigh) I thought it'd be a smart idea to light it on fire and didn't really think about the fact it was dry, lacquered wood. I just thought the flames would go up then go out, and it'd be fine. But it went up like a torch. It was at this place called The Outhouse – you just made your own rules there. It was four miles outside of town. It didn't have a phone or running water because it was literally a shack in between two cornfields. There were no bathrooms. You just pissed outside. We could do what we wanted out there. "Sure I'll set my drums on fire! Why the fuck not?!" There was this band called Cock Noose who used to throw TVs and road kill into the audience. It was all just good fun.

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"There was this band called Cock Noose who used to throw TVs and road kill into the audience. It was all just good fun."

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Your involvement with The Flaming Lips didn't initially have anything to do with the drums, right?
Yeah. Initially I was just a huge Lips fan. I don't know how much of the history you know but Ronald Jones, The Lips' amazing, crazy guitar player, quit in 1996. Then they made Zaireeka – the album spread across four discs - and toured doing the Boom Box Experiments, you know what I'm talking about?

The thing with the cars in the parking lot?
Yeah, Steven and Wayne made these cassettes and gave them out

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"I thought it'd be a smart idea to light it on fire and didn't really think about the fact a drum set is dry, lacquered wood. I just thought the flames would go up then go out, and it'd be fine. But it went up like a torch."

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to people in parking lots. Everyone played the tapes in their stereos at the same time whilst Steven and Wayne acted as conductors – telling people to increase of decrease the volume or playback speed and stuff. Anyway, because they were doing all this other stuff, they hadn't played any "rock shows" in a number of years. So in '99 The Soft Bulletin was getting ready to come out. They decided that rather than hire other musicians, they'd just put the drums and other stuff on tape. So that's when Steven, who was the drummer, moved to playing guitar and keyboards.

Anyway, I saw they were doing a warm up show for SXSW in Dallas. It was their first rock show in years so I was like "Holy shit! I gotta go!" Their sound guy, Trent, was a really dear friend of mine so I asked if I could tag along. He said, "Sure, The Lips are coming by at noon to pick me up, but I actually don't need to be there until six, so how about you give me a ride instead later on?" So I did and we got there at six. Of course, The Lips weren't even there yet and when they finally did turn up at about seven thirty everyone was going nuts because doors were supposed to open at nine. So I just started helping out, loading stuff in. At the end of the night I stayed behind and helped them tear down too, and afterward, I gave my number to Wayne. A couple of months later The Soft Bulletin came out and they were getting ready to tour. Wayne called and said, "hey, were you serious about wanting to help out?" So I was like, "Fuck yeah man – anything, anything at all the Flaming Lips need, man, I can do." So I became a roadie.

In that period prior to becoming involved with The Lips, how were you feeling about the possibility of being able to maintain a career in music? Had things been going well?
At that point I was only 25 so I was still pretty excited about music, but I was also in a band where things were starting to get pretty dysfunctional. I do remember thinking, though, "something has to change here," and the motivation to do things was starting to flag a little bit. It was early 2000 so I was living in Austin at the time and joined this local band. The band were all staying at my house and a couple of guys had gotten into a fight with the bass player. He was really pissed and said he was going to sleep in the van. The next morning someone realised he hadn't come back in for breakfast so we went out to the van and he wasn't there. There was just a note

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"After 11 years, I wouldn't have the strength to go back to being a roadie and watch someone else play drums every night. It'd be heartbreaking."

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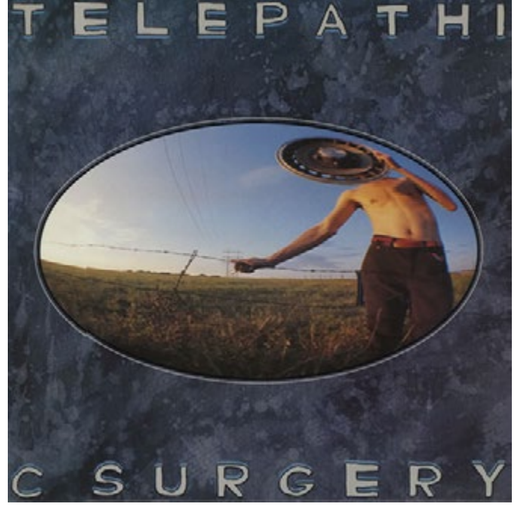
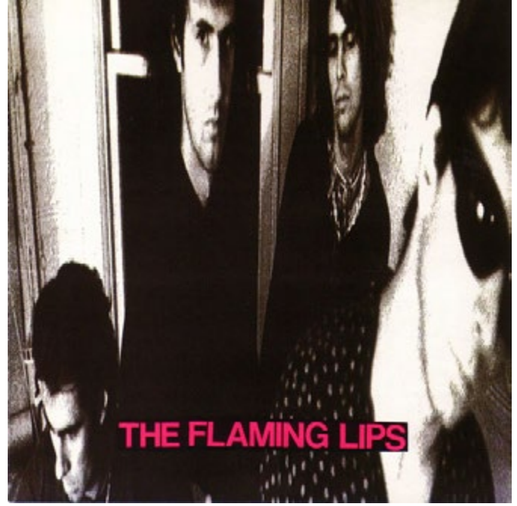
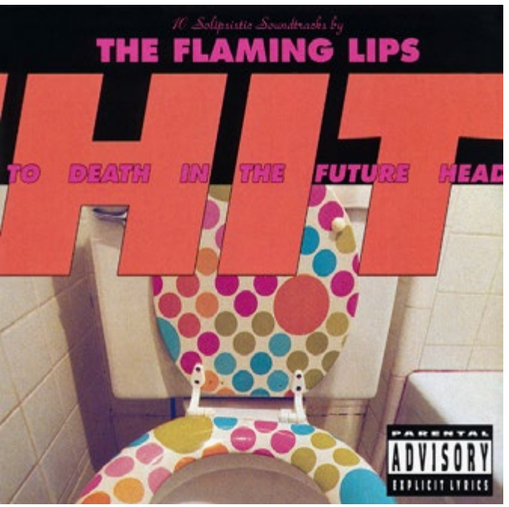
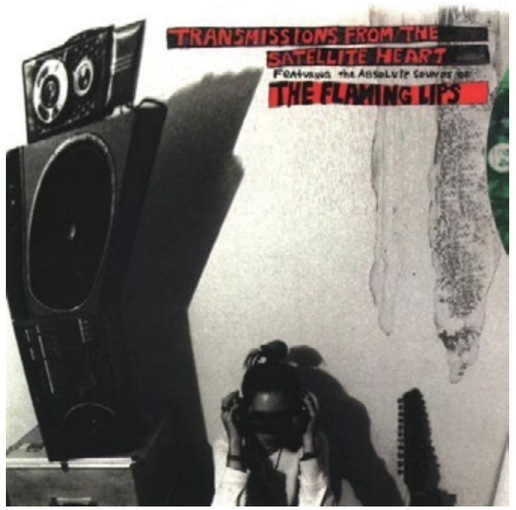
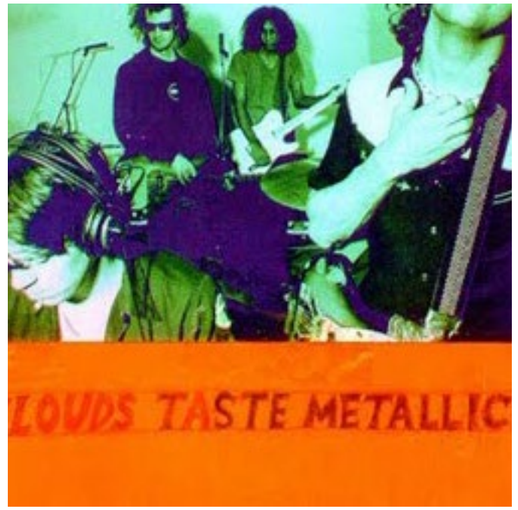










Hear It Is - 1986

Oh My Gawd!!!...The Flaming Lips - 1987

Telepathic Surgery - 1989

In a Priest Driven Ambulance (with Silver Sunshine Stares) - 1990

Hit to Death in the Future Head - 1992

Transmissions from the Satellite Heart - 1993

Clouds Taste Metallic - 1995

Zaireeka - 1997

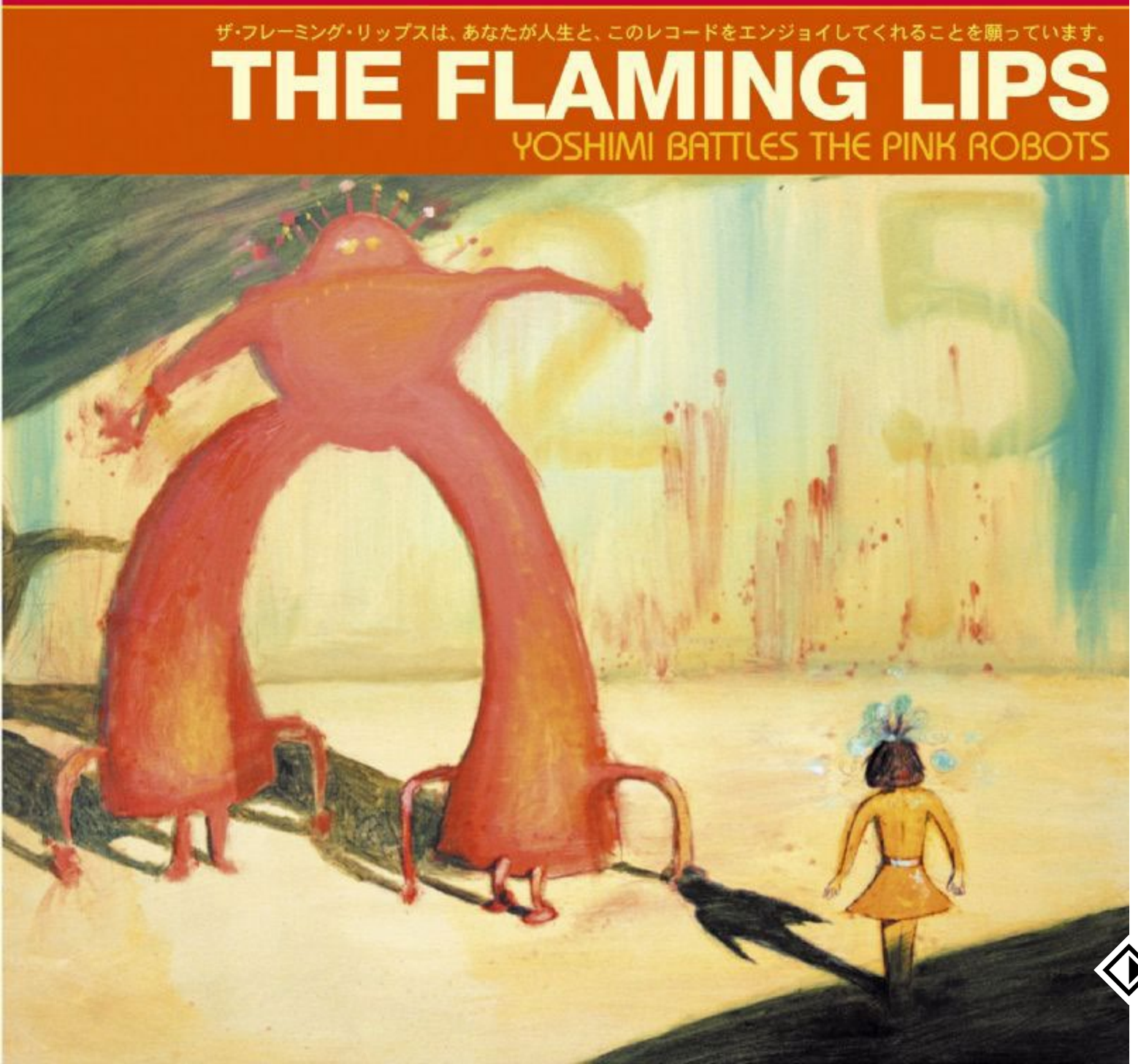
The Soft Bulletin - 1999

Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots - 2002
(Following page)

At War with the Mystics - 2006

Embryonic - 2009

The Terror - 2013



that said, “fuck you guys.” After that it all fell apart. There were a lot of drugs and alcohol going on and it was affecting a few of the guys quite badly. So after a few months I couldn’t take it anymore, and so I moved back to Lawrence. That’s when the roadie stuff properly started.

It’s not uncommon for a drummer to join a band and learn the old drum parts. I think it’s a bit more unusual for the drummer you’re replacing to still be in the band, and more unusual still for you to be a fan of the drummer you’re replacing who is now watching you play.
It definitely was weird at first; it really psyched me out. Steven is one of my favourite drummers, second to Bonham, of all time really. On stage I’m usually sitting about two feet away from him and I look up and I think, “a guy who could mop the floor with me is right there - what’s the point in me being here?” But he’s never been anything other than supportive. Anytime I start feeling kind of weird he’s like, “dude, if we didn’t want you around, you wouldn’t be around. Don’t worry about it. Just play and have a good time!”

Is it still intimidating now?
It is, yeah, but usually only when we’re recording and everyone’s studying the drums under a microscope. I’m still very much aware of the fact there is another guy in the band who can do my job a lot better than I can. But, like I said, the guys have been nothing but supportive.

So which was the first studio album that you played on?
I did a few B-sides here and there, but the first proper Lips album I did was Embryonic.

How did you approach that? Was it something you were looking to impart your own stamp on, or was it just strictly to in keep with whatever the other guys would expect?
The main thing I wanted to do was not be a detriment because, like you said, it’s a fairly unique situation because the old drummer is still in the band. The Lips, minus me, have made great records. I just didn’t want to ruin that! What helped slightly was we were experimenting with new sounds and a new way of working, so it

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"If you keep doing the same thing, eventually people will get bored and that will spell the end of your career. It's better to do something you like rather than do something just because you think other people will probably like it."

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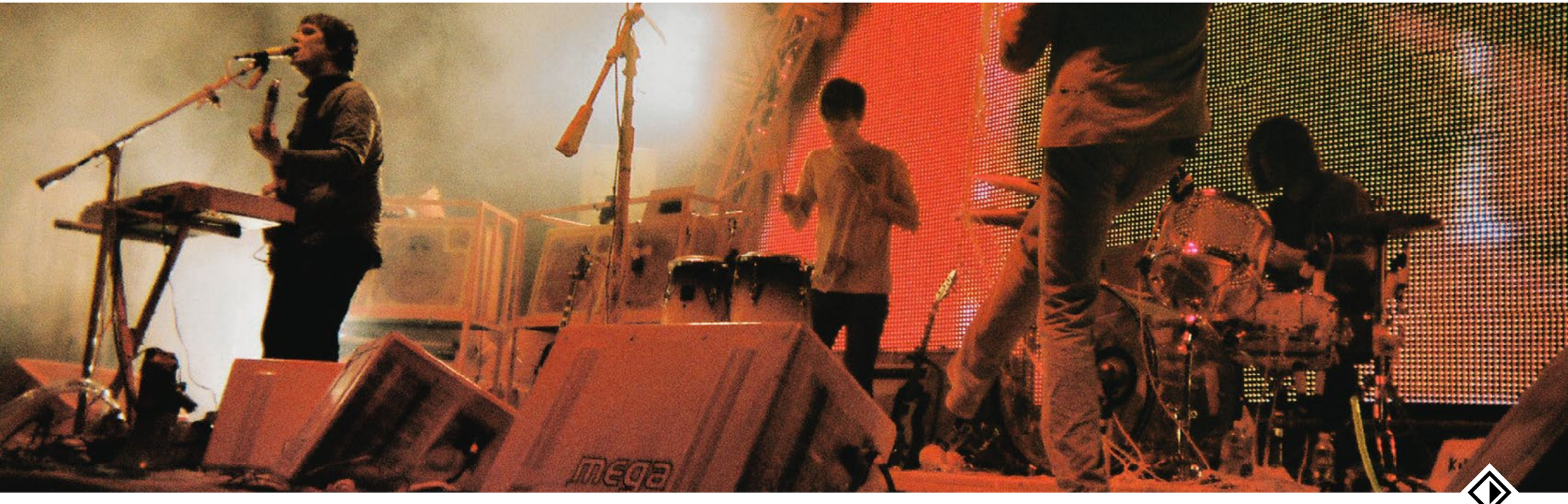

didn't feel as weird to me as it might have if we were making another record in the same way that The Soft Bulletin or Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots were made.

Do you have techs?
My friend Matt from Stardeath and White Dwarfs comes out on tour with us and helps me out whenever he can. But no, I don't have a designated drum tech.

Would you say that's slightly unusual for a band as big as The Flaming Lips?
We do have roadies - we couldn't do everything ourselves. But when I first started working for the band, I loved that they were right there with me setting their stuff up. There was never this attitude of you're just this hired hand. I think it's the old saying if you want something done right you've got to do it yourself.

You've previously said somewhere that if they asked you to stop playing in the band you'd be able to go back to being a roadie. That sounds like the making of a Shakespearian tragedy or something - ousted from your position of power to become evil and twisted through jealousy and spite.
Haha right! I think I know the interview you mean actually. That was quite a long time ago. It was at a point where it hadn't yet been decided if I was going to keep playing with the band. I'd only been doing it a few months. After 11 years, though, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have the strength to go back to being a roadie and watch someone else play drums every night. It'd be too heart-breaking.

A large part of The Flaming Lips' appeal has been about experimentation and avoiding repetition. Do you take that sort of approach to the drum set?
To an extent. It's never been about experimenting or changing for the sake of it, it's more about not wanting to get bored. It would have been very easy with the success of Yoshimi to stay in that mode and just keep going. If you keep doing the same thing, eventually people will get bored and that will spell the end of your career. It's better to do something you like and hope other people like it too, rather than do something just because you think people will probably like it.

The reception to your latest album The Terror has been pretty positive. It gets descibed in the press a lot as 'bleak'…
We didn't intentionally set out to make a bleak record. I mean, I hear why people say that. I guess it's just a product of the environment we recorded in. It was the middle of winter and it was recorded really, really fast. Our previous records have been done over the span of a few years, whereas this one took only a few months. Because we did this record so quick there was no changing of the seasons. And we were really burnt out. In 2011, we had toured full time. That was the year where we put out something new every month. Whether it was a 12-inch EP or a memory pen in a gummy skull. We also did a few collaborative EPs which turned into the idea of doing a collaborative album which became The Flaming Lips and Heady Fwends. It was while we were working on that that Steven wandered into the other room and started writing. That's how a lot of the new record came about. We weren't intentionally trying to make a record quickly - we weren't consciously even trying to make an album - we were just working on some songs and then realised, "hey, we've got an album here. Cool."

I really like the groove on Look... The Sun is Rising.
Yeah… (Kliph pauses) That one was Steven.

Ah…Sorry.
(Laughs) Don't worry. I couldn't come up with anything that was working and Steven went in and said, "hey, I've got an idea what do you think of this?" That's what I love about the band - when you're in the studio there are no defined roles. If I came up with a guitar part that was really cool it'd be like, cool, go play it. Maybe one day!

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"Steven Drozd is one of my favourite drummers, second to Bonham, of all time. On stage I'm usually sitting about two feet away from him and I look up and I think, "a guy who could mop the floor with me is right there - what's the point in me being here?" I'm still very much aware of the fact there is another guy in the band who can do my job a lot better than I can."

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THE DRUMMER'S JOURNAL

AN INDEPENDENT DRUM MAGAZINE

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MORE THAN FUN & GAMES

Robb Reiner and Lips of Anvil

Words by Tom Hoare

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I'm standing looking at a large, grey, windowless building. Sort of like a supermarket except there's no colour or glass. A grey parking lot surrounds it, merging the building with the grey sky behind making it difficult to discern through the pouring rain. Little more than a huge concrete block, it has the sort of reassuringly oppressive appearance Joseph Stalin would likely find comforting. Except this is not a soviet munitions silo. The words "More than Fun and Games" are painted in a large bold typeface above an uninviting door. Welcome to America's only indoor theme-park.

The building has three entrances evenly spaced along its exterior wall. Outside each of these doors stands a group of people. At the first, a line of restless children and impatient adults queue for admission, covered by a makeshift canopy of umbrellas. Outside the second, set some 50 metres apart from the first, a temporary sign bears the words "Nicholas' Bar Mitzvah" along with a group curiously eying those stood outside the third door another 50 meters away. Here, several butch men in black t-shirts are trying to organise a scrum of people sporting various configurations of leather, patched denim and tattoos into an orderly line. It's not working.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Please refrain!" There is more pushing as people squeeze through the door. "Please refrain! There is not enough space inside for you all! You will get to meet the bands!"

It's 5.30pm and the fan meet and greet was supposed to begin 30 minutes ago. There are rumours it's been cancelled. A large man, unfazed by the fact his camo shorts and jacket are completely soaked with rain, stands apart from the furore, gazing into the distance like a soldier on a Hollywood battlefield who has suddenly realised the futility of his own existence. On his Army Surplus beret, a patch bearing the word Anvil is sewn, and the red ink from which it is coloured is now running down his face like streams of diluted blood. On any other day I would find this sight slightly odd. But not today.

The Story of Anvil

Anvil are a band that, for many, played a pioneering role in the early 1980s metal scene. Founded by drummer Robb Reiner and guitarist Steve "Lips" Kudlow, they are often credited by the likes of Metallica, Slayer and Anthrax as instrumentally shaping their respective careers. Anvil's first two albums - Hard n' Heavy and Metal on Metal - are abrasive, fast paced and raw; traits which would come to define speed and thrash metal. Naturally, Lips' signature get-up of wearing a bondage harness whilst playing his guitar using a vibrator as Reiner brutalised his drum set proved particularly appealing to audiences and promoters alike. This appeal, unfortunately, wasn't to last and whereas the aforementioned bands would go on to sell millions of records, Anvil, by 1990, had fallen into relative obscurity. Here they stayed until, in 2008,

"Anvil: The Story of Anvil" promo poster

Robb and Lips were thrust back into the public consciousness as a documentary detailing the rise, demise and subsequent stagnation of the band's popularity was released, receiving much critical acclaim.

As a piece of filmmaking, it makes for excellent, if often uncomfortable viewing. Ultimately, it's a story of perseverance in the face of adversity as Robb and Lips, now in their 50s, attempt to restore their band's former glory with their thirteenth album. I won't spoil the ending.

A man with a megaphone is now reassuring people that the meet and greet is simply behind schedule, and the ruckus around the door subsides slightly. I use the opportunity to locate the band's tour manager who leads me through the sizable venue Anvil will later play to the back stage area.

Lips and Robb look to be enjoying a particularly animated conversation when the tour manager pulls them away and leads us into the dressing room, the walls of which consist of white Ikea sofas all stacked atop one another like a fatally flawed flat-pack igloo. "Best make it quick," the tour manager whispers before promptly leaving, "we're behind schedule." I make a joke about choosing where to sit but Lips and Robb, who both look annoyed at being interrupted, remain deadly quiet. The laughter and conversation from the next room seem invasively loud. Instead we share an awkward silence.

Things don't improve. The first 20 minutes pass slowly, lost in a maze of angular, disjointed conversation. Lips does most of the talking as Robb eats pack after pack of aniseed balls, offering the occasional "hmm" or "yeah." During this time we're able to cover most of the questions I'd hoped would afford us a good 60 minute conversation. To make matters worse, a man with a video camera has entered and is now filming the interview, waving his arms and mouthing the words "we're live" in my peripheral vision. I imagine looking through the camera and watching myself burn as Lips and Robb sit in silence.

A knock, and the tour manager re-enters. "Are you guys done? It's meet and greet time." Lips and Robb excuse themselves. "Are we good? Do you have any more questions?" I pause momentarily, and consider cutting my losses. "Could we maybe do another 10 after the meet and greet?" There's a contemplative pause.

"Ok, we'll come back." They leave and I'm left alone in the sofa-cage.

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"Robb's had numerous offers to join other successful bands, but he turned them all down." Robb nods. "Yeah. I was asked to join Ozzy's band," he recounts flatly, "wasn't interested."

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I head out of the dressing room and to the backstage area to watch the meet and greet. A line some 200 people strong snakes its way around the room and out into the venue itself. Lips and Robb, alongside bassist Sal Italiano, are sat at a table signing the plethora of merchandise each of their fans have brought along. On the front of the table is a large poster – a poster for the documentary in which they featured some five years previous.

The Story of Anvil was partly billed as a real life This Is Spinal Tap – a fictitious "rockumentary" which follows an aging '80s metal band as they navigate disastrous tours, declining audiences and hapless managers. As you'd imagine, Lips and Robb are unenthused by such comparisons, though there is no denying that Anvil have endured almost every clichéd contingency a band can experience. They've played in 10,000 capacity stadiums to barely a hundred people, faced repeated rejection from nearly all major record labels and made up after venomous fallouts with teary apologies.

Yet, the story of Anvil is still incomplete. Since 2008 the band have enjoyed renewed success, but also faced criticism concerning the sustainability of their new careers and the quality of the music. Some see Lips and Robb simply as people who got famous for being in a successful film, as opposed to being reputable musicians in their own right. Anvil have shown that earning recognition can be tough. What they're doing now is sustaining it – arguably even harder.

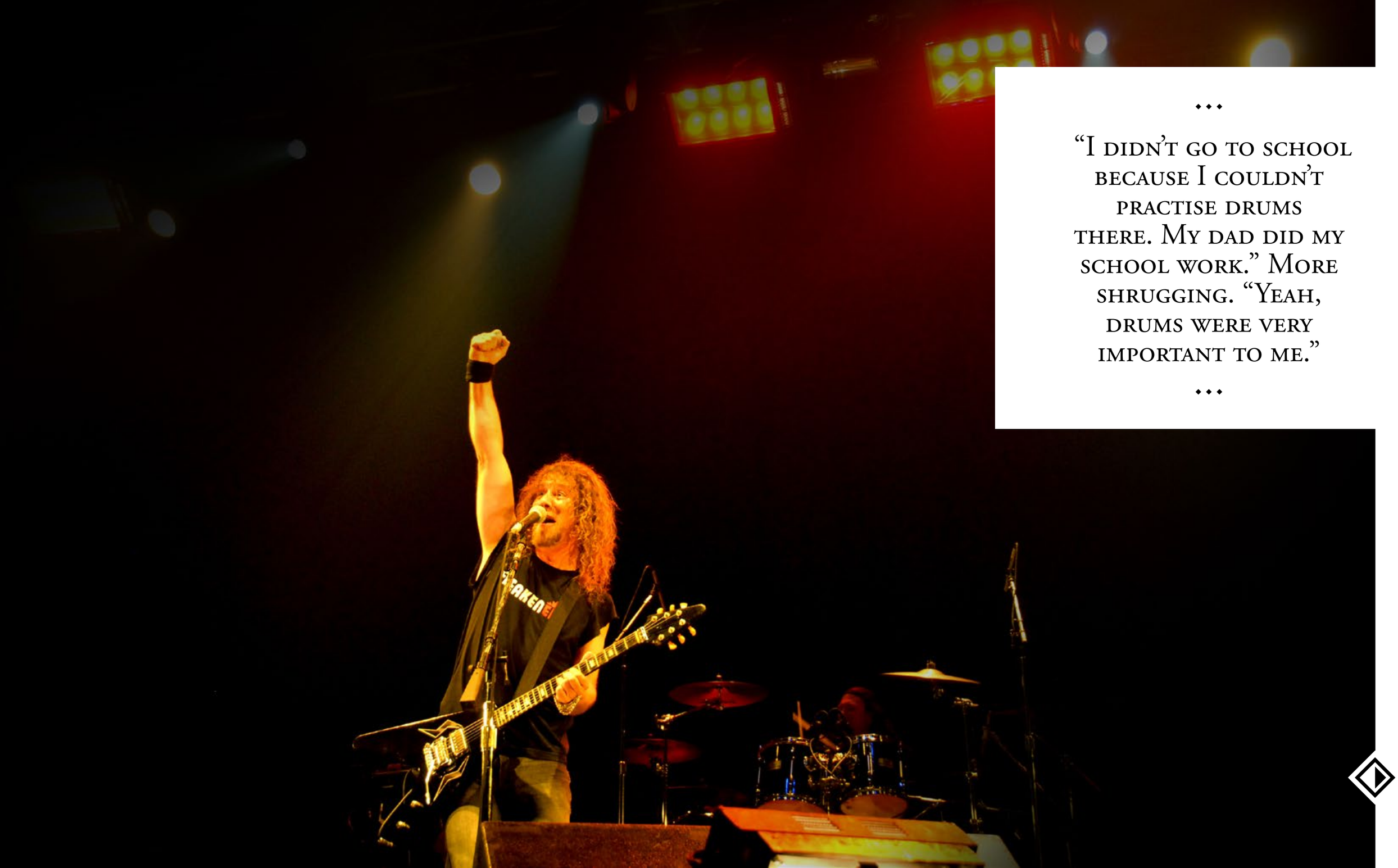
The man in the sodden camo gear is one of the last in the line, and ushered out from backstage looking quite pleased to have braved the wait. After the 90 minute intermission, we're sat back in the dressing room, Robb now inhaling a small bag of red gummy sweets.

Metal on Metal

Regardless of the film, I realise I'd been keen to talk to Robb and Lips because they're people who have dedicated their entire lives to playing music. For Robb, regardless of notions of success and reputation, the drum set has underpinned the course his entire life to date has taken. The same could be said about Lips and his association with the guitar.

With the atmosphere more relaxed, I ask if they could describe what music meant to them as kids. Lips talks at length about hearing The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and his first ever glimpse of an electric guitar. Robb's responses, in-keeping with his persona, are much more muted, understated and flitting: "I just liked Buddy Rich," he shrugs.

Robb's infatuation with the drum-set meant he didn't go to school. His father, who had miraculously avoided death in a Nazi concentration



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"I didn't go to school because I couldn't practise drums there. My dad did my school work." More shrugging. "Yeah, drums were very important to me."

• • •

camp, moved to Canada after the war where Robb was born. Robb grew up playing drums and was naturally talented at it. “I didn’t go to school because I couldn’t practise drums there. My dad did my school work.” More shrugging. “Yeah, drums were very important to me.”

On the surface Robb and Lips are two very different people. The documentary makes this much clear; in a scene where Lips is physically threatening an untrustworthy concert promoter, Robb is outside on the pavement calmly smoking a joint.

I ask Lips to describe Robb. “Consistent - in every walk of life,” comes the reply, “as a person, as a painter, as a drummer - he’s consistent. Robb’s had numerous offers to join other successful bands, but he turned them all down.” Robb nods. “Yeah. I was asked to join Ozzy’s band,” he recounts flatly, “wasn’t interested.”

Notions of consistency have played an important role in the band’s longevity. Where as some bands will bridge multiple genres during their career, out of the 15 studio albums Anvil have released to date, their style and sound has remained remarkably uniform. The reason Lips and Robb have previously given for this is that doing so was staying true to the type of music they wanted to produce, as opposed producing what was fashionable at the time.

“We’ve never done a bad album,” Lips states, when I ask how he feels about their back catalogue. “It’s just that the public have a perception that success is about having millions of dollars and playing in front of thousands of people. But what about the success of putting a band together when you’re 14, keeping it together for 30 plus years and putting out 15 albums?”

Lips may well have a point, though, however you define success, Anvil’s extensive recording history has provided a source of criticism for those who believe classic metal is all but consigned to the past; offering nothing new, repetitive and irrelevant.

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"I've been in situations where roadies of the headliners have done things to our backline as we're playing. Pulling the plugs out, turning things off."

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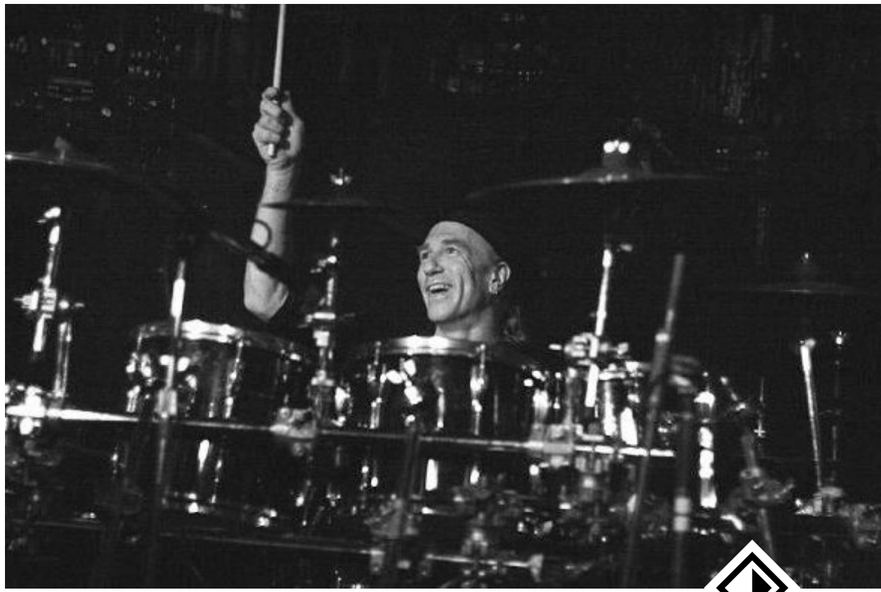
McDonalds, '83



Above: Robb over time

"The haters," groans Robb, leaning forward and putting his head in his hands. "You know what sucks? It was the metal scene who were the last to open the doors and give us recognition."

Lips nods. "Yeah, the metal scene in general is extraordinarily negative. I've been in situations where roadies of the headliners have done things to our backline as we're playing. Pulling the plugs out, turning things off. There're lots of other bands I could name that won't gig with anyone else in case they get upstaged. They don't want you opening up in case you're too good. They'll say stuff like, 'we don't want to share our audience with those guys.' It's pathetic."

I ask Robb if he agrees. "There was a time when it was very positive and very exciting, and what has happened over the years is all that excitement has turned into apathy. Everyone's a Nihilist now! It's all just 'shit.' Nothing is good. You say, 'hey, here's a new band!' The response, 'no, that's going to be shit.' Why are you saying it's going to be shit? That excitement of being told about a new record: 'Who's this?!'" He mimes gazing longingly at an invisible vinyl record. "That caring has just disappeared."

I ask Lips why he thinks this has happened. His response is frank. "It's over-saturation and sub-quality. The guys who distribute it are just looking for units to make money. They don't care if it's good or not. The record company aspect has disappeared because they opened up the barn doors and all the horses ran out. They created a medium of digital music that could be shared by the click of a button. That killed the record companies, so now there's no filtering system. People record in their living rooms and put it on the internet. Now there are 10 billion bands, so how are you meant to tell one apart from the others? It's way harder to make it now that it was before. A new band of today? You need a break. You need tour support. You can't just be original and hope you'll be heard. There's no record company that's going to help you get known. How are you going to get a record deal when they can't sell your CDs. They can't pay for your recording because they can't sell your CDs. They might as well sell air."

I ask Lips if he's ever heard the rumour that Catherine Zeta Jones has air canned and imported to the US from Wales. His jaw hangs open for a few seconds before he responds with a string of expletives.

Entrenched Warfare.

In 1984, heavy metal became one of the most famous and recognisable genres of music in the world. In the US alone, metal

Photo by Dalila Kriheli

accounted for almost a quarter of all record sales. Today, it continues to remain one of the most readily identifiable and enduring musical subcultures. Its initial appeal was, in part, rooted in notions of community and a rejection of certain social or political conventions adopted by wider society. Fans could relate to the values which they shared with or projected onto their favourite bands.

We begin talking about the atmosphere surrounding metal when it was flourishing, and it was enjoyable listening to Lips and Robb rosily recount tales from the early 1980s. Robb talks about coming up with the drum groove on Jackhammer – a song from their second album – in a way that invokes real passion and genuine appreciation for not just metal, but music in general. Lips describes how to appropriately mitigate chaffing when wearing tight fitting leather. These were heady times for Anvil – headlining festivals with Motorhead and Whitesnake – so I ask if they feel proud to have had a founding role in what would become one of the most expansive genres of music in the world. Instantly, and rather unexpectedly, the tone changes. Robb begins scoffing and mumbling inaudibly, before repeating the word "bacteria" under his breath and eventually offering an explanation.

"Metal is like bacteria. There's good bacteria and bad bacteria. Most of it now has turned into bad bacteria. It's like the evolution of everything. Things always mutate for the worse." He concludes with an example of how art has followed a similar path – where genuine artistic integrity has been replaced by people "throwing paint at a canvas."

Conscious things are becoming somewhat negative, I ask if Robb and Lips now feel they're seeing a different side to a business which they've previously been despondent about.

Robb snorts. "Music business? There's nothing to say about it. It's barely a business. It's more like a mob." Lips is nodding. "It's just superficial fucking bullshit." There's a brief silence. "Do you think it has the potential to change?"

Robb's scowling. "It hasn't changed at all. It'll never change. There's nothing more to say. Move on."

"But how does brushing over it help anything? Surely if you think it's wrong there should be at least some suggestion as to how it can begin to be fixed?"

Robb's response is cut short as the tour manager enters with a large Pizza and deposits it on the table, leaving without uttering a word. We eat in silence.

Whilst in one light it's perfectly understandable why Anvil would harbour such views, there were still a number of times I felt utterly perplexed at the way Robb and Lips suddenly seemed to seize up with anger

and spite over certain issues. At first I dismissed it as another facet of Anvil's consistency –espousing views so seemingly entrenched they've become like automated error messages on a computer; largely frustrating and decidedly unhelpful. This isn't, however, an accurate description of Robb and Lips' demeanour which confused me all the more.

For Robb and Lips, credibility and consistency are inextricably linked. The idea of change, for them, represents something undesirable and unnecessary. "Sometimes I don't know what more people want from us," muses Lips as he summarises his views on criticisms of the band, "all we've ever been is consistent."

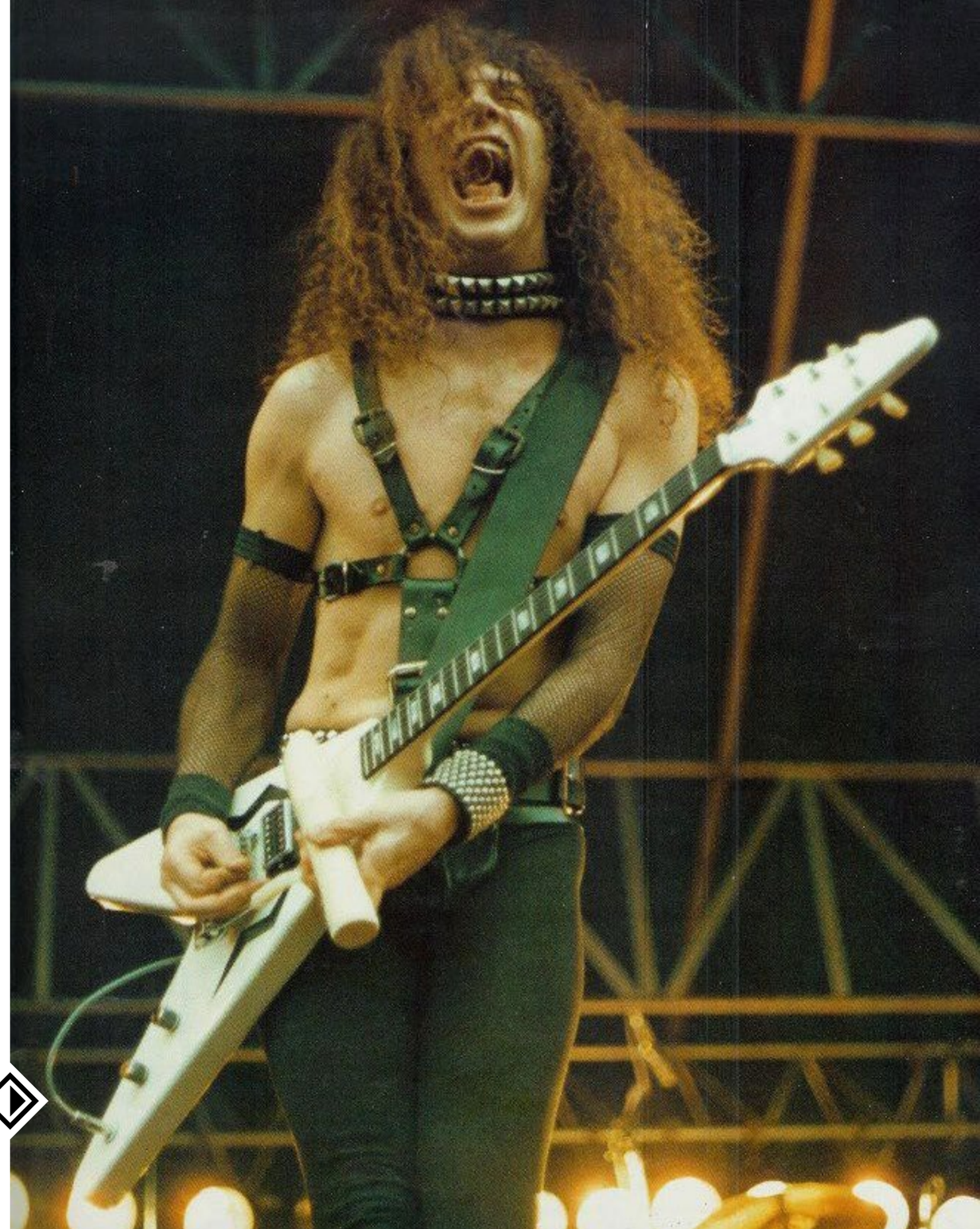
Notions of integrity are quite fundamentally rooted in the way many of us perceive music, and, for the most part, the reasons as to why people may deem music to be 'genuine' or 'fake' are very diverse. There are, arguably, no definitively authentic or inauthentic musics – only differences in the way people choose to define what they believe to be genuine. The way some strive to defend criticisms of John Bonham and the way others will staunchly defend Justin Bieber are markedly similar. Each does so because they believe that the artist in question is legitimate. Perhaps more often than not, they are loaded terms used by the press. When music is deemed authentic this usually signifies something good – it constitutes a personal or collective worth, value or meaning. Inauthentic music, by contrast, is seen as worthless and is closely associated with 'the commercial' and 'the masses.'

The pizza has now reduced in size by half and partially melted the frost that was beginning to accrue in the air. The conversation turns back to ideas of integrity, and how Robb and Lips both perceive it.

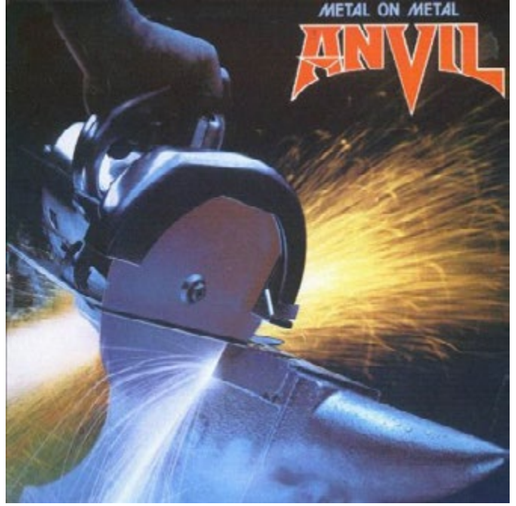
Lips begins. "I think integrity is to do with the skill it takes to play something."

Anvil's Studio Album Artwork [Next Page]

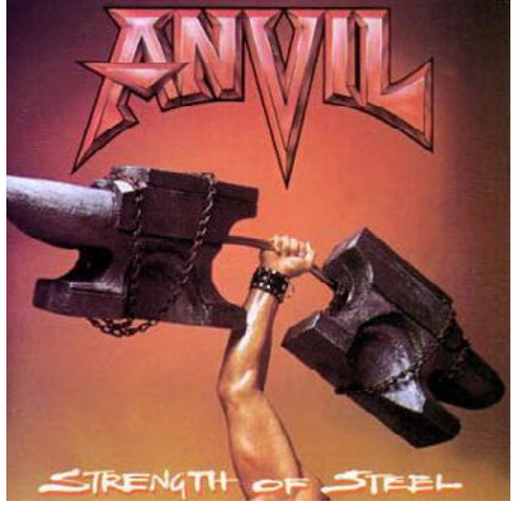
1981: Hard 'n' Heavy
1982: Metal on Metal
1983: Forged in Fire
1987: Strength of Steel
1988: Pound for Pound
1992: Worth the Weight
1996: Plugged in Permanent
1997: Absolutely No Alternative
1999: Speed of Sound
2001: Plenty of Power
2002: Still Going Strong
2004: Back to Basics
2007: This Is Thirteen
2011: Juggernaut of Justice
2013: Hope in Hell




HARD 'N' HEAVY
ANVIL


METAL ON METAL
ANVIL


ANVIL
Forged in Fire


ANVIL
STRENGTH OF STEEL


ANVIL
POUND FOR POUND


ANVIL
WORTH THE WEIGHT


ANVIL
PLUGGED IN PERMANENT


ANVIL
SPEED OF SOUND


ANVIL


PLENTY OF POWER
ANVIL


ANVIL
STILL GOING STRONG


ANVIL
B·A·C·K T·O B·A·S·I·C·S


ANVIL
THIS IS THIRTEEN


ANVIL
JUGGERNAUT OF JUSTICE


ANVIL
HOPE IN HELL

"So it's to do with musicianship?"

"Well, it's more than that. You feel when it's real."

"What about you Robb?"

"Fabricated shit is premeditated – there's deliberately that cliché hook or sound. Real music is organic."

"Do you agree, Lips?"

"Well, I don't know really. You know you've done the best you can – you set a standard when you write music, if it doesn't meet it doesn't happen."

"Robb?"

"I think credibility is established by people embracing it."

"So it's about popularity too?"

Robb considers his words. "Well…I suppose a lot of shit stuff is popular." He sighs. "I don't know either, I can't explain. You can just feel it when you hear it. It's about staying true. Sticking to your guns."

Whilst, in one light, Anvil's notions of authenticity have let them achieve success on their own terms, they are also in danger of trapping them in an inescapable paradox. In the 1980s what Anvil offered was, to varying accounts, revolutionary. It's easy to see why Reiner's playing was eye opening – at the time cannon like double kicks and thunderous 32nd note tom fills across the bar line were uncommon. By 2013, however, despite the prowess with which it is executed, Anvil's decision to stick to their guns is all to easily interpreted by some as resting on their laurels. Given what is expected from new releases, particularly in a genre already heavily saturated with similarity, nostalgia can only afford limited acclaim. Whilst Lips and Robb impress indifference to such matters, the proverbial "fuck you" in light of negative criticism can serve to reciprocate itself in the form of alienation and a diminishing fan base.

It was because of this that when I read Anvil had recorded their latest record, to quote Lips, "as if it was 1983," I was, initially, sceptical.

"For your new album, Hope in Hell, you said your approach was to write it as if it was 1983 again."

Lips nods, "that's right, yeah."

"Bands often receive criticism for going back, as it were. You know how recently there was a spate of boy bands who, having broken up in the 1990s, got back together?"

"Not really."

"Ok, well, a lot of them released new material, which got panned for being too dated. Was that ever a concern?"

Lips looks incredulous. "Dated? Are you fucking kidding me?" He sighs deeply. "OK, listen. Metal music will never be dated. It's different in the sense it's autonomous. Lots of people want to put a clock to it, but we've been playing guitar music for the last 50 years. Chuck Berry became Jimi Hendrix. Jimi Hendrix became Ted Nugent. Ted Nugent became Lips. You see what I'm saying? It's all attached. Everything is connected. So, no, I don't think it is dated, there's no such thing." Lips pauses momentarily.

"People say that metal is dinosaur music. Well, in some ways, bands like ours, we're the last of the dodos – you know what I mean by that? My era and what inspired our music, our morals, our ideals, when we

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"Music business? There's nothing to say about it. It's barely a business. It's more like a mob."

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ANVIL
FINEST CYMBALS
FOR THE
FINEST DRUMMERS

die, it's gone. And it's going to happen in the not to distant future."

Robb is nodding in agreement. "Fuckin' Eh."

The door swings open and the tour manager enters, tapping the watch on her wrist. "Can we wrap it up? We're on soon." The Pizza is finally depleted.

I depart and head out into the main hall. When the house lights dim, a rising, repetitive chant of the band's name is met with a wall of distortion.

Watching Anvil play made me realise why the room in which I was stood was also populated with 5000 other people. I'll admit that prior to meeting Robb and Lips I felt Anvil's future was uncertain. I thought their most recent albums sounded tired and uninspired. It would be hypocritical of me to suggest these views have changed now as they haven't - they are seemingly some of my own entrenched opinions. But, those who say classic metal has no place in today's marketplace are guilty of generic sweeping statements that have no real substance. If you appreciate Anvil for what they are rather than what they will or will not be, you'll see two guys playing music with a passion, as they have done for the last 30 years.

The name Anvil is ultimately quite fitting. Anvils are relatively unassuming objects on which other more expensive or desirable wares are formed. They're apt at taking beating yet posses an inherent longevity. Long may it continue.

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"People say that metal is dinosaur music. Well, in some ways, bands like ours, we're the last of the dodos – you know what I mean by that? My era and what inspired our music, our morals, our ideals, when we die, it's gone."

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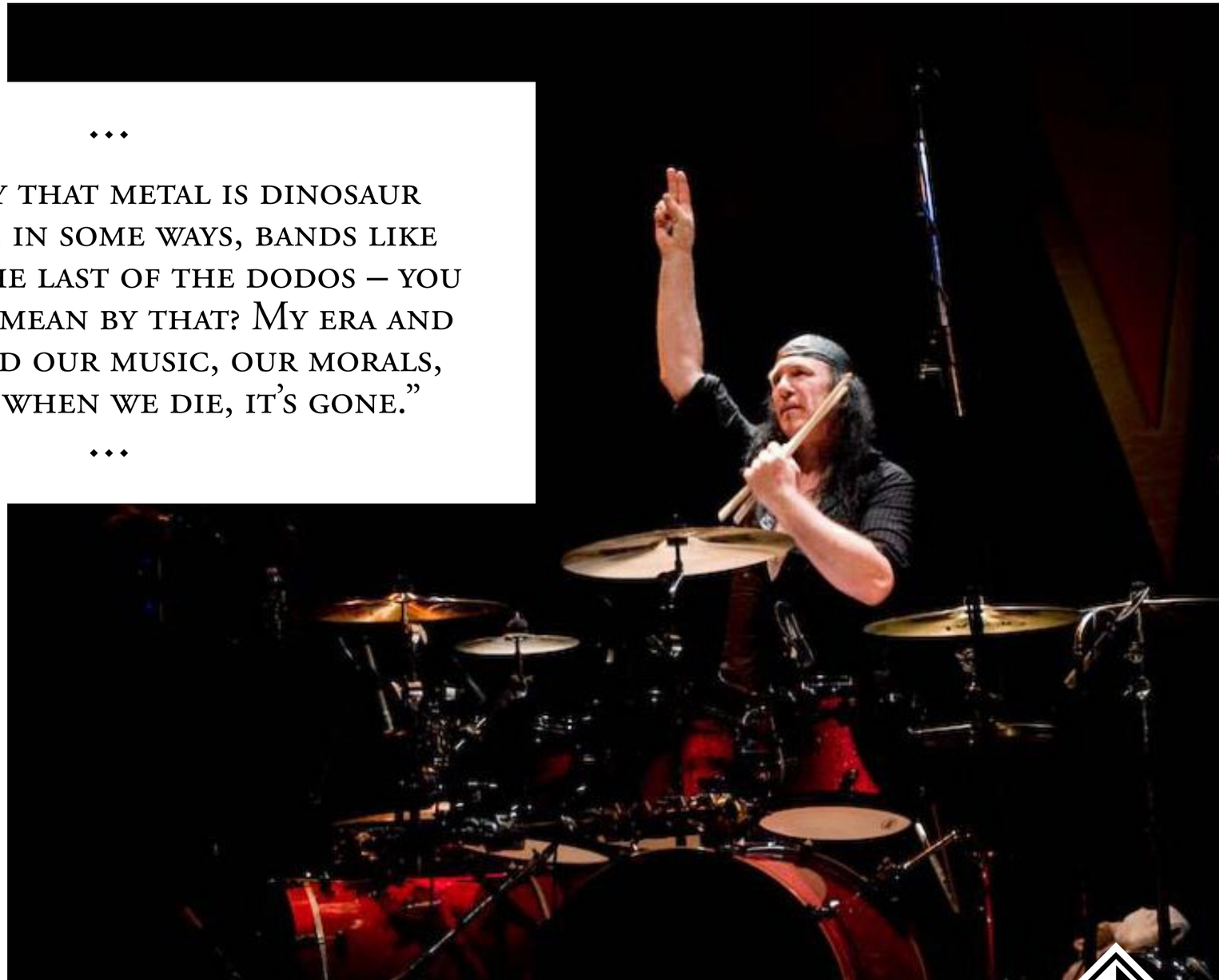

Photo by Dalila Kriheli

WIN!

We're giving away 12 pairs of ProMark Hickory 5A Wood Tip drumsticks - worth £119 - plus a T-shirt, mugs and stickers.

The entire bundle is up for grabs! There's no devious small print – it simply says that by entering you are also subscribing to The Drummer's Journal, which will get delivered straight to your inbox every two months.

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THIS IS NOT A WRAP

Keith Keough and Premier Percussion

Words by Tom Hoare
Photography by Luke Douglas

In 1860, the Lancashire countryside was littered with industry. Cotton and coal fuelled an impending revolution as the north of England dredged from the earth its own veins to fuel the spindles. At its height, Lancashire's 2,650 cotton mills produced over half of the world's cotton. By 1960, the mills, undercut from the east, were closing at a rate of one a week until only a handful remained. Manufacture was moving, and the consequences for local, rural communities were dire.

Driving through the countryside this legacy is still highly visible. Old factories and chimneys interspersed between dry ditches; rolling, artificial heaps divided by scars and pits. A skip stacked with discarded drum shells.

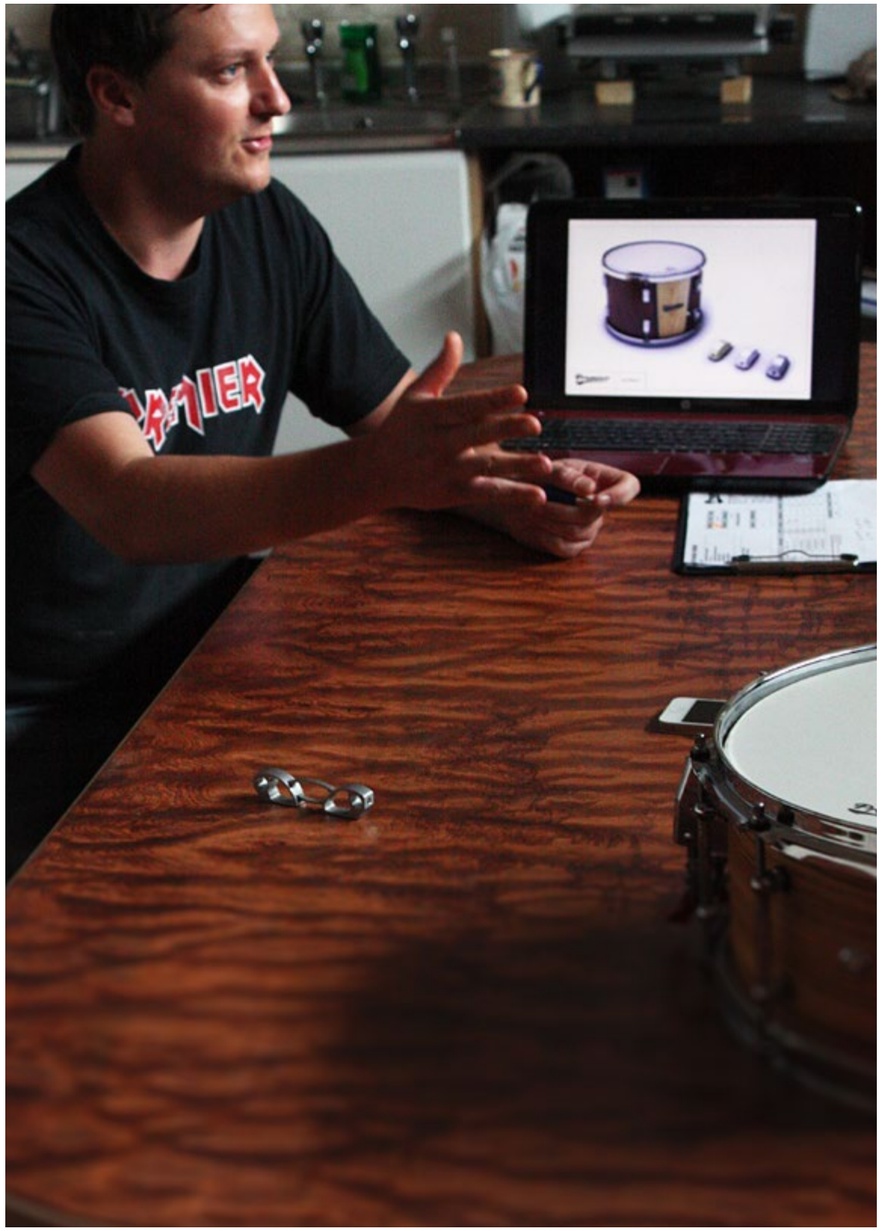
We'd arrived.

Premier Percussion share a story akin to many other British manufacturers operating throughout the twentieth century. Initially founded in 1922 as Premier Drum Company, a series of mergers saw the manufacturing base migrate from the UK to the Far East. Recently, however, the company came back under British ownership and turned its attentions to producing handcrafted products in the UK once more. To do this, they recruited a skilled drum builder by the name of Keith Keough who, at the time, owned a small bespoke drum manufacturing business called KD Custom Drums.

Keith's current position is unique. As the founder of KD he worked for many years as an independent manufacturer. With the support of some high profile names, he was able to open up a shop in Stockport to sell his products before Premier bought out Keith's company in 2011. He now works as head of R&D for one of the industry's oldest and most recognisable firms.

It's easy to see why Keith's work caught Premier's eye. On the old KD Custom website, the intricacy and sheer artistry of Keith's designs was best displayed by the short, caps laden phrase accompanying the photographs of his builds: This is Not a Wrap. Had Pope Julius II been interested in a bespoke drum set, he would have likely told Michelangelo to busy himself with the ceiling before turning his attentions to the renaissance's equivalent of KD Custom to sort his kit.

From the outside, Premier's bespoke workshop looks suspiciously dark, the only hint at what's inside displayed by the blue, sparkling wraps of Taiwanese shells stuffed into the skip outside the door. With the shutter slightly ajar, I walk into a room where stacks of shells and drumheads are barely visible in the gloom. "Hello…? Keith?" No Answer. I realise he can't hear me because I can now see him through the window that leads into the small office, where he's stood with his hands clasped to his head. "The power's out," he groans as I approach, "I hope your camera's got a good flash."



The Drummer's Journal: How did you start out building your own drums?
Keith Keough: I've worked with wood all my life. Even when I was a kid, my dad and me would make stuff like lamps and candleholders. After school, I worked as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. I started tinkering with drums because, having always been a drummer, I bought myself a custom kit which I ended up not being very happy with and so decided to make some alterations myself.

So you taught yourself?
Yeah. It's not the sort of thing you learn from a book. Back then there was no internet either – you couldn't just log on and learn how to build drums. For me, it was all initially just trial and error. By the time the web arrived, I'd worked out most of what I needed to know.

How did you start manufacturing your own stuff?
I moved to Manchester and was working in a rehearsal and recording studio called Moolah Rouge. By that time I'd built a load of drums but they weren't branded. People were buying them though, so that's why I started KD Drums. I went to The Prince's Trust and got a small loan and started building in a small room in Moolah Rouge studios. Then Pete Salisbury – the drummer from The Verve - opened a drum shop and I moved in upstairs, doing repairs and things. I'd build the odd custom kit and sell it through the shop. Eventually I took over that shop and re-opened it as KD Drums. I did that for about six years until eventually Premier bought me out.

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"I THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE USE WORDS LIKE RESONANCE, WARMTH AND ATTACK BUT NOW THEY'VE LOST ALL REAL MEANING BECAUSE THEY'RE SO OVERUSED."

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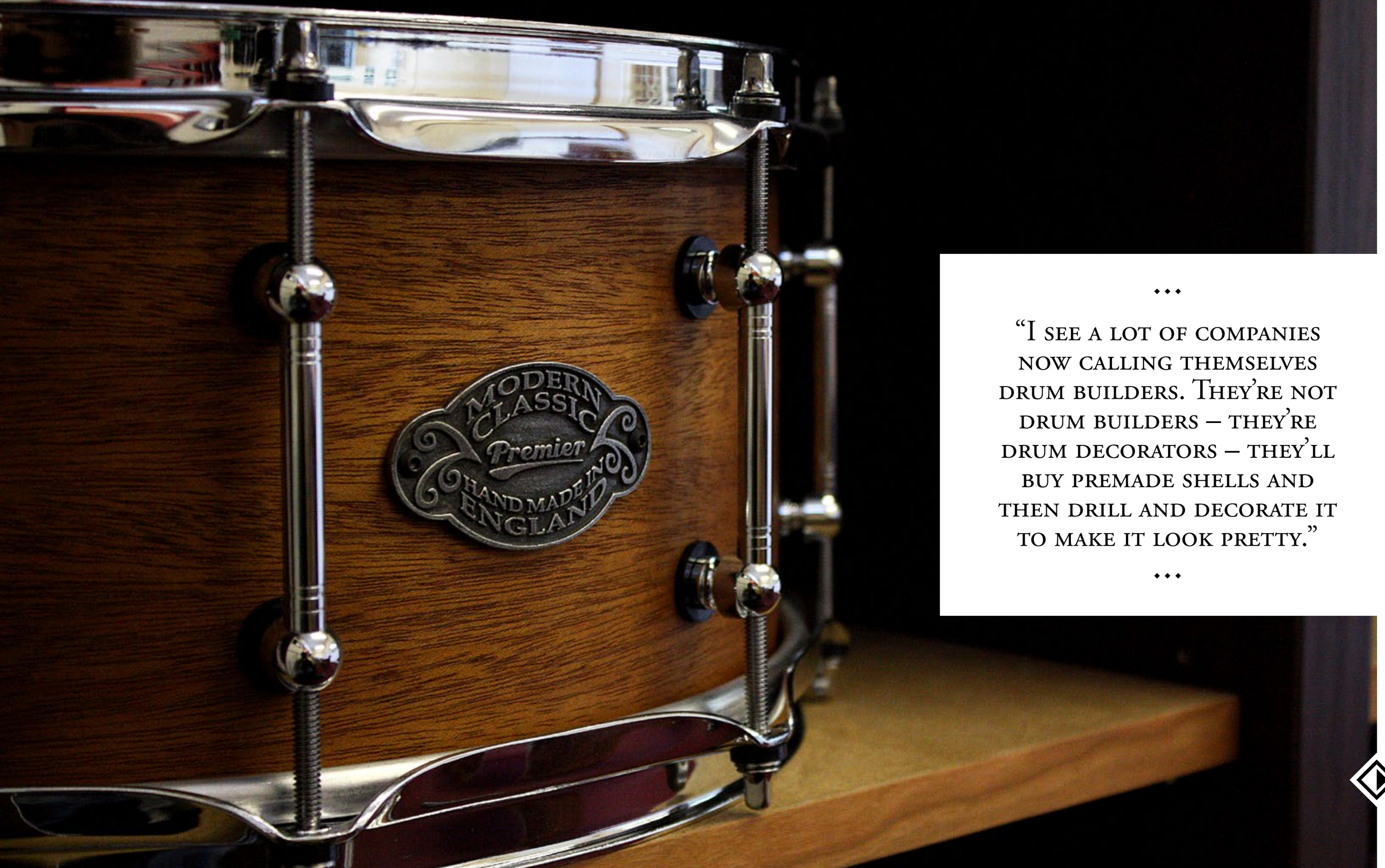

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"I see a lot of companies now calling themselves drum builders. They're not drum builders – they're drum decorators – they'll buy premade shells and then drill and decorate it to make it look pretty."

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So you were headhunted?
Yeah, I suppose. The other four guys here, apart from Chris, were at KD Drums too and they came with me.

How long did KD exist for?
From 2003 until 2011 - so about eight years.

Why "KD"?
My full name's Keith Davidson Keough. I used to sign cheques KD Keough. I just didn't want to call it KK Drums. It might have been misinterpreted.

Do you still have the first drum you ever made?
Yeah. It was a segmented zebra wood snare drum. I actually ballsed it up pretty bad. I put the butt plate too low so the hoop hit it. I never made that mistake again.

So you opened your own shop?
One of the things I needed to do was beat all these new custom drum building companies sprouting up nearly every month. So I thought, if we get together the key manufacturers like Highwood, Guru and Gatton, whenever they sell one, I technically sell one too. It was the only totally custom drum shop in the UK.

How was the business side of things – the running of the shop as opposed to the craftsmanship side?
I found that hard. There was only me and one other guy at the time. We'd both be upstairs building and then running down to serve someone who had wandered into the shop. The problem there was lots of people were just coming in to have a look and have a chat, and before you know it they've been in there for two hours and you've still got an entire kit to build. Really, we should have had a full time shop assistant, but it wasn't financially viable.

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"You need to understand that either side of the KD Custom shop were two sex shops. A few doors up there was a shop selling knives and knuckle dusters. Across the street there was a shop selling bongs and marijuana paraphernalia. Then there was us."

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You did a lot of repairs?
Yeah. A lot of vintage stuff - all sorts of kits would come in to be re-wrapped or re-veneered. That was the most common task, alongside re-cutting bearing edges.

So the shop closed when you moved to Premier?
Yeah, it's closed. Steve White did some teaching out of there for a bit - he's actually just recently stopped doing that.

How did you get to know Steve?
Just through building drums. He found me really.

Was he ever a KD endorsee?
No, he was endorsed by Mapex but he used to play my snares.

That must have been handy.
Steve White's the reason I'm here today. When we did the Spitfire snare together, he mentioned it via Facebook and I suddenly had all these people calling me up wanting one.

Was closing your own business heart breaking?
Not at all. To be honest, I'm much better off here at Premier. I get to travel the world and go to all the shows, whereas with KD I was stuck in a small workshop.

Is it still nostalgic, when you look back on it?
I suppose it is a bit, but I got in so much debt and so much trouble that I was glad to see the back of it. I'm in the clear now, thank god. I had such high hopes for it, but I always felt like I'd ultimately join someone else.

Why did it not work out?
A few reasons. The recession, and then we got flooded. Twice. It's a long story.

Left; Marking out plies. The tape on the shell to the left has to be removed with a hairdryer or else it might damage the wood.

After pressing, the plies are cut to size and layered up in the mould.

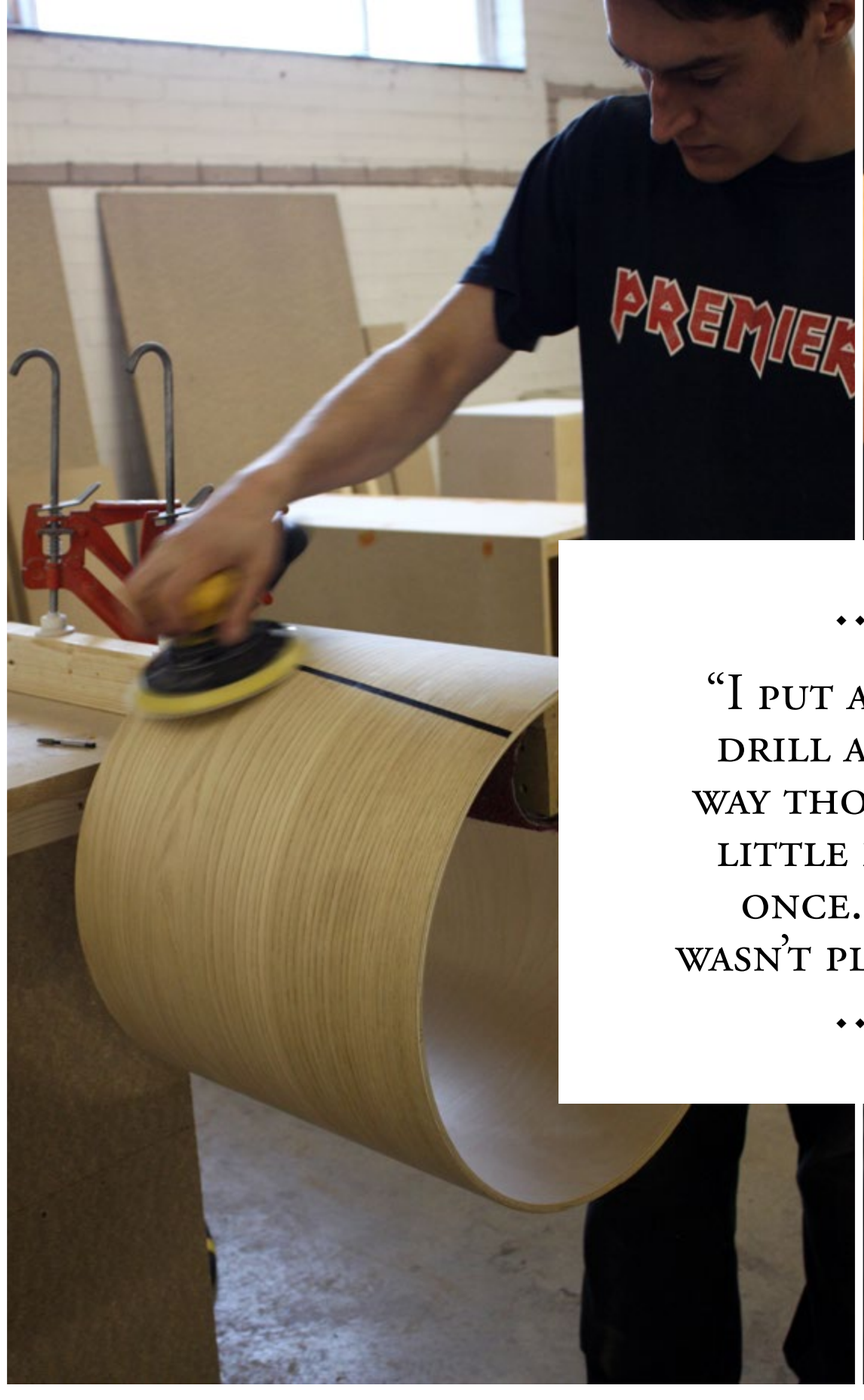
As opposed to an internal compression system, the way the plies are layered ensurers their own pressure forces out trapped air.

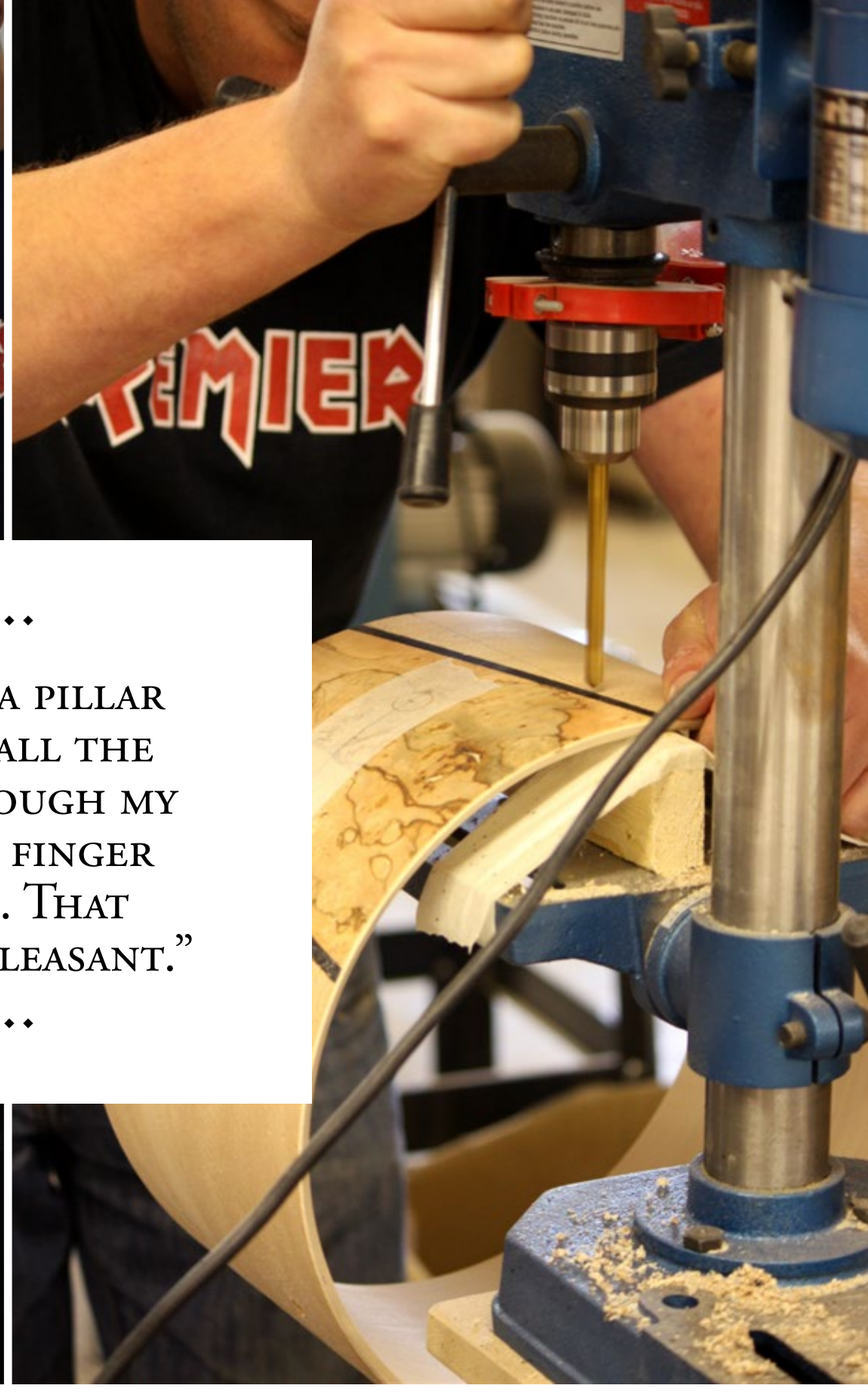
We're not in a hurry…
(Laughs) Ok. It all happened on Christmas Eve, which is also my birthday. That year I was at home in Cumbria. I was out having a few drinks, as you do, meanwhile, the workshop in Stockport was flooding. Because there's no phone signal back home, the Police couldn't get hold of me to let me know. Eventually, I found out four days later, and the place was destroyed. The flood completely wiped out all my stock and equipment. I had customers phoning up threatening me because I didn't have the money to be able to refund them straightaway. The insurance wouldn't pay out because they said it was my own fault I had no emergency contact number. Then, after that, the council tried to fine us £25,000 because the building's alarm had been going off. Apparently, your alarm is allowed to go off for 45 minutes then after that you get fined for every 20 minutes it continues to sound. Mine was going off for four days.

Did you pay the fine?
Did I heck. I couldn't afford it – I was flat broke. Still, the council just wouldn't budge. They said I could either pay the fine and carry on trading, or refuse to pay and shut my business down. I fought with them about it for ages. Eventually they let me off.

What then?
After the flood, we had to refit the entire shop. We did it out really well – it looked great. Someone from the council came down to inspect our work. You need to understand that either side of the KD Custom shop were two sex shops. A few doors up there was a shop selling weapons - knives, knuckle dusters and crazy stuff like that. Across the street there was a shop selling bongs and marijuana paraphernalia. Then there was us – a custom drum shop. So the guy from the council turns up and looks around. I swear, hands down, he turns to me and tells me that my shop makes the street look scruffy.

Above: A ply is placed in the press





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"I put a pillar drill all the way though my little finger once. That wasn't pleasant."

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> “The council tried to fine KD £25,000 because the building’s alarm had been going off. Your alarm is allowed to go off for 45 minutes, then you get fined for every 20 minutes after that. Mine was going off for four days.”

I was like, “are you serious?” We’re flanked by two sex shops, a drug den, a weapons shop – and my shop makes the street look scruffy? We should have bought a job lot of dildos and put them in the window.

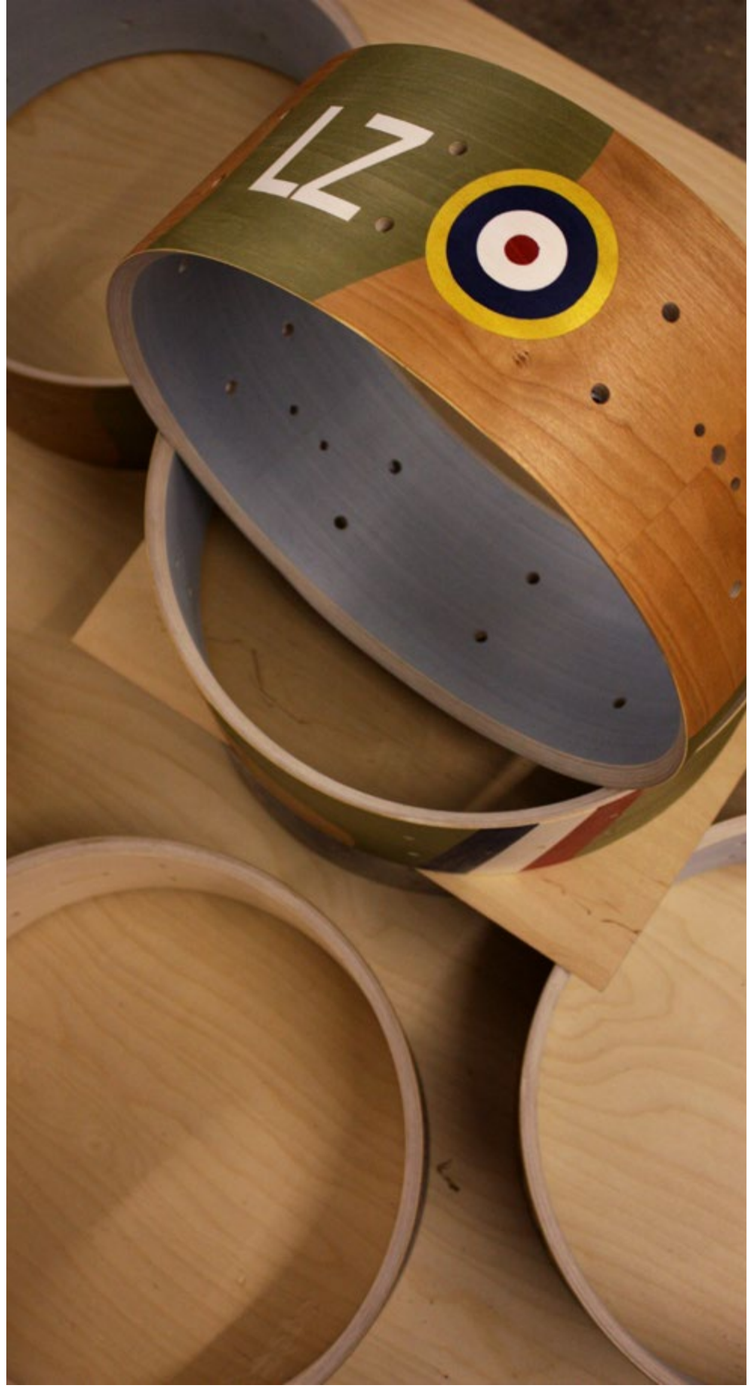
Well… I guess that brings us on to what you’re doing now – do you have an average day here at Premier or is it pretty diverse?
I’m head of manufacture and R&D so I design all the stuff and do most of the machining.

How does the design process work?
I’ll usually start by doing a sketch, then I’ll make a visual in Solidworks or AutoCAD. Before I go into any more detail, we all have a look at it and decide if there’s anything we want to chop and change.

When you joined premier, what state was the company in – I mean, they were looking for someone to come in and reinvigorate some of their product lines?
I can’t really comment on what state Premier was in when I joined – but they were keen to get back to UK manufacture. We started off with snares first, then slowly introduced drums too. There was no set agenda or plan, we all just got together and said, lets do this snare and take it from there.

And it’s working?
Oh, yeah, the made in England tag has done so much.

So, in terms of people who are buying it, is it British people?
No, the majority of sales are from abroad. China, Japan, America, Italy. They love the made in England tag – it carries a lot of weight.



Left: the Aces High snare, which takes upwards of eight hours start to finish. Excluding full sets, the workshop averages 160 snares per month.

> “Lots of people say to me, a 45 degree bearing edge sounds different to a 30 or a 60. I’ll give you a medal if you can turn your back and tell the difference.”

Do you feel like the UK custom scene has gone through a resurgence?
There has been a resurgence yeah, but I think it's slowly starting to tail off. The market has been flooded – there are a lot of bespoke manufacturers now. The thing I admire about the British guys is most make their own shells. Here, you can't just go and buy Keller shells like all the American guys do. I see a lot of companies now calling themselves drum builders. They're not drum builders – they're drum decorators – they'll buy a premade shell and then drill and decorate it to make it look pretty. In the UK it's too expensive to do that so most build a shell from scratch.

What about the metal work side of things? Are you planning to start doing that too?
The lugs are made in the UK. The hoops come from Taiwan.

There's a stigma attached to products from Taiwan, but there's a lot of good stuff if you source it properly.
A lot of people say Taiwan is only good for making cheap stuff, but I've been over there and when you compare their machinery to what's in the UK, our engineers can't touch them. The facilities they have are unreal. I go over quite frequently for quality control and stuff.

Out of everything you've built, is there a particular favourite or something that sticks in your mind?
Probably the Union Jack One Series snare drum. It's just a normal ply snare drum, but cosmetically, it takes such a massive amount of work. I also like the Spitfire snare. It's so well designed. The lugs look like the nose of the aeroplane and they have lug locks too. It has isolation washers throughout so the screws never actually touch any part of the shell and it's blue inside to mimic the underbelly of the plane.

Do you see drum building as a science or an art?
An art form. Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of science, but you can go over the top. Completely. It takes the soul out of a drum when there's too much science in it. A lot of people say to me, a 45 degree


Premier
THE PREMIER DRUM CO.
1922
HANDMADE IN ENGLAND

bearing edge sounds different to a 30 or a 60. I'll give you a medal if you can turn your back and tell the difference. I think a lot of people use words like resonance, warmth and attack - they've lost all real meaning because they're so overused.

I used to live across the street from this old guy who built dog kennels out of pallets. He had a home made table saw in his garage and it alone is about 40 years old. Over the years, he's managed cut all but two of his fingers off on it. Have you had any particularly bad injuries?
I put a pillar drill all the way though my little finger once. That wasn't pleasant.

As a builder, what sort of things influence you? Is it other builders?
Yeah pretty much. Johnny Craviotto – I love his work. And SJC – the funky designs they do in wraps, I wanted to do in veneers. We do quite a lot of Art Decco stuff because Premier was established in the 1920s.

So the One Series is totally bespoke?
Yeah. They're all bespoke. Everything's a one off and named after a British village, town or place if interest.

Are there parts of the process you enjoy more than others?
I love the whole process of doing a new product. The bit I like the best is when I go to my boss and show him what I've made. It's not so fun if he doesn't like it though.

That can't happen very often?
No, it doesn't thankfully.

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Everything is hand made and all marked out by eye, no machines.


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XC1445PCS
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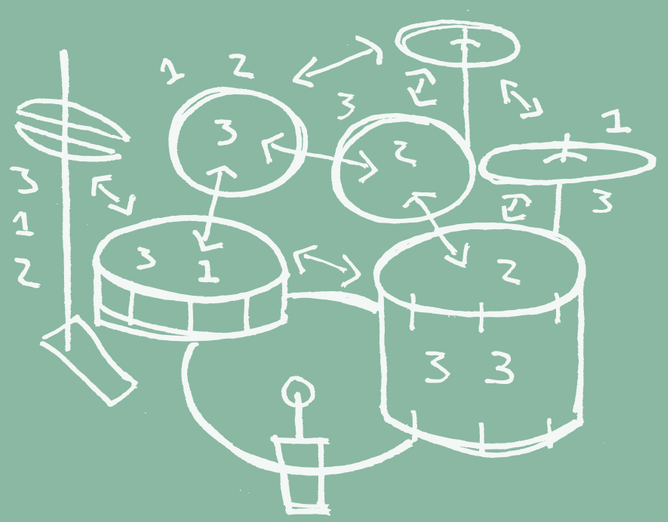
TECHNICALITIES

Creative Versus Technical Expression

Words and illustrations by Ben Martin



A while ago a non-drummer friend of mine declared that, after attending a drum clinic featuring a well-known drummer, he would rather hear someone play musically as opposed to technically. When I asked him what he meant, he stated that he considered the acquisition of "too much technique" on any instrument to be a killer of creativity.

This begs a question: Is it possible to maintain a creative approach to drumming while continuously striving for better technical skill?

In a fundamental sense, drumming is such an immediate musical form that the very act of playing is creative in itself, regardless of the extent to which we apply technical skill. Take someone, for example, such as Terry Bozzio who is famed for creating highly technical compositions. These conceptual performances are inspirational because we realise how many ways there are to apply our skills. I suspect my friend had picked up on the convoluted aspect apparent in the performance of many technical drum solos - especially at drum clinics - and dismissed them as a non-musical form of drumming. This is not always the case, however, especially when the concept is one other than pure technical prowess.

Although it is true that drum playing at a clinic will tend to be highly complex and precise in its execution, the licks, rhythms, fills and concepts are all conceived in the clinician's head and so they are part of their creative output and imagination all the same. It could be said that they are not so much un-creative but perhaps less appealing as a musical format. Despite this it is true that those same ideas as played may not fit into a regular drummer's musical output. I suspect this is also what my friend meant - he didn't feel musically inspired.

Despite this opinion, there is an obvious problem with regard to the gap between what you might aspire to play after having seen an inspirational performance and how to incorporate such information into your own musical knowledge as part of your everyday drumming. This leads us to a new question: Can the application of technical skill inhibit your creativity in performance?

It is a long-held belief of mine that creative flair will suffer during a performance simply due to the weight of increased pressure or expectation. So, let's imagine two approaches to the same scenario. You have an important gig coming up and you will be playing a new track. You have some creative ideas involving polyrhythms, for example.

1) You decide to notate the idea note for note and practice it over and over to a click track then, with your band, you go over the section during rehearsals. You get it to a point where you have it down. When the gig comes you are more tense and nervous than you would be at a rehearsal. You fluff the part you were intending to play and it

throws you to a point where you have to rein in your playing and you lose confidence.

2) After notating or recording the idea you start to think about other possible ways to play it. You try out different feels, tempos, phrasings and count it out loud. You then try out the idea repetitively against various rudiments, sticking patterns and feels. When it comes to rehearsal you concentrate on getting the songs tight and perhaps try out your idea here and there to see if it works. When the gig begins you are nervous but as you play you find that things are going well so you decide to try the idea out and pull it off a couple of times. Eventually your concept becomes second nature and the drum part for the song is all the better for it.

In the first scenario the drummer puts the acquisition of a technical lick before the performance of the song whilst in the second scenario the drummer learns the lick and understands it from various perspectives. The latter is interested in the creative possibilities of technical application more than showmanship. They don't push themselves during a performance to show technique unless they feel comfortable doing so. In this respect, technical skills are treated as musical ones as opposed to a showcase of talent.

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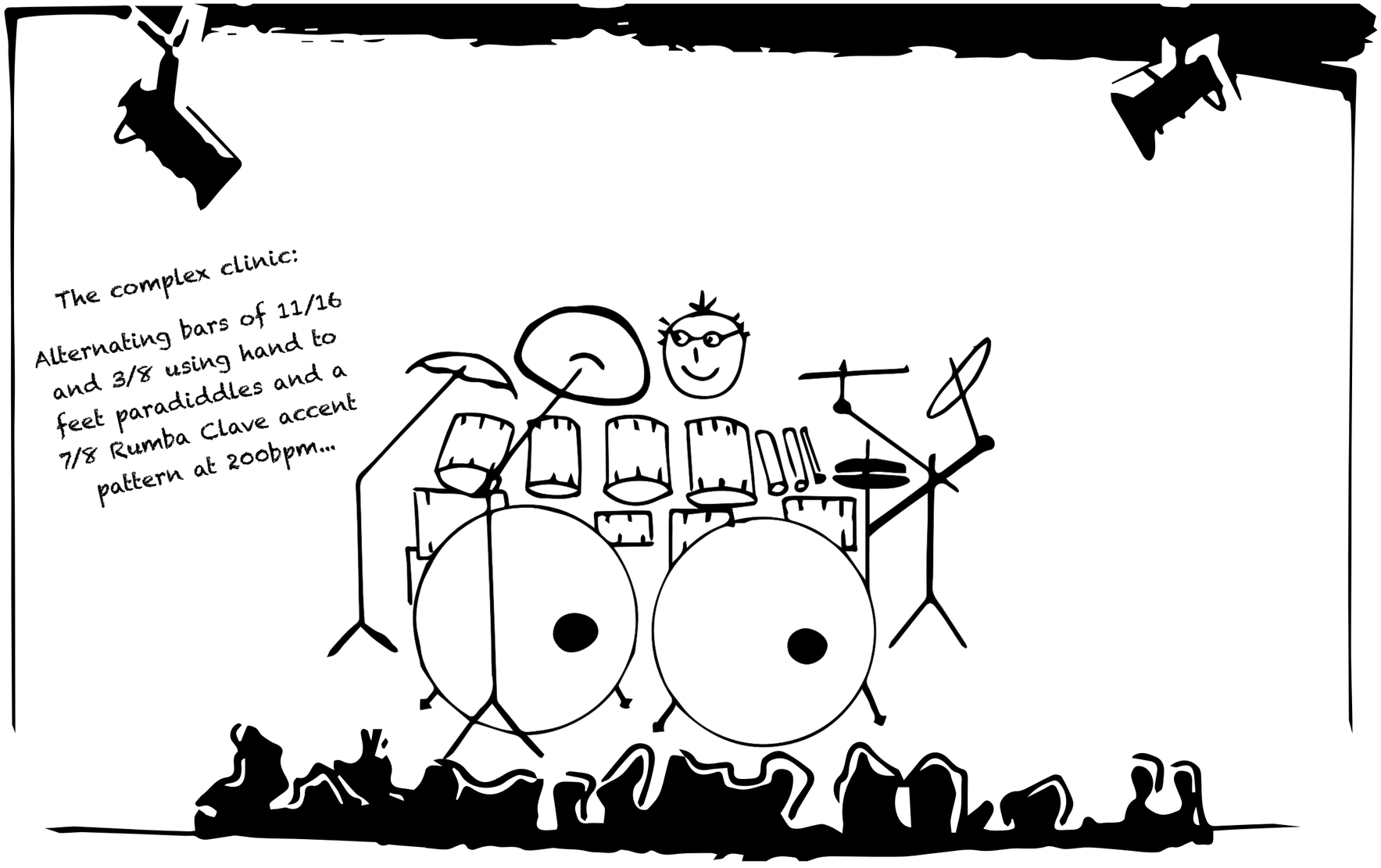

A CALL TO ARMS!

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If you're a writer or an illustrator we'd love to hear from you. This is your chance to join The Drummer's Journal and make your mark on the magazine. Get in touch by heading to thedrummersjournal.com.

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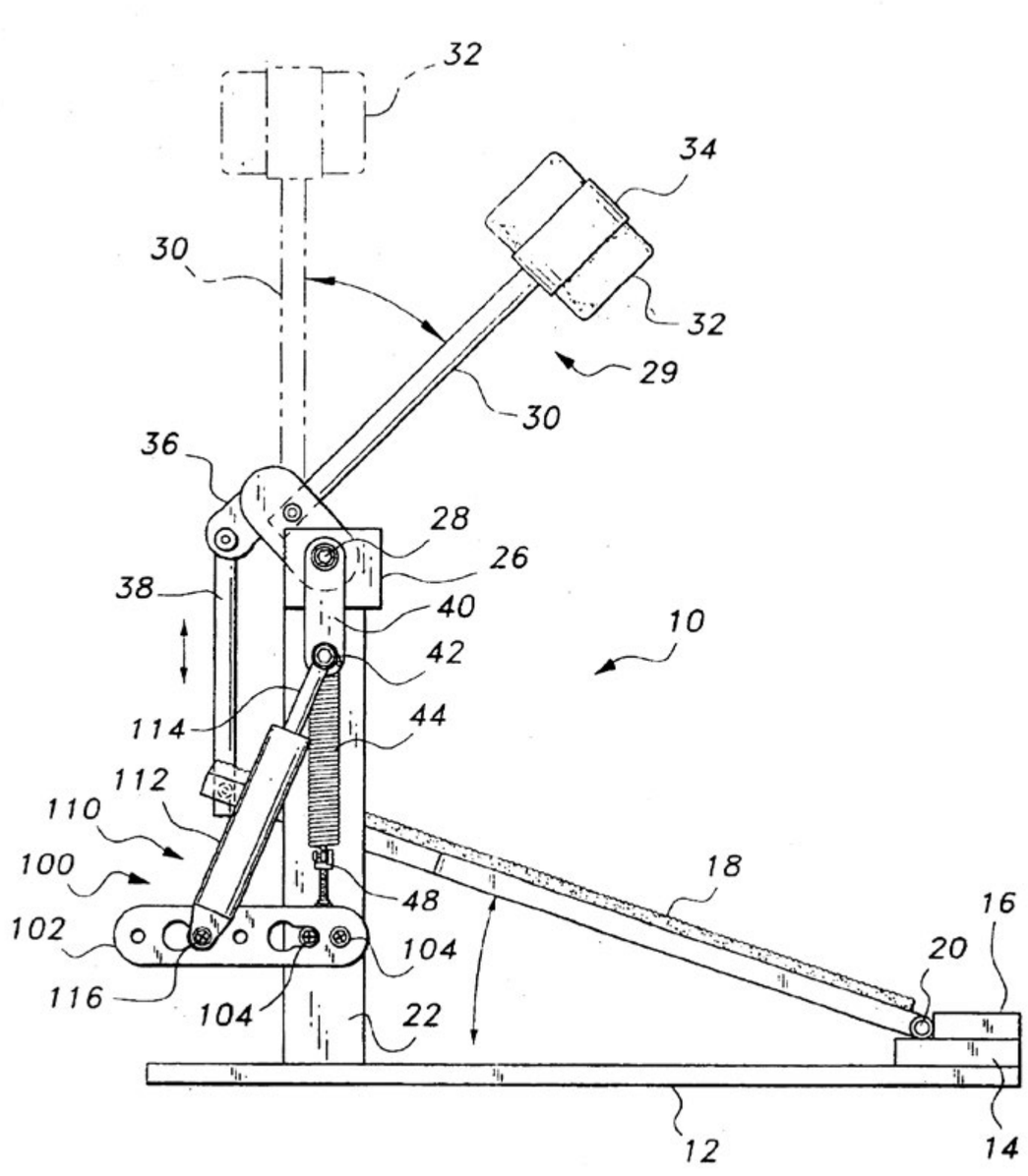

SELECTIVE COLOUR

Fay Milton of Savages

Words by Tom Hoare

The story goes that a cattle rancher by the name of Franscisco Lopez was resting under a tree in Placerita Canyon in California. Tired from a day's work in the hot sun, he falls asleep and dreams of floating on a pool of liquid gold. When he wakes, he hungers and crosses a small creek to a sycamore grove. Foraging for food, he uncovers a wild onion, extracting it from the ground to find chunks of gold clinging to its roots.

Lopez's discovery sparked the California gold rush of 1848. At the time, San Francisco was little more than a town of 200 settlers, but thanks to the wealth in them there hills, the population boomed to 36,000 in under two years. It was a frenzied, chaotic, lawless affair fuelled by media speculation and uncertainty.

Sitting opposite Savages' drummer Fay Milton in a cafe in east London, the gold rush seems irrelevant and long forgotten. "Are there still pictures of Savages all over Rough Trade? They might have gone by now. I keep forgetting they're there so when I go into the record shop my face is everywhere." Fay's squinting in the sunlight. On the four foot high poster round the corner, however, she's stood alongside her three bandmates maintaining a steely gaze. "God, they're everywhere," she grins, "it's bizarre."

Based upon the media's reaction, Savages are perhaps the closest thing the UK has ever come to a gold rush, albeit one less to do with mining minerals and more exploiting a cluster of critical acclaim around a band whose profile is proving increasingly exponential.

It's by no means unusual for the hype machine to go into overdrive a few times a year where debut albums adorned with stars, Ks and uninsightful adjectives populate every available ad space. The beauty is that hype is relatively fickle, and more often than not, this week's band of the year is, quite harmlessly, replaced with next week's band of the year and so on. Savages have been subject to the same predictions of grandeur but, despite the furore, have remained markedly detached from it. Their debut LP, instead of displaying any one of a thousand glistening reviews on its cover, offers a succinct, Orwellian analysis of technology and modernity.

Savages' songs are intense, forceful affairs, laden with a low end so rhythmically enticing that Fay and bassist Ayse Hassan will be one of the best rhythm sections you'll hear in a while. Though you may be inclined to think gold rushes are relatively short lived, it's also worth remembering that all that is gold does not glitter.

Photo by
Antoine Carlier

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"Music that you love can inspire you but music that you hate can inspire you even more."

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Savages
Silence Yourself

THE WORLD USED TO BE SILENT
NOW IT HAS TOO MANY VOICES
AND THE NOISE
IS A CONSTANT DISTRACTION
THEY MULTIPLY, INTENSIFY
THEY WILL DIVERT YOUR ATTENTION
TO WHAT'S CONVENIENT
AND FORGET TO TELL YOU
ABOUT YOURSELF
WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF MANY STIMULATIONS
IF YOU ARE FOCUSED
YOU ARE HARDER TO REACH
IF YOU ARE DISTRACTED
YOU ARE AVAILABLE
YOU ARE DISTRACTED
YOU ARE AVAILABLE
YOU WANT FLATTERY
ALWAYS LOOKING TO WHERE IT'S AT
YOU WANT TO TAKE PART IN EVERYTHING
AND EVERYTHING TO BE A PART OF YOU
YOUR HEAD IS SPINNING FAST
AT THE END OF YOUR SPINE
UNTIL YOU HAVE NO FACE AT ALL
AND YET
IF THE WORLD WOULD SHUT UP
EVEN FOR A WHILE
PERHAPS
WE WOULD START HEARING
THE DISTANT RHYTHM
OF AN ANGRY YOUNG TUNE -
AND RECOMPOSE OURSELVES
PERHAPS
HAVING DECONSTRUCTED EVERYTHING
WE SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT
PUTTING EVERYTHING BACK TOGETHER
SILENCE YOURSELF

The Drummer's Journal: Ba Ba Black Sheep?
Fay Milton: Yes - can you tap Ba Ba Black Sheep with your right foot whilst rubbing your stomach and patting your head at the same time?

Er… No, I don't think I can…
Actually thinking about it I'm not sure I could now either. But back when I was eight, our school music teacher told me if I could do that then I should play drums. I remember trying to do it then thinking, "I'm actually doing this!"

You're up on your world music, right?
The course I studied at university was really world music based. Prior to that I'd only played classical music, and reading off a piece of paper was the only way I could process how to play something. Learning Samba especially was inspirational, but it kind of destroyed everything I learned beforehand.

How so?
After leaving university I stopped playing music altogether because I felt really disillusioned with the classical music world.

Because you didn't want a career in it?
I think classical music can be a narrow path to follow. You don't realise that you can take the skills you've learnt and use them in lots of different areas of music.

Was it the way you were taught?
I had some amazing teachers but it only takes one to really knock you. They make you feel that becoming a famous musician is the only real aspiration you should have. So coming from that, I had a great lecturer at university called Barak Schmool – he's a jazz musician – cool name right?

He sounds like a jazz musician.
Yeah, he was pretty legendary. He taught samba and ethnic music, and he really dragged all these classically trained musicians back to where music comes from which is inside your body - stepping, walking, moving - that's the basis from where you learn.

So do you miss the classical aspect?
I miss the instruments. I'm dying to play some timpani again, or a pair of clash cymbals. Or even a triangle - the most under rated instrument!

How did your interest in other music sit alongside your interest in classical?
From a really early age I was going to concerts with my mum and her taste was in 20th century classical music. We went to see Ensemble Bash a lot who are a percussion quartet. I think from a very early age my concept of what music was was a lot more based on just sound and noise, so from that starting point, whether its rock, classical or dance music, it all fits in.

What's this I read about you being inspired by Garage music then?
Oh my god (clasps head in hands). You read that on Wikipedia right?

… Possibly.
Someone put that up as a joke. I need to take it down (laughs). I did grow up in southeast London going to garage clubs, and, to be honest, there are a lot of rhythms in garage music that I really like. It's haunting me that statement on the wiki site though.

So how did the transition to the drum kit happen?
Erm… I just decided to start, about four years ago. It's funny; music that you love can inspire you but music that you hate can inspire you even more - it makes you want to get off your arse and do something better. I'd been hearing a lot of music I didn't like and I was listening to a lot of drummers playing infinitely boring rhythms. That's why I started really. Have you heard of a drummer called Steve Reid?

(Squirming) Er…I should have, right?
He's one drummer in particular I'm very inspired by, but more so as a human being. He was a jazz drummer and played with Miles Davis. I was making a film about an experimental project between him and Kieran Hebden from FourTet. Steve was just a very inspiring person. He had a love for humanity and the way he channelled that was through playing the drums. He had this way of pointing out and cutting out bullshit. He wouldn't stand for anything that wasn't real. With a lot of indie bands it's more about the hair cut, the jeans or the stance. Steve would see straight through that. He'd insist everyone should master their instrument and play from the soul and not worry about image. He's in my head a lot when I play.

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"SAVAGES AS A BAND SOMETIMES GET DESCRIBED AS ANGRY, AS IF WE HAVE A VENDETTA AGAINST THE WORLD. SOMETIMES YOU CAN TAKE SOMETHING VERY VIOLENT AND PHYSICAL AND INTENSE, BUT CHANNEL A POSITIVE ENERGY INTO THAT."

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So your influences as a drummer stretch beyond music?
Yeah, definitely (pauses). I'm trying to think of a good example. It's a bit weird but I have very specific images in my mind that relate to drum patterns. They're usually very abstract. I can't think of a good example.

Think of a bad example then.
Erm… I've just thought of a pretty weird example. Sometimes there'll be certain notes that I play or certain beats that remind me of different things. For example, there's this kick drum in one of the songs that really reminds me of having sex. I don't know why. But every time I play that part it's always there. I mean something like sex inspires so much music so it's a bit of an obvious example. But there are lots of abstract things that can inspire you. Literary references. Pieces of clothing. I have a very abstract mind.

Do you find playing emotive?
It's kind of like a performance art in a way - a physical way of creating an emotion. It's not necessarily the emotion that's inside you. I could be in a really cheerful mood but have to play a really violent song. You have to create that, and you can create it in different ways.

Savages as a band sometimes get described as angry - as if we have a vendetta against the world. Sometimes you can take something very violent, physical or intense but channel a positive energy into it. There's a bit in the song She Will where I smash a cymbal over and over again but, when we wrote that, I was coming from a place where I was - not angry - but feeling quite strongly about something negative. Now, though, when we play that song every day on tour, it's more of a case of a real love and respect for the audience. I want to put every single ounce of that into playing as hard as I can. A lot of people often ask me if I get my frustration out through the drums but that doesn't make sense to me. Playing drums is a very positive thing.

How did you become involved with Savages?
I was playing in a few bands and a mutual friend put us in touch. It all moved really fast actually. Music was my hobby up until that point, then it kind of took over.

Photo by
Antoine Carlier

Does it feel like a career now?
No, not at all. It feels like I had a career and I stopped it. Not that savages couldn't be a career but it's more of an artistic project.

Was there a point where you had to quit your job to do the band full time?
Yeah. Actually, it was really hard. I'd been working for a long time as a film-maker and really enjoying it. It was weird because when you're freelancing you're completely in control of your life, but then having to change and become part of a group means you never have time on your own anymore.

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"In our culture there is a focus on joking all the time, being ironic and having this protective layer around you to avoid being serious about something and then failing."

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As a creative outlet, are there any comparisons between making a film and making an album?
Yeah, definitely. Making a film and making an album are similar undertakings. One isn't more difficult than the other necessarily. I was filming a lot of musicians and bands and you become really involved with it, you feel like part of the band. You're following the musicians from one place to another – you're improvising with the band in a visual way rather than a musical way. So, it comes from a similar creative place in a way – improvisation – when you're behind a camera you're always having to make up your next move. You have to know the camera like you know an instrument. Unfortunately, though, when you're a camera person no one claps at the end.

So it was the right choice, quitting?
Absolutely. 100%. I wouldn't change it. We'd gotten quite far down the line with the band before I quit though. Everything moved so fast.

The moving fast thing is a reoccurring theme with Savages. Why do you think that is?
I think it's four people being in a room together who are very hard workers. That pushes something quickly in a direction.

So was it the band doing the pushing? Or did you feel you were being pushed?
I don't think we were pushing for anything else other than writing music and playing good shows. Everything else we were trying to hold back. Too much, too fast. There were some rocky moments.

Do you read a lot of what's written about the band?
When people write about Savages, on the whole, they're writing about us as a band. Recently, though, we've had a lot of weird, awful journalism about us. People writing things about us as people. We're not going out to present ourselves as people, we're going out to present our project, our performance, our music, our album. It's not different to who you are as a person but you can separate yourself from it. It's funny because when people have been addressing our work it tends to be really positive, but when they're addressing us as people they can be a bit less positive (laughs).

Why is that?
You can't always be what people want you to be so I think they just get disappointed. I think people get very intimidated by people who are very serious about what they do. In our culture there is a focus on joking all the time, being ironic and having this protective layer around you to avoid being serious about something and then failing. People are often like, 'I'm doing this, but I'm not that serious about it so if it doesn't work then that's ok.' We're not like that. So I think people find it a bit scary.

It's also because we don't have that barrier of silly artwork or funny pictures. It's not because were not funny - we're hilarious - it's just because that stuff gets in the way. Our gigs are quite intense - we're not exactly frolicking around onstage.

I think for a long time people have naively assumed things about all female bands. Political orientations for example…
In previous generations women have had to fight to do creative things without the direction of men, but we haven't really had to to do that. Hopefully that's now becoming the norm. That's in this country anyway, because different societies are in different stages of development, but in London, hopefully we're seeing the start of women in music not having to be feminist. It's just something that's normal. A women can buy a drum kit and play it like any man can. When I was eight years old and I was offered drum lessons and so was my best friend Lucy so in my mind that was what eight year old girls did. Our hero was Evelyn Glennie and she was female so it was just normal. It didn't seem like there were any barriers to stop you doing things. I think sometimes the challenge is in people's own heads rather than in reality.

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A women can buy a drum kit and play it like any man can. When I was eight years old I was offered drum lessons and so was my best friend Lucy so in my mind that was what eight year old girls did. Our hero was Evelyn Glennie and she was female so it was just normal.

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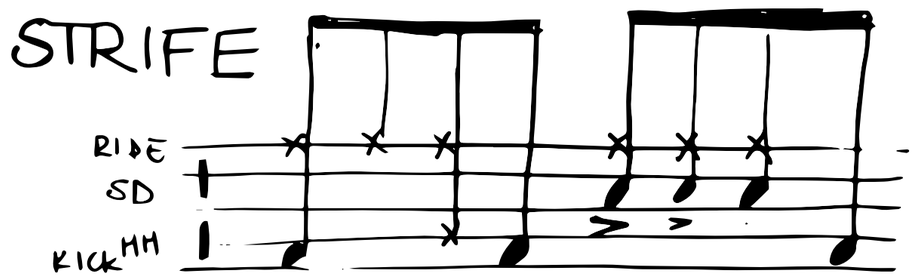

Excerpt from Strife,
Silence Yourself

THE DRUMMER'S JOURNAL

AN INDEPENDENT DRUM MAGAZINE

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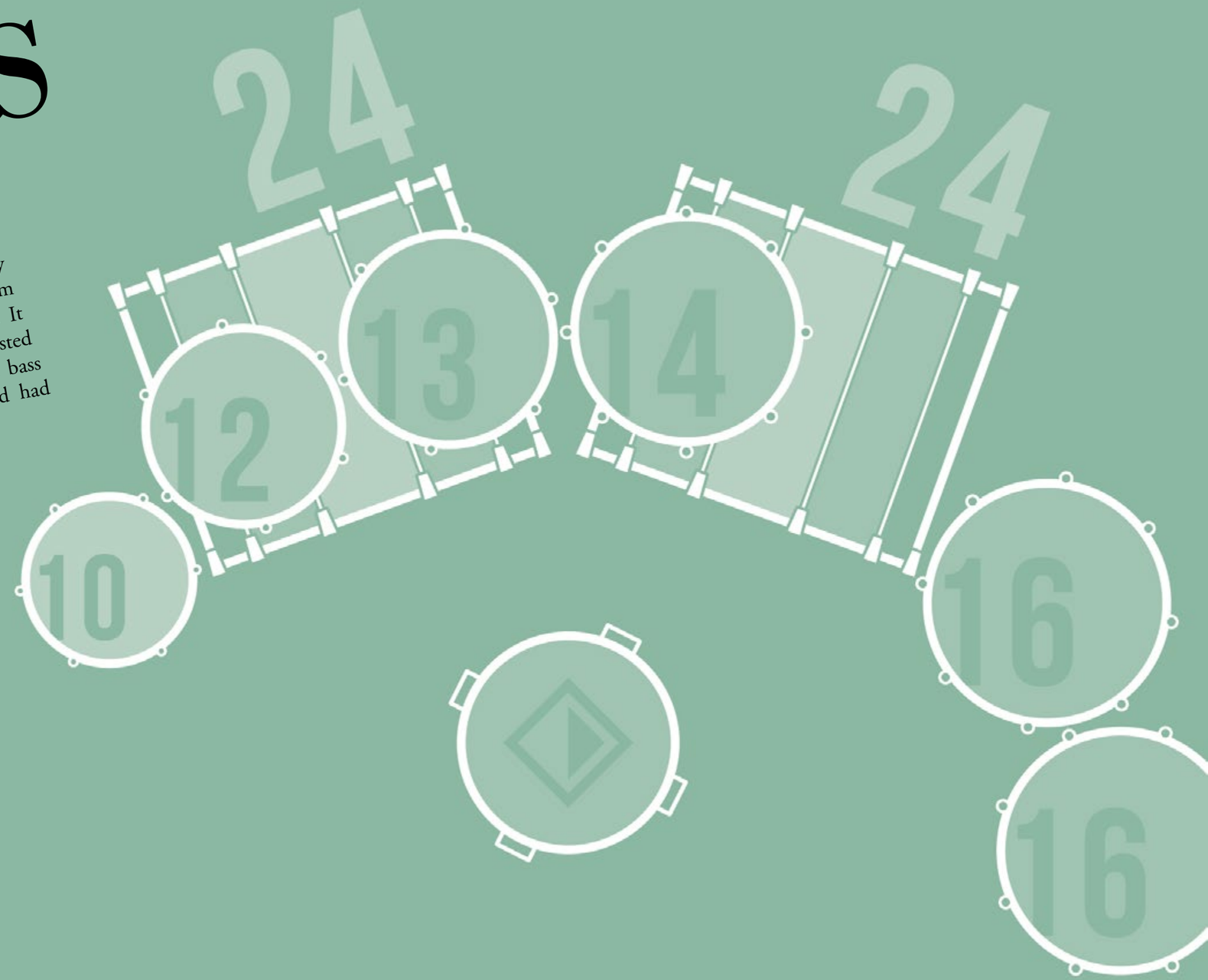
ARTEFACTS

Carl Palmer, Premier and Chrome Plating

In the 1970s when in Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Carl Palmer famously commissioned British Steel to build him a kit with shells quarter of an inch thick. It weighed in at two and a half tonnes and tested stages and roadies' backs worldwide. The bass drum alone took four people to lift and had handles fixed onto the actual shell.

Progressive rock came to encompass uncurbed excess before many of the big British bands disbanded towards the end of the '70s when, according to Robert Fripp, the genre "veered tragically off course."

Words and images by Nick Hopkin



In 1982 and when playing in the super-group Asia, Carl commissioned British drum manufacturer Premier to build him a kit for their world tour. The kit they built for him was a little less presumptuous, a lot more practical but equally as impressive. Built to Carl's specifications, it has many quirks which set it aside from any other Premier kit which makes it instantly identifiable. The drums are chrome plated steel shells, fitted with lugs from Premier's 1970's Elite range. All the toms are single headed and fitted with die cast hoops. The 10, 12, 13, and 14 inch toms are mounted on two 24 inch bass drums using a customised mounting system consisting of three sockets on the one bass drum, and one on the other. The floor toms are also single headed, and fitted with 1970's brackets and legs.

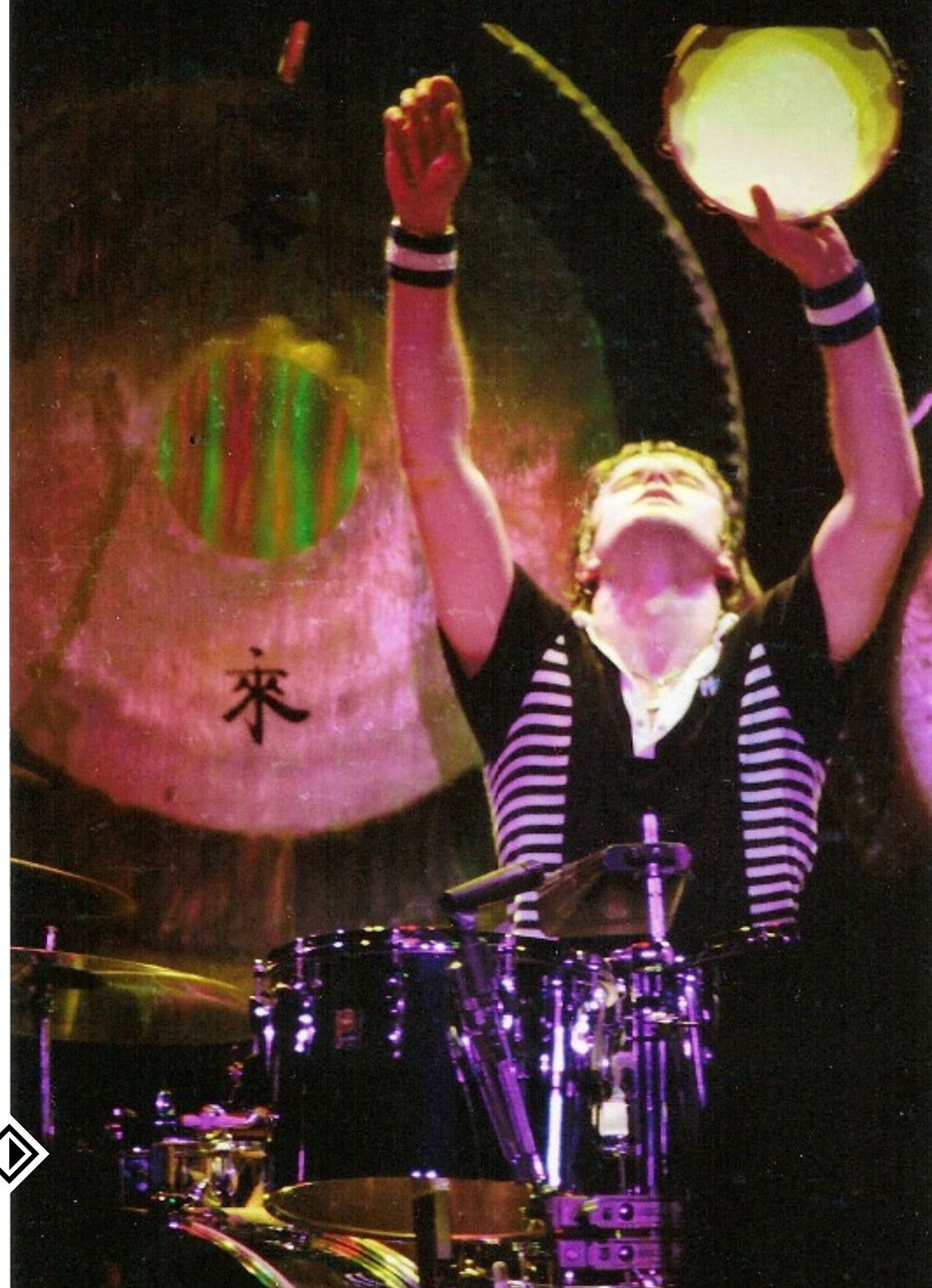
The bass drums feature cymbal mounts for splashes, crashes and rides, some mounted from sockets designed for more tom posts. The two bass drums are reinforced with interior wooden liners, to act as support for the weight of the toms and they also feature double legs to provide extra stability.

As you'd expect it's a big, loud, open sounding kit. The concert toms give it that punchy sound and the steel shells give off some serious volume. The bass drums can only really be likened to cannons going off. To complete the set up, Carl used over 15 Paiste cymbals and bells, including two symphony gongs, the larger of which measured 50 inches.

There seems to be a current trend back towards concert toms, which had become rather unfashionable. They are generally thought to be easy to tune and have more attack and volume, though improvements in microphones meant these attributes became less important as engineers sought fuller, warmer, sustained tones typically associated with a dual-headed drum. With some big name drummers using them live this year, however, and some of the major drum companies featuring concert tom sets at NAMM, it looks like the past is about to be repeated once again. At least the recessions over, right?

The original '82 kit, now in Nick's possession

Left: A premier ad from the early 1980s featuring both Carl and the kit.



Right: Carl Performing with the set during the 1982 Asia world tour.

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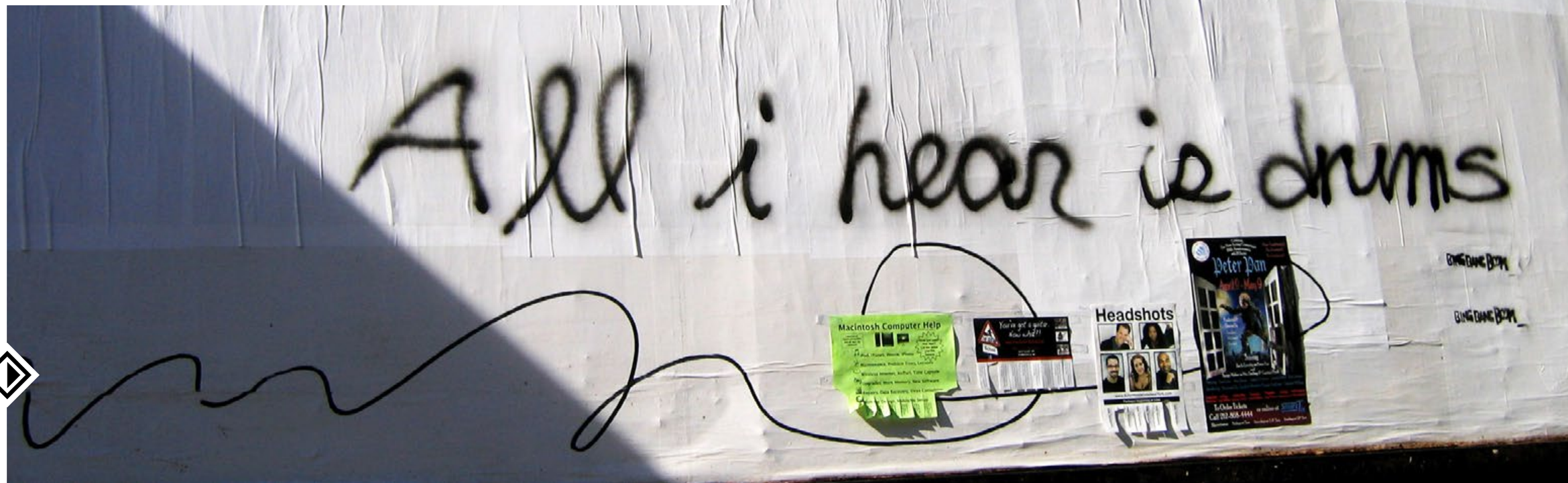
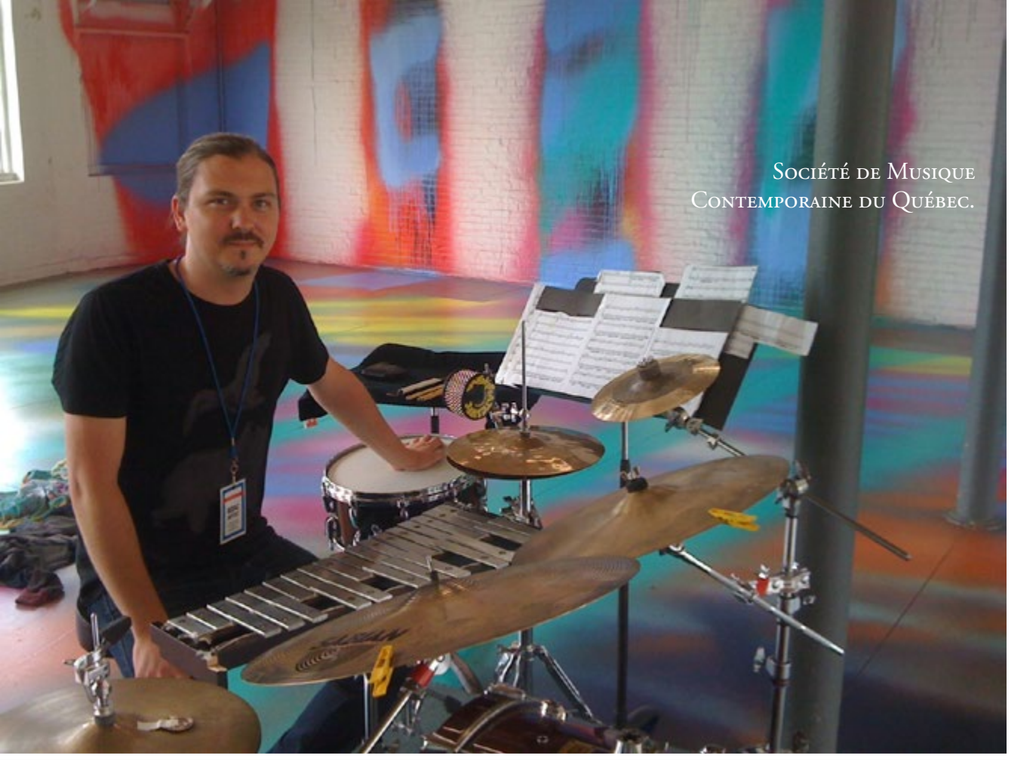


THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARMS

Ben Reimer

Words by Dan Stadnicki & photography by Matt Duboff

I met Ben a few years ago on a Montréal city bus following my very first academic conference presentation. My topic was something to do with Buena Vista Social Club, the Congolese band Staff Benda Bilili, and the marketing of old age in the world music industry. I can't remember exactly what we talked about or how our conversation started. Maybe it was something obvious: Ben was at one end of the bus reading a drum magazine and I was carrying a cymbal bag; we exchanged glances and gave each other the drummer's nod, the universal sign for rhythmical fellowship. Unfortunately, I'm sure it wasn't as cinematically dramatic as that. We chatted briefly and parted ways somewhere along the bus route and I divulged that night on warm Montréal bagels and strong Québécois beer with friends in the Mile End district. "Why the hell don't I live here?" I would ask myself (and still do to this day).



Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec.

Back home in Toronto a year or so later, a classical musician friend of mine was raving about a drummer from Montréal: "Everything he plays is notated!" he said. After pulling up a video online - Nicole Lizée's piece, "Ringer" - I recognized who he was talking about: it was Ben, the guy on the bus. We scanned through a bunch of clips and I was amazed at the sheer complexity of Ben's playing, the ingenious drum kit set-ups ("Ringer" featured a glockenspiel, various hi-hats, and double-kick), and the fact that all of it was composed. I found this last point to be particularly interesting, and a bit odd to be honest. Maybe it's because that kind of skill is rarely asked of drum kit players. Or, perhaps the idea of performing composed parts for drum kit runs counterintuitive to popular beliefs about improvisation, variation, and 'feel' in drumming.

According to Ben's website, he is the first to pursue a doctorate in 'contemporary drum set performance,' which was surprising to me. He's currently endorsed by Yamaha, Sabian, and Vic Firth, and plays regularly in orchestral settings, including a recent stint with the Winnipeg Symphony during Steve Reich's appointment as their Distinguished Guest Composer. Ben has already been the head of a percussion department (Brandon University), performed alongside Dame Evelyn Glennie, and is currently collaborating with Bang On A Can's David Cossin. He frequently premiers new drum set compositions internationally, often in mind-boggling configurations that would make Terry Bozzio and Neil Peart do a double take. He is presently at work on a project with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra on a Nicole Lizée composition, "Triple Concerto for Power Trio and Orchestra - Fantasia on Themes by Rush."

In truth, Ben is a bit of an anomaly in the drumming world. What he does challenges many of our ideas about what drummers do and what constitutes drum set performance. According to Ben, there are some within his music faculty who don't really get what he's doing, or share his interest in understanding the role of drum kit performance in contemporary music. Drum companies and festivals don't really know what to do with him, either: He is simultaneously a drum kit performer, classical percussionist, educator, contemporary musician, and scholar. He's endorsed as a classical percussionist, but he isn't recognized so much as a drummer; he doesn't play for a well-known pop artist that would guarantee high profile product exposure. And yet, Ben has a demanding schedule as a drum kit player. Still, if you were to check out his website, BenReimer.com, he is labeled as a 'percussionist,' perhaps out of necessity in order to placate any confusion in the drumming industry. But, if you ask me, Ben Reimer is perhaps one of the most unique and important drum kit players in the world today.

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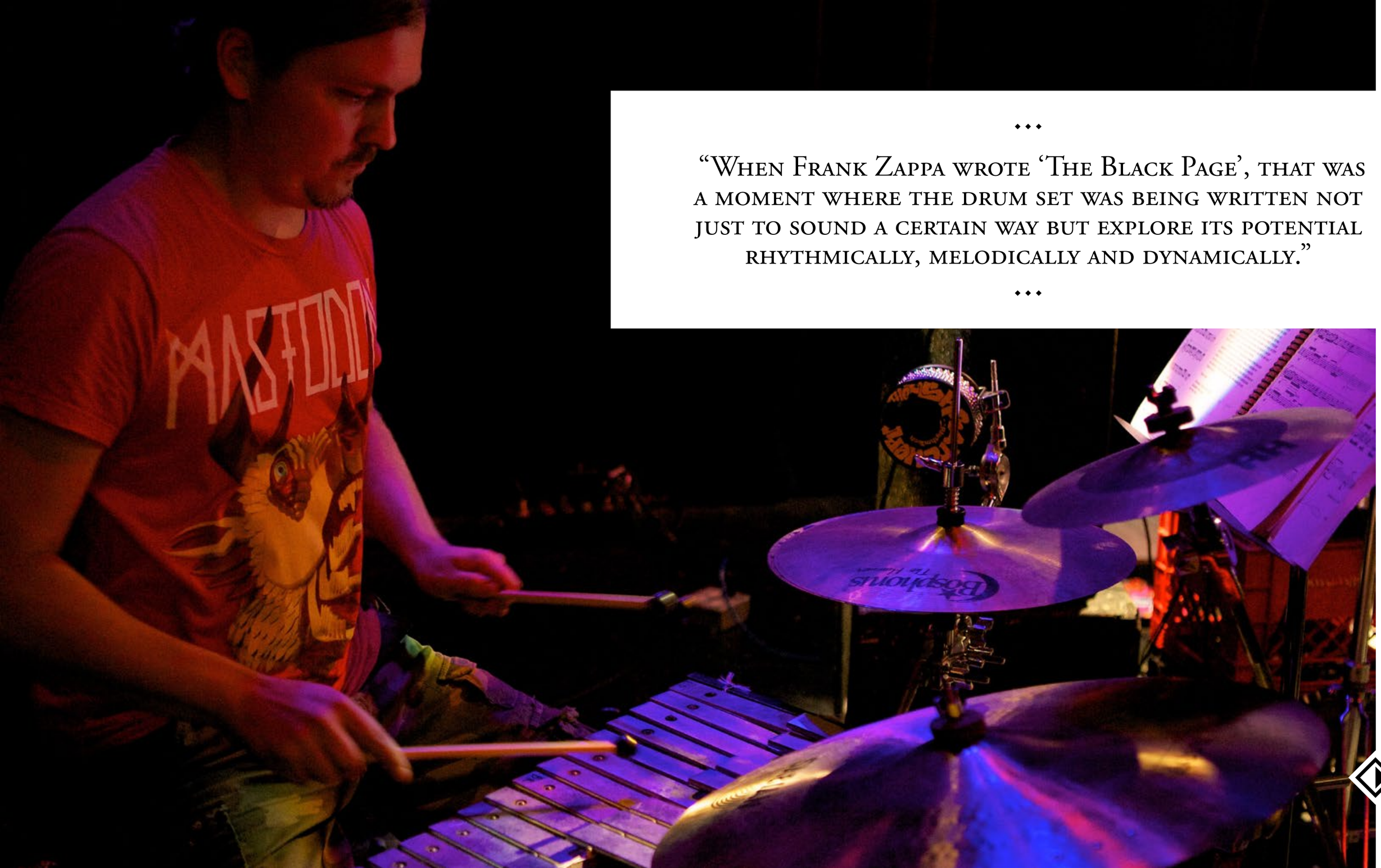
The Drummer's Journal: When many of us think about contemporary music and drumming, it's this sort of 'outside,' really improvisational kind of thing. What does a fully composed drum part bring to the table that improvised drumming can't?

Ben Reimer: Well, you're hearing what the composer intended - not to say that I don't get an opportunity to add my feel, but I play exactly what's on that page. I don't veer from it, but I still have a way of interpreting it with my own personal sound. I feel like it puts the drum kit in a new place that I don't think the drum set has been that often, but I think it came close. Like, when Frank Zappa wrote "The Black Page." That was a moment for me where the drum set was being written not just to sound a certain way but explore its potential rhythmically, melodically and



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"When Frank Zappa wrote 'The Black Page', that was a moment where the drum set was being written not just to sound a certain way but explore its potential rhythmically, melodically and dynamically."

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dynamically. He just wrote this perfect piece. It still kind of grooves, but it doesn't rely on the groove; it doesn't rely on referencing rock. It's not a gimmick - it was a piece that stood alone.

Before that, you've got guys like Igor Stravinsky in the early 20th century who was basically using a drum kit for things like "Histoire du Soldat" and his early works, but he was using it in a way to reference pop culture and the jazz craze of the 1920s. The composer Darius Milhaud wrote "The Creation of the World," where he used hi-hats and a kick drum, but that was because he just came back from Harlem where he heard an African American singing the blues for the first time. So, he was referencing something, too. You get that with Gershwin and "Rhapsody in Blue," which was supposed to sound 'jazzy'. But, they were always using it to sound like something we already knew. I find that after "The Black Page" was written, all of a sudden you get a very select few who started taking the drum kit and writing specifically for it. It wasn't to sound jazzy or pop-y, but to create a new set of repertoire—a new way to be expressive on the drum set.

How do people react to your work and approach to the kit?
When I do these shows with orchestras, the conductor - especially at the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony - makes sure the audience know I'm reading the entire time. It kind of blows people's minds and I kind of like that. It's like, 'Yeah, I fucking read that shit!' So, I take pride in that craft. It's a unique path, but I don't think it's the only one. I wish that I could improvise like so many of my friends and so many drummers I see. But, this is my sort of path and I find it really freeing when I'm sitting there playing this music and I know it so well. It feels just the same as when I was a kid playing in my punk rock band, but there's something bigger about what I feel like I'm doing now than when I was just trying to rock out. Not to say one's better than the other, but I just found something that met all my cravings. I thought I was supposed to be a classical percussionist looking for orchestra jobs. That's what my undergrad was all about, but I didn't want to do that. I went into contemporary music, studied with really great contemporary players, but I don't really want to play Stockhausen and Xenakis my whole life either. Actually, I really hope I don't have to ever play it again (laughs)! But I always come back to the kit, so this was my way of combining it all. My big thing is that I'm playing fully composed music. I'm playing the same kind of music that I was playing as a contemporary percussionist, but I do it on the drum set. There aren't really many people doing that.

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"It was all fully notated; not like a chart that says 'shuffle for eight bars' or something. Not at all. It's like notating every single hi-hat opening and closing; every accent, Everything."

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You've been going back and forth between Winnipeg and Montréal, performing with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra for some time. How did that all start?
After I finished my masters at Stony Brook in New York, I went back to Winnipeg and was lucky enough to know a guy named Pat Carrabré, who was the composer in residence at the Winnipeg Symphony and also taught at Brandon University. Basically, they have a really great classical percussion section there, but no one was really interested in doing the extras: the chamber nights, the solo parts. So, I started to get a lot of work in the New Music Festival because that was my thing. I owned a five-octave marimba and nobody else did in the city, so they could hire me and I could bring the marimba, too.That's actually how I sort of lost touch with the whole band scene because this symphony would give me a weekend of shows and rehearsals, all paid. Somebody would ask if I wanted to play a show on Friday but couldn't pay me for rehearsal. So, I started having to say no to all the bands and started taking the classical gigs.

Do you still play in any rock or punk projects?
I haven't played in a band in four or so years now. When I was in Winnipeg, I was doing some different things. I was playing for Maiko Watson and the singer for The Duhks, Jessee Havey. My brother Nathan has a band called Moses Mayes in Winnipeg. They won a Prairie Music Award and Western Canadian Music Award and I toured with them one summer, playing funk and dance music. I had a few of my own bands in the early 2000s and the '90s playing prog and punk kind of stuff.

I know I'm happiest, most comfortable and artistically fulfilled when I'm sitting behind a kit, even when I'm reading note for note what somebody else has written for me. I feel like I have more control - it just feels more correct than me doing a marimba solo. All that stuff is amazing, but it's something different when I'm behind the kit, and it's just because that was my first real love and my first instrument.

Do you still get excited when you have to set-up all those different drum kit combinations for these compositions?
That's a big thing. If I'm doing a full show with solo drum set music, every composer there has a different idea of what they want in their set-up. Set-ups I'm such a sucker for; I love gear, you know. I went to the Sabian Cymbal factory a few years ago and got to go around with Mark Love and we went and hand-selected a whole ton of cymbals.

But then you have notation, where every single piece of notation is different, too. I'm never really playing a regular five-piece; it's always extended and everybody approaches their extended kits differently. Each set-up kind of feeds my percussionist side, where you always have these different set-ups, but there's still a sort of consistency with

it all, I guess. Even with the stranger configurations, you still sit down behind the kit with your hi-hat, a kick, a snare and everything else just kind of fits in.

I was wondering about your long-time collaboration with Montréal composer Nicole Lizée. How did that relationship start and what are you working on right now?
I met her through the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and because of Pat Carrabré, who booked me to play a percussion part in one of her pieces, "This Will Not Be Televised" for turntable and chamber ensemble. I really learned and played the shit out of that part. We kind of just hit it off. She booked me to come out here and record her first CD and I played kit for that. But again, it was all fully notated; not like a chart that says, 'shuffle for eight bars' or something. Not at all. It's like notating every single hi-hat opening and closing; every accent, every regular hit on the snare. Everything. I commissioned her to write "Ringer," and after that I was basically playing everything she wrote. But moving out to Montréal was a major part of it because we could actually get together. For the concerto for drum set I did with her through the SMCQ (Société de musique contemporaine du Québec), I hit a turntable while it was spinning; I had a guitar with delay, and I'm hitting that the same way I did with the glockenspiel in "Ringer." I'm doing all these extended techniques on the kit. We could just sit in the studio and experiment, which wasn't possible when I was in Winnipeg.

Is there anything you are working on right now?
This summer, I'm premiering a piece with Dave Cossin for the "Bang on a Can Marathon" in New York City. We're doing a drum duet composed by Lukas Ligeti - son of the 20th century composer - who plays drum kit and writes insane drum set stuff. In August, we have this big concerto recording for Nicole's Rush Concerto. It's orchestral music, but it's going to be huge and exciting. It's one of the greatest things I've heard Nicole Lizée write. And then I'm doing my comprehensive exams and looking for teaching jobs (laughs).

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The Man With the Golden Arms

N. Lizée

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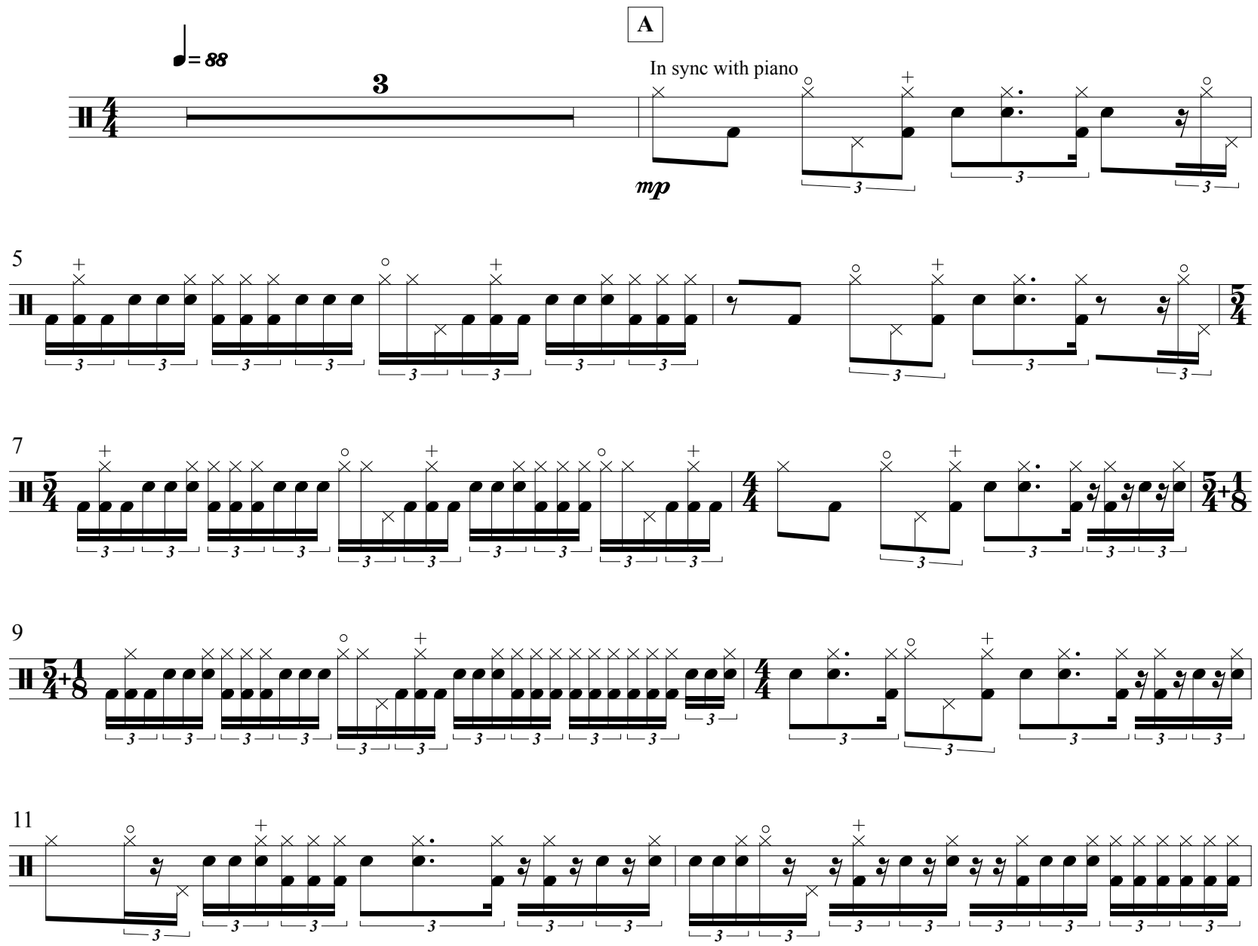
Solo Drum Kit: Glockenspiel, Acoustic Guitar, Portable Turntable, Sizzle Cymbal, Ride Cymbal, Hi-Hat, High Tom-Tom, Low Tom-Tom, Floor Tom-Tom, Snare Drum, Double Kick Drum.



Right: Concerto for Drum set and Orchestra by Nicole Lizée.

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FRENCH MARTINI

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2.0 Parts Vodka

2.0 Parts Pineapple Juice

Half Part Raspberry Liqueur

Twist of lemon and a whole raspberry

Fill a shaker with ice cubes. Add all ingredients. Shake and strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with a raspberry and a twist of lemon.