



PAYING THE RANT



Okay drummers, let talk about what is ultimately important to us all. Now I know that most of you have strong opinions as to what that would be (strong groove, new licks, independence studies, timekeeping, odd time, etc.). However, I put all these factors deservedly on the "B" list when compared to music. Yes, "music". The reason we pick up the sticks is to play it, yet a lot of drummers seem to spend most of their time discussing everything but.

I have often encountered people talking about the drumming "community" and how drummers are more of a brotherhood banding together to support each other and champion the cause of their seemingly downtrodden profession. Well, I am going to say it and will probably ruffle a lot of feathers in the process, but here it goes. Drums are an unmelodic instrument. Rhythm is what we put out and having even eight or more drums in a kit is certainly not even close to the capabilities of melodicism of a piano or guitar.

Granted, some drummers have come about as close as possible to playing melodies (Terry Bozzio, Max Roach), but it is like comparing the vocabularies of a Neanderthal person and an English professor. So, instead of trying to force the impossible, why not deal with what we have got. Really, we are hitting things with sticks. I would say that the majority of drummers cannot even properly get a good sound from their drums let alone be able to compose a melodic piece on their 5 drum "tuned" percussion set.

Time after time in drum clinics we are subjected to a "name" drummer playing a half hour drum solo, a quick Q&A and then another solo. Because it is a drummer performing for drummers the questions are always directed towards drumming. Rarely does a clinician demonstrate any of his recorded work and give an explanation of what he played, how he played it, what inspired it and why. Some of these gentlemen have played with people we can only dream about playing with, yet the only mention of these artists is on the advertising flyers. There are a select few clinicians that have gotten to where they are strictly performing clinics.

I dare say that most originally achieved their notoriety by recording for a popular artist or being a member of a successful band. The fact that the playing of music, the most important thing, is sadly overlooked. And because of this, I believe a lot of people spend time practicing stuff that would only be relevant to another drummer.

Liberty DeVito gave the best drum clinic I have ever seen. No solos,

he merely played to pre-recorded Billy Joel songs and explained the parts. From this I saw the true power that a unique tasteful drum part had on the music. No speed paradiddles, no odd note groupings, just a pure musical drum part. What he played in "Just The Way You Are" stands as a recognizable part even without the music. Even moreso, with "50 Ways To Leave Your Lover", Steve Gadd's rhythm, while a technical challenge, is identifiable and pleasing to listen to. Both drummers were thinking music first, and if they can make it more interesting for themselves and not stomp all over the tune then everybody's happy. Think of your part as a part of the composition as they did. Become familiar with song terminology and how building the rhythm affects the feel. Ever simple ideas like dropping to half time in the second verse or occasionally dropping out altogether, can be very affective tools. However, there are obviously a million other similar ideas, just be aware and think compositionally, hey drummers "composing" whoda thank!

So what should we be concerned with first? First of all I would say "sound". The ability to tune a drum kit and play it in the correct manner in order to achieve a good pleasing, workable easy on the other musician's ears "sound". Think about the things sonically that drums contribute to the music, and tune your drums accordingly. Keep in mind the dynamics of the songs you are playing. Find a decent "cruising" level range that gives you headroom to accent and bring it down when necessary. Even the most ferocious music I have played (Death Metal) is not played at full volume all the time and to constantly bash would remove any ability to accent anything. However, some would say that to cut through a wall of Marshall amps, one has to "bash". I would say that a good discussion of dynamics within the band members is in order as bashing the drums is in no way musical. This will actually hinder your abilities to play and lead to physical problems such as tendonitis. This can be avoided by the phrase "turn down". Naturally some drummers are louder than others and it makes more sense for the other players to adjust their volume knobs to the particular drummer than the poor drummer have to routinely almost kill himself to compete in the "sound wars".

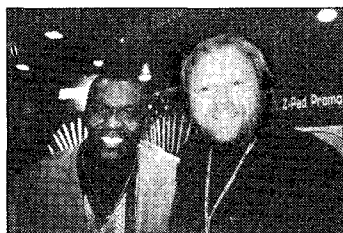
My philosophy is that since I do not play a melodic instrument should make certain that I try to understand every aspect of percussion and how it relates to the music I am playing. Through working with different producers I tried to learn as much as possible about arranging songs, rhythm sections and constructing complementary drum parts.

Remember, if the music stops all you have is drum parts. If the drums stop you still have music. Make your drumming count!

Neal Busby is now drumming for Canada's newest metal band "Solus".



Sale-a-bration time at Just Drums



Elvin Jones with some guy



Chad Smith giving "Signature Snare" door prize at clinic