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Winter NAMM 2014 Photo Expose

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- Ash Soan

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Drummer, producer, engineer, educator, musical director, inventor...and guitarist; Joe Crabtree is all of that, and then some.

Joe is one of the 'perks' of *Drumhead*, meaning—this magazine was the catalyst for our meeting and becoming friends. For that fact alone, I am grateful.

As a fan of the magazine, Joe contacted me to introduce himself and express his appreciation for what I was doing. We met and got along immediately, finding many things in common, with one very distinct mutual interest and affliction: Vinnie, sealing the deal. We could speak (and have) for days about him, and trade a never-ending amount of tracks, which always leaves us in awe and wonderment.

Joe has also been a wonderful addition to *Drumhead*, with his "Joe Knows" column, where he takes what seems impossible or too difficult, and breaks it down, so it's easy to learn, understand and execute. Vinnie, Weckl, Porcaro, Gadd, Coleman—Joe knows and tackles them all.

But one thing I admire very much about Joe is that he plays for the song and the artist. Seeing him perform with Wishbone Ash for the first time I wasn't sure what to expect. Here's a player with serious chops, playing in a straight-ahead rock band, how's this going to fit?

Well, fit it did, because Joe did what all great mature players do, he played for the songs and the artist, and then showed some shit in his solo!

If that wasn't enough to impress me, he then swaps sticks for his 'thinking cap' and invents some of the coolest apps I've ever seen or heard: OctopuSequencer and Polynome. I highly suggest checking each one out. They will both help in making you a better player.

When you go to Joe Crabtree's website, the title "The Art & Science Of Drumming" comes up. It's completely apropos as Joe is the perfect blend of both art and science, and much, much more.

JM: How old were you when you started playing, and did you start out on a kit or a pad, self-taught or lessons?

JC: I got a drum kit when I was 11. I requested one for Christmas and specifically did not want an electric kit: "I want some real drums." I don't remember exactly what the inspiration was, but I'd seen the Argos catalog and the drums in there were four pads in a laptop sized box. My brother, who's a couple of years younger than me, had some "electric drums," which were just sticks with wires coming out the back into a little belt pack; you hit things and a speaker in the belt pack made crappy sounds. I used to take those, switch off the sounds and just hit dustbin lids and things. I guess I enjoyed hitting things.

JM: That was before asking for the drum kit?

JC: Yeah. I remember asking for this kit for Christmas. There had been a kit in the reception area where my dad worked, that I used to sometimes go and sit on.



Crabtree

A photograph of a man with curly hair, wearing a dark shirt, playing drums. He is looking upwards and to the left. The background is dark with out-of-focus blue and white lights. A cymbal is visible on the left side of the frame.

A Wish Come True

Interview: Mover - Photos: Alan Fretten



Lay Your Hands On These

JM: Do you recall what influenced you to even go sit and play the kit, rather than walking around with your brother's sticks and randomly hitting things?

JC: It was the Peter Gabriel *Security* album and the tom-based songs, "The Rhythm of the Heat," "I Have The Touch" and "Lay Your Hands on Me." I was really into them.

JM: Where did your father work that there was a kit in the reception area.

JC: He started AMS, a company that made digital reverbs and things like that, and they just had the kit there for fun. Peter Gabriel actually came in when I was five years old. I don't really remember meeting him, but apparently he played peepow [hied and go seek] with me and I ran off.

JM: Do you recall what the kit was?

JC: No, but I saw a picture the other day; I thought it was this amazing kit, but it was just a beat up old three-piece set. But there was something about a drum kit that was cool, that drew me to it.

I remember, a week before Christmas, discovering this kit covered up in the back room. WOW! I hadn't really thought I'd actually get a drum kit. I was so excited; it was such an amazing feeling. Then on Christmas Day I had to act surprised (laughing). I didn't even know how to set it up, "Which way up does the snare drum go?" and, "How does the hi-hat clutch go on?" It was actually about six years before I learned how the hi-hat clutch was actually supposed to work. And the toms—which order they go in—I knew nothing. All the stuff that now seems so obvious, I had no clue.

JM: Did you eventually figure it out from looking at other kits or know a drummer that could help?

JC: There was a book, *Learn To Play Drums*. I played piano a bit but I didn't understand how you would have a whole note on a drum kit, because it's just "bap." So I went for lessons with a local guy who was self-taught. Ironically, after asking for a 'real' acoustic drum kit, I turned up at his doorstep and he asked, "What's your favorite band?" I said, "New Kids On The Block." At the time, "Hanging Tough" was the song they had out which had big sounding drums. "I want to play that. How do I make my drums sound like that?" He said, "They're electric drums." Then he said, "Do you like The Beatles?" "Yep, I like Beatles." That turned into three years of playing to Beatles records and Barry White and stuff like that.

JM: Did you work on any technique or was it mostly grooves and listening to drummers on records?

JC: Since he was self-taught, he couldn't show me a lot of technique. I would ask him how to hold the sticks, and he would just show me, "Kind of like that." But I really looked forward to going to lessons because he was so passionate about it and he saw my passion for it too. He was a really enthusiastic guy.

JM: How long did you study?

JC: I went to him for two or three years. It was getting to the stage where he was saying, "I don't really know what else I can teach you." Then I turned up one day, he was having his dinner, and he said, "Oh, watch this." He put *Dave Weckl The Next Step* on and I saw him doing the triplet things around the kit; that blew my mind. Up to that point, I would get excited just to find a new bass-drum beat or something. Suddenly there's all this crazy stuff going on!

JM: Were you studying any notation?

JC: No, he didn't read. He didn't believe in reading; he was one of those guys. I guess that was good ear training in the beginning.

JM: You would pick out a song and he would show you the things that Ringo or somebody was doing.

JC: Yeah. The first song that I played the whole way through was "Please Please Me." He showed me the grooves for the different sections and the fills to play. It was so much fun just playing along that I'd have it on repeat all day long. It must have driven my parents crazy.

JM: I remember those days.

JC: So, at the point at which he finally said, "I don't think I can teach you anymore," I'd collected a whole bunch of DCI videos and was watching that stuff; really getting into Weckl.

But, with the Weckl stuff, he would show you, "Right Left Foot, Right Left Foot," or whatever, but then in his solo, he'd be playing stuff that didn't seem to be that. Or he'd show you a paradiddle and how you use it in a groove, but he'd go off on it and veer away from paradiddles.

I found myself trying to figure out what he was doing in all of those other bits that he didn't explain. I kind of approached things in a bit of a backwards way. I would end up with, "Oh, this is a Weckl lick," and it turns out that he might have put it together from a six-stroke roll, or an inverted paradiddle-diddle or something like that. There are guys who are schooled and it's like—here's a rudiment, here's how you can apply it to the drum kit, here are all the different ways of doing it. Whereas, I just heard the musical phrase, liked the sound of it and figured out what it was. I don't know if that's been a help or a hindrance. Now it's actually gone the other way because now I've discovered where it all came from.

JM: Judging by the way you play, I would say it was a help, not a hindrance.

I remember that feeling of figuring things out on my own. You listen, try different things, figure out what works and then play it. It's instant gratification. And if you're lucky, you come up with something new.

JC: I remember the first time I heard a triplet and had to figure out what was going on. It was "Lay Your Hands on Me." There's that build up on the floor tom, which sounded amazing to me. Such a simple thing, but I got immense pleasure when I finally figured out that in order to play it the accent would have to switch from hand to hand.

Then after watching the Weckl videos, I got into the Gary Chester and *The New Breed* approach of breaking stuff down. I was really into Virgil Donati and those guys. I spent a lot of time trying to play things that I thought were clever but I wasn't really nailing them.

JM: This is still in practice mode or were you actually playing out in bands?

JC: I was playing in bands but I hardly ever got to use any of that stuff in a band.

Sticks And Strings

JM: How old were you when you started playing in a band?

JC: The first real band I had I was probably 13 or 14. I found a young guitarist who was pretty good and a bass player who sang. We were playing all this heavy rock stuff with a 12-year-old kid on vocals. When the bass player left it was just me and the guitarist and we'd do instrumental versions of David Lee Roth songs.

I also played guitar. I started when I was 12 and there was a point at which I was thinking I might be a guitarist instead of a drummer. I was into Satriani and Vai, hence knowing who you were. I was a real bedroom guitarist. I'd try to learn Steve Vai solos and I'd be able to do an approximation of it, but my tone sucked and I was missing the subtleties that really made things sound good. That's something I came to appreciate a lot later. It's the same with the drums. With all the simple stuff, I don't feel like I can play it as well as I want to play it, if that makes sense. The hardest songs in the set are the really simple ones. Like, a simple disco groove or something, I'm thinking, "Man, that bass drum's a little late. And it's driving me nuts!"

JM: Yes, but the fact that you can actually detect what you think is wrong is something that you can modify and fix. Or are you just looking at things from too much of a technical point of view because of how deep you're into Vinnie and Dennis and Weckl?

JC: I think I justified a lot of the crazy stuff I was working on, getting into the Marco Minnemann-type stuff because I thought, "If I work hard and if I can play in 19/16, or if I can subdivide this, and play quintuplets, then that will help me play a 'Billie Jean' groove." It didn't. It turns out that practicing the "Billie Jean" groove is what makes you better at that.

JM: But, when you're able to understand all that stuff, from the other players as well as yourself, you can then control it and modify it. Whether it be moving a kick drum a bit here and there, or even if it's just part of your personality that you inject into everything play, crazy or simple.

Take Gadd for example. He can play the most amazing ballad or simple disco groove, and it's just as dirty and earthy and awesome as when he's playing "Night Sprite."

JC: That's the thing. When I was starting out, when I discovered

There was something about a drum kit that was cool, that drew me to it.





Weckl and saw all that solo stuff, it blew my mind. I wanted to learn things that I thought sounded cool. If something interests me and I think it's cool, I'll try and figure out what's going on, and work at it. But, once I do know what's going on and can kind of do it, the magic sort of disappears a bit because now it's not so mysterious.

The first time I saw Gadd was on the Buddy Rich Memorial Concert with the trio solo. I watched that and I thought he sucked, because, "Vinnie's playing really fast; Weckl's playing really fast" and Gadd wasn't. I was thinking that I was at the point of playing what Gadd was playing because it seemed easy—I sort of understood it. On this tour I've been videoing my solo every night. I had no idea what I was going to do, so I was doing some research to try to find solos that I liked. I find when I listen to other solos, I pick out, "Oh, that's a nice bit, and that's a nice bit." But, if it's my solo, I find all this stuff that I think sucks and I ignore the bits that are good. I pulled out that trio video and now I'm watching it and the Gadd stuff is brilliant—so musical and groovy. I appreciate the attitude and phrasing—my 15-year-old self just thought it was simple.

JM: Tell me about it, I was there.

JC: At the actual gig?

JM: Yeah, it was a great day. I had flown out to LA the day before to start playing with Alice [Cooper] for the Trash Tour.

JC: Did they do like nine drummers on one day or something?

JM: No. I think it was three and three. The first half was Bellson, Bissonette and Dennis [Chambers]. And Dennis just completely tore the roof off the place. He took no prisoners. Then the second half was Vinnie, Gadd and Weckl. It was a spectacular day all round. As for that trio thing: Vinnie did things that nobody else on earth can do, as he always does; Weckl hung in there and played his signature licks; but Gadd was the guy that just

walked away with it. He had nothing to prove.

JC: Yeah, it's so approachable and musical. Now it's my favorite stuff to listen to, and I think for a non-drummer it's probably the best stuff to listen to. But for a kid who's been playing drums for a couple of years and thinks he can do it already it's under appreciated.

London Bound

JM: Before we get to Wishbone Ash, let's talk about your affiliation with David Cross and Pendragon.

JC: The David Cross Band; I studied physics at university because my parents thought I should get a proper degree. I didn't want a "pop" music degree, and I wasn't good enough to be at Trinity in London. I enjoy physics, knowing how things work and that analytical side of things, and it seemed like it would be an easy thing to do. So I went and studied astrophysics for three years. I met a lot of great musicians while I was there and played in bands. Didn't go to a lot of lectures. I always said that when I left uni I'd pursue a music career. After finishing I ended up working a bit, teaching privately, doing weekend gigs and suddenly my schedule was full up with gigs, but I wasn't really where I wanted to be. I was playing in some reasonable function bands and making alright money, but playing "Mustang Sally" every night wasn't exactly what I'd been dreaming of. So I cut all my ties, said goodbye to my students, moved to London and started looking through the free-ads papers for anything. I went to a lot of auditions where they wanted guys with a van, and gigs that weren't going to pay anything: "We're the best band in the world. We're going to make ..." Not going to happen. Then I saw an ad that said 'Ex-King Crimson violinist looking for drummer.' I rang the bass player and he said, "Yeah, we want somebody who understands cut-common time." I didn't know what the f*ck he was talking about but I said, "Of course" and looked it up when I hung up.

I turned up to this audition and it was the ideal situation for me; their audition process was, "Let's jam a bit. Now, here's a thing in 13/16. Can you play that?" And I could. And I guess most guys who turned up would have struggled with it. That was the stuff that I was really into. They said, "Alright, you've got the job."

JM: That must have been exciting and a real feeling of getting your foot in the door, since David Cross was a "name" pro player coming from King Crimson.

JC: It wasn't a paid gig, but yeah. They had a couple of gigs in Japan, so I thought, "Well, that will be a nice holiday." We rehearsed a couple of times a week and it was a lot of weird time-signature changes and things like that. It was fun. It was a chance for me to get all that stuff out of my system.

JM: Must have been some great players to be working with.

JC: I was playing with pretty good musicians. David was the main guy and pretty exceptional, and the guitarist was a really great player. The bass player passed my name on to a bunch of people so I started getting random calls for playing with all these re-formed '70s bands. I'm always half the age of the guys in the band. But they've got gigs; so it's not like getting into a band that's trying to make it. And it's music that I'm into.

Pendragon was a really random gig. A friend of mine called and said he heard that this band was looking for a drummer. He gave me a number, and it was one of those moments where I felt, "Yeah maybe I'll do that, maybe not." Then I thought of that phrase: Why put off to tomorrow what you can do today. So I picked the phone up and called the number, "I hear you're looking for a drummer." The keyboard player said, "How do you know that? Our drummer doesn't even know that we're looking for a drummer yet." I said, "Just through the grapevine."

They already had somebody in mind, but I sent him my website where I had a video up there, pre-YouTube. He called me back the next day, "We've got a tour starting in less than a month; can you do it?" I had a holiday booked in Kenya, but said, "Yes, send me the CDs." I put it all on my iPod and took it with me. I had planned to write the stuff out when I was over there. Then I got there and thought, "I'll do it on the plane journey on the way back." I got sick on the last day, and ended up in a hospital in the middle of Kenya. I emailed them from the slowest Internet connection ever, "I'm not going to make it to the first rehearsal. I'm stuck in Kenya in a hospital." I think we were going to have three days of rehearsals, now we're down to two. They were panicking because I hadn't even met them yet. I was going to transcribe the stuff on the plane on the way back but was feeling like crap, so I said, "Look, can we make it one day of rehearsal and I'll just spend a day really learning the stuff?" So I charted the stuff out, turned up and I was kind of worrying

that I wasn't going to be prepared enough. It turned out I knew the stuff better than they did. It was old songs that they hadn't played for a while and I had my notes and learned everything.

That was the first tour I did on a tour bus; it was an eye-opener. It was fun going around to all these different venues and places, but it wasn't really my kind of music. I guess I was maybe growing out of prog a little bit at the time. And, when I joined Pendragon, everybody had jobs, so they'd do a tour here and there. Whereas with Wishbone, that is everybody's job.

Texting 1 - 2 - 3

JM: Speaking of Wishbone. You're 33 and have been playing with them for about seven years now. Growing up, did you even know who Wishbone Ash was?

JC: No, I had no idea.

JM: How did the gig come about?

JC: One of their previous drummers, an American guy called Mike Sturgis, was the head of drums at a music school in England that I was just doing a little bit of teaching at, covering for teachers who couldn't make it. I wanted to get a job there because it paid quite well and I enjoyed it. But he'd already got all the teachers for the next year set up so he couldn't offer me anything. Then, out of the blue, he sent me a text, "Do you want to join Wishbone Ash?" I was at home and said to my mom, "Have you heard of Wishbone Ash?" She said, "They're your uncle Peter's favorite band." I said, "Cool, okay." They were playing at a venue local to me that was a nice theater, and I thought, "Well, that's a level up from where I'm at."

JM: You'd never heard of them, so you really didn't know anything about them or what you were getting into.

JC: No. I had no idea whatsoever. Andy [Powell – guitarist] lives in America, so I spoke to him on the phone. He basically said, "I think we need a new drummer pretty quick." They had a tour coming up the month after I spoke to him and they were ready to record a new album. I don't really know what happened with the previous drummer, but I first met Andy when he picked me up from the airport in Finland to record the album. We had ten days in the studio, and a gig in Russia came in, right in the middle of this period. Andy said, "Look, there's an album we have to do, and there's a tour a couple of weeks after that; can you do those things?" I said, "Yeah, sure." I didn't know that it would go any further than that.

JM: So, not only are you learning all the new material for the new record, but, I would imagine you had to learn the entire

The hardest songs in the set are the really simple ones.





A lot of the things that I learned in my physics and math lessons, which at the time were really dull.

live set as well.

JC: Yeah. Three or four days before I flew over to do the album, he called and said, "We've got this gig in Moscow. Would you be able to learn the set for that?" I'd been planning to learn the set after the week doing the recording, but I said, "Sure, why not." He sent me a live recording. Most of the songs were very straightforward, but there is a song called "Pheonix" that we do at the end, which is 17 minutes long and goes through all these seemingly random changes. There's a tempo change right in the middle that wasn't any kind of obvious metric modulation.

JM: Just a feel thing.

JC: Yeah, and that was a bitch to chart out. There are loads of bits that I didn't know if they were improvised or not, so I'm wondering, "Do I need to know that that's 33 ½ bars before it goes into this section or am I just going to look for a cue?" I had to kind of do the best I could.

JM: Were you able to ask or at least rehearse that one?

JC: We had one run-through in the studio. We had to record an album, so we didn't have time to rehearse much. I think it was three days in, so we ran the set once and I kind of got through it with my notes. Then we had a 12-hour train journey to Moscow, got off, did the gig, straight back on the train for another 12 hours back to the studio and finished recording the album. I basically met all the guys that week; 24 hours on a train was a good opportunity to get to know them. A couple of hours talking to the bass player, a couple of hours talking to the guitarist, I felt like I knew them quite well by the time we got back. And I was quite vocal in the studio. I had to come up with

drum parts and I'd get involved in arranging and suggesting bass lines and things.

JM: And they were open to it?

JC: They were really open to it. I mean, they're great guys. I get on with them really well. I wouldn't still be doing it if we didn't get along.

JM: Seems to me they probably appreciate, not only the enthusiasm, but also that you do know the melodic side and are more than just the drummer keeping a beat.

JC: Yeah, I think that's definitely been an asset in the various bands that I have been in.

In The Driver's Seat

JM: One thing I noticed at soundcheck was that you seemed to be in the MD position: running the show, making comments to the guys about playing and their sounds...

JC: I guess I find that because we're on the road so much, I don't want it to feel like wasted time. I really hate feeling like I'm stuck in the same place. I couldn't do a 9-to-5 job. The first tour was exciting because we were playing all these new venues, and in all different cities. This is probably the sixth American tour that we've done. Now it's all the same places and we're playing pretty much the same songs night after night. The set list will change between tours, but we don't change stuff that much within a tour. I want to become a better drummer within those confines, so I would record gigs. I got into doing in-ear



Photo: Richard Pierce

**...I found a use for and understood them
when applying them in the programming world.**

monitoring after I read that Weckl did it, so I bought myself an O1V and did that. That made gigs much better for me since the sound was much more consistent. Then I got the guys on in-ears and there was one point where we were all on in-ears. I've always set all that stuff up, and got into the technical side of things. I like having little projects like that to work on. I would listen to the gig recording on the drive to the next gig, listening for what I could change: does this groove work, does that fill work. I'll hear things differently when I'm listening, "Oh, it'd be great to play a fill like this." Then on the next show, I'm playing and I go to put it in and realize that it starts a couple of beats earlier than I'm comfortable playing a fill, and I find out why that stuff never comes out (laughing). So I'll work on that kind of thing. And I notice when other people f*ck up, "Yeah, you played a wrong note there." Or, "This would sound better if it was a bit heavier on the bass." Because they have no interest in listening to the gig on the drive.

JM: I'm sure they're tired of it in many ways.

JC: Yeah, but it's interesting for me. We're recording shows now with a PreSonus desk that you can plug the laptop into and record multitrack. We'll release live CDs, but we've got to have a good take of the song. You do 30 gigs and you don't get a single take (laughing), that you're completely happy with, I've sort of taken on the MD role in the sense that I want us to be a good band. We don't often rehearse because we all live in different countries, so we just fly to the first gig. If we put in new songs, we have to rehearse them at soundcheck and work them into the set.

Getting With The Program

JM: You said you went to university for physics and you're pretty busy creating and inventing.

JC: I like making things. I like creating things. I don't feel particularly creative, in the arty-person sense, but I like making stuff. I like writing programs; I wrote a program that would calculate the distance from each gig to the next and put it in a calendar on the iPhone. I wrote another one for keeping tabs on the merch we sold: what needed ordering, how many T-shirts to order based on what we sold on the last tour. I find coding is a great way to make a five-hour airport layover pass quickly. I like efficiency. I see things that don't run smoothly and enjoy creating a program that can do this or that to help.

JM: Where does this computer-programming background come from?

JC: When I was at university we had to do a computer-programming course. I learned the basics there and then just got into it more. The Internet made it interesting. I got into programming ActionScript in Flash to make interactive websites. A lot of the things that I learned in my physics and math lessons, which at the time were really dull, I found a use for and understood them when applying them in the programming world.

JM: I was blown away with the OctopuSequencer and PolyNome. For those who aren't as familiar, what was behind the concept and design of each one. Can you give an overview?

JC: Well, actually, RhythMachine was the first music program I wrote. That was inspired by a lesson I took with Robby Ameen in New York. We were both playing a left-foot clave groove, then he'd play a melodic phrase on the toms while keeping the clave going. I'd then try to copy what he'd played. He made it tricky by mixing up the triplets and 16ths. It was great fun and more challenging than I'd anticipated.

I wanted a way to recreate that scenario so I developed RhythMachine. You can program it like a drum machine, to play a groove, but you can also tell it to create random rhythms based on 16th and triplet permutations for set numbers of beats. For example, I could set it up to just generate a random bar of rhythm and repeat that 'X' times and then test my ability to copy that rhythm. Or, I could program it to play a random bar of rhythm, then leave a gap for a bar, where I could copy what was generated or respond in a musical way, then it would create a new rhythm and leave another bar, and so on. Or, I could replicate the scenario I had with Robby and program in a left-foot clave groove, then keep the left-foot clave going for a bar while it generates a pattern on the toms for me to try and copy a bar later. It's not an easy thing to explain, but I have videos up on my website demonstrating various ways that I use it in my practice sessions.

OctopuSequencer evolved from the step sequencer I'd built to use in RhythMachine. I had this basic step sequencer that I could set a rate and repeat length for. For example, I could tell it to run at a 16th-note rate and loop after seven beats. That would give me a bar of 7/16. I suddenly thought how cool it would be if I had another sequencer next to it that I could set to play a bar of 4/4. If I set them both running together then it would generate a groove that wouldn't resolve for seven bars.

JM: As I said earlier, I know you're into Vinnie, Dennis and all, but where does all this come from? Those guys aren't coming from a calculated place.

JC: I was really into the stuff that Marco [Minnemann] and Virgil [Donati] were playing ostinatos in 5/16 between the left foot and the left hand, then playing groups of 7 over the top on the kick and toms. If you were to write these things out or program them into a regular sequencer, they take a long time to resolve, so you have to write out the whole pattern. With OctopuSequencer, I basically put four step-sequencers in one package and you can choose a different rate and loop point for each one. You can basically treat each sequencer as one of your limbs and tell each to play whatever you want. You might program sequencer 1 (your right hand) to play a pattern in 5/16, while sequencer 2 (your left foot) plays in 7/16, and sequencer 3 (your right foot) plays repeating groups of 11 eighth-note triplets while sequencer 4 (your left hand) plays a backbeat on 2 and 4. You could spend years learning to play this only to discover it sounds like crap. With OctopuSequencer you can program it in in seconds and find out that it sounds like crap a lot quicker (laughs).

PolyNome was actually the result of somebody emailing me and asking me how they could program the table of time into OctopuSequencer. You know, the thing where you play 1 note per beat, then 2, then 3, 4, 5 all the way up to 16 notes and back down. You can't actually do that in OctopuSequencer—the rates for each sequencer are fixed.

I liked the idea though so I wrote a little program called Pyramid that would let you choose a list of rates and it would play them in order. So you could type in 4,3 and it would cycle





I've sort of taken on the MD role in the sense that I want us to be a good band.

between playing quarter notes and triplets. Or, you could type the numbers 1–16 and it would play the table of time.

One of the people who'd signed up to my website for lessons happened to be a guy named Lucas Ives who, it turned out, was Dave Weckl's drum tech. I hooked up with him on a trip to New York and we went to see Dave play at the Blue Note. Lucas used to work for Pixar and he mentioned that he'd been getting into App development. I told him about Pyramid and asked him if he thought he could write a version for iPhone. That's how PolyNome was born. It's literally the metronome that I always wanted to own; there's so much you can do with it. From hearing every conceivable polyrhythm to setting up clicks with bars of rest, to hearing a paradiddle played in quintuplets over triplets on the hi-hat, it's such a useful tool.

JM: Any idea what your next program/invention will be?

JC: Not right now. Writing those programs took a huge amount of time, but it was also great fun making tools to fill needs I had. Maybe I need to come and take a lesson with you to get some more ideas (laughs).

JM: How serious are you about it?

JC: It's like a hobby on the side. Website building is another part of that. I actually learned to do the back-end stuff in websites when I started a speed dating company. I knew somebody who was going to do all the code and the database stuff but he was so slow getting anything done that I bought a book on it and learned how to do it myself. That company never went anywhere, but I used those skills to build my own site. And then, for all these different things that I got involved in at different times, I had this toolkit available to me. I don't need somebody to do the programming; I can do it all myself.

JM: Teaching via the web is something you're into, which also ties into the audio/video lessons you've done for *Drumhead*. How important is it, and how much are you into the social networking that seems to be necessary to survive today?

JC: I think the social networking stuff is important, but I'm not good with it. I'm good at getting the Facebook account and the Twitter account: I'm not good at posting on them.

JM: Because of the time it takes or you don't care that much?

JC: I just never really got that into it. I'm not an in-your-face kind of salesperson. I use those tools but I don't really enjoy doing it. I don't want to Tweet what I had for breakfast. I know some people are on Twitter all the time, but I just haven't gotten into that. To me, it's more important to build the back end that works

and will deliver the content than it is to Tweet about what I'm doing now.

The lesson stuff, I started out with this idea that I'd make drum lessons, sell them on my website and like make a living from it. But I couldn't figure out where I was going to host the videos and how I was going to charge for the content. YouTube had just sprung up around that time so I thought, "I'll put it up on there and it'll be free," which was the best move I ever made. If I had figured out how to do it on my website, nobody would have ever found it. Everybody who's found my stuff is due to YouTube. That's been a gradual thing. I had a bunch of free stuff on YouTube and people were into that. Then I got the website going and set up a way to charge for some content and people were into that. It's not yet something I can make a living from, but it's definitely becoming feasible. Last year I made a monthly membership thing and I put a new video up every week, so I have to create content. And the stuff I'm posting on there is stuff that I'm into. It's the stuff that I think is sometimes missed in online lessons. Breaking things down, so anyone can then build them up in all sorts of different ways.

You get an hour-long video from Dave Weckl and he's trying to fit everything that he's learned in 30 years of playing into one video. I'll watch that and get some ideas but then, in trying to apply them, I'll be thinking, "Oh, but what about this, and what about that?" All those questions that I have, that I figured out the answers to for myself, are what I try and share in the videos. People seem to be really into that.

JM: For example...

JC: Most everybody in the social media world only puts up their best stuff. You never see them struggle or mess up. On my website I have a SoloWokshop where I show you how to play this insane Chris Coleman solo. But, you don't just see me play each bit perfectly. I videoed the process of me learning it—you see all my struggles and how I overcame them to finally be able to play it. I think that honesty is appealing and encouraging.

I used to love it when I'd see Virgil playing a solo and he'd drop a stick or something: he's human. When everything's perfect, it makes you feel like—I would never be able to do that.

So, whatever I'm working on, I'll break it down to a level where even a non-drummer could follow. I've got emails from guitarists going, "Yeah, I understood it. It was interesting to me." I find that it's often the things that seem the simplest that need the most work in order to progress, and if I'm only just discovering some of these things now then they're probably going to benefit other drummers too.



| Drums | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Sonor Force 3007 | | |
| 22" x 17" Kick | 14" A Custom Mastersound Hi-hats | Kick - EQ4 |
| 10" x 8" Rack | 17" A Custom Crash | Sticks |
| 12" x 9" Rack | 22" A Custom Medium Ride | Vic Firth 5A |
| 14" x 14" Floor | 15" A Custom Crash | Hardware |
| 16" x 15" Floor | 19" A Custom Crash | DW5000 Double Pedal, Pearl Hi-hat, Sonor. |
| 14" x 6.5" Pearl Ian Paice Snare | Heads | Percussion |
| Cymbals | Evans | Pearl Cow Bell |
| Zildjian | Snare - Coated G2 | Monitors |
| | Racks - Clear G2s | Sensaphonics - 3D Active Ambient IEM In-Ears |
| | Floors - Frosted EC2s | Porter and Davies - BC2 Drum Throne |

Coming Of Age

JM: You're usually the young guy in the band playing with people who are quite a bit older than you. There's going to come a point in time where you're going to run out of those guys...though hopefully not too soon. Do you think there'll be a time where you might put something together around yourself, maybe with younger guys, or does the programming/computer/Internet world that we're talking about look to be more the future?

JC: To be honest I have no real idea. Wishbone has been a really great thing and it's allowed me to have some security. I know we've got gigs booked for this time next year, and there's time off where I can focus on the other things. I do enjoy teaching and doing the online lessons. In the time off, that's been a focus. I'm trying to make that into another source of income so that when Wishbone does come to an end I won't suddenly be desperate for work.

Sometimes I question it all because there's always that thing, "Should I be doing something else with younger guys, bigger gigs or something else?" I know a lot of really great drummers who aren't working, so I'm in a really fortunate position. I've been in bands where the music has driven me nuts, but this music we play every night must be good music because I still enjoy it. There's room for me to do my own thing. They've been going for 40 years, so there's a variety of different styles there.

JM: Did you do a lot of research from the early stuff, or pretty

much do your own thing within the guidelines.

JC: I wasn't even aware of the band so it's not like I was a massive Steve Upton [original drummer] fan. It's interesting because he does have some cool things and musical ideas that I'd never have come up with. Sometimes it feels important to replicate certain fills or approaches to grooves. I tend to keep the things that stood out to me as great parts when I first listened, and of course the basic premise of the grooves, but the rest changes from night to night. I'm always looking for ways to make things groove better, or trying to find the perfect fill.

I'm also on three studio albums with the band now so there's a bunch of songs that I was involved in writing. That's interesting to me because I know how much time I spent constructing parts in the studio, trying to find things that worked. When we've been playing something live for a while that part will evolve—sometimes for the better, sometimes not. I might hear the original version and think, "Oh, that's what I did. Why have I changed it?" Other times I end up liking the live version much more and wish we could re-record.

JM: Looks like for this tour, you've switched around your rack toms, a la Aronoff. Any particular reason why?

JC: I've always struggled with the centered "square" positioning of the rack toms on the bass drum. With that standard setup, I find it difficult to reach the 12" with my left hand. The way I like to have my ride cymbal, the 12" would push it out so the bell was a real pain in the ass to reach. Those factors meant that I always used to twist the tom mount in order to bring the 12" as close to me as possible, and that positioned it almost directly above the bass drum.

A couple of years ago I was pulling my hair out trying to get the 12" to sound more resonant. It seemed that no matter what I did, I couldn't get it to fit in with the 10" and 14". It just seemed dead. I had a theory that this might be because the bass drum shell was right under, and very close to, the bottom head of the 12". If you've ever held a drum close to the floor and hit it, you'll know that it really kills the resonance. As an experiment I switched the 10" and 12" toms around. It did help a bit with the resonance, and I was also surprised at how much closer it allowed me to bring the ride cymbal.

I've pretty much always had the fusion-size toms, but I find that for the style of music Wishbone Ash plays, the larger toms sound better. The 10" just sounds too high for most fills. If I were to choose three toms to keep for that style of music, they'd be the 12", 14" and 16", I'd set them up with the 12" in front of me, the floor toms in the usual places, and I'd put the ride where the second rack tom usually goes. My current setup, with the toms switched, is essentially that three tom setup but with the 10" sneaking in under the ride cymbal. I only use the 10" in a few fills here and there. There's a really fast round-house fill I always do at the end of "Phoenix" that I had to modify with this new setup. I just opted to miss out the 12". Apart from that I find it's kind of interesting having them switched—it makes you think more about what you want to hear and opens up some new possibilities.

The New Blue Horizon

JM: What can you tell me about new studio recording, *Blue Horizon*?

JC: We spent a week writing new material in the summer, then spent November in the studio tracking and mixing. I had this great idea that we should actually know the songs before it came to recording them. With the previous album, *Elegant Stealth*, we were tracking bass and drums for some songs that didn't have any lyrics or even melodies. It's really hard to know what to play when you have no idea how the vocals will work in the track, or even what it's supposed to be about.

This time we had demo versions of 90% of the songs before it came to recording them. We'd worked out vocal harmonies and knew what we needed to work on. The plan was to play the songs on tour in October so we'd be comfortable with them by November. Of course, that didn't happen.

I wanted to track everything live, with no click, and just do take after take until we got one we were happy with. Inevitably though, it ends up with us doing this until we get a drum track that's solid enough, then everyone else gets to spend time redoing their parts. Leaving the click out of the equation just means it's a lot more time consuming trying to fix things later on, and you have to play tambourine for the whole of every chorus when you're overdubbing percussion (laughs).

JM: I love playing to a click, but I also really enjoy playing without one, as long as I'm playing with great musicians that can either hold it together or follow me well.

JC: I think we did two tracks without a click and the rest with. Even so, I feel the songs on this album are stronger. There's nothing fancy on the drumming front—I was just trying to find parts that worked and were a little bit interesting. I got more involved in production this time. I finally overcame my fear of writing lyrics and contributed a few verses here and there, and I sang some backing vocals. I even got a guitar solo on one of the outros.

JM: How did that happen?

JC: Andy had flown back to America by the time we were doing the final mix of "Take It Back" and the track felt like it was missing a solo at the end. I hadn't picked up a guitar in years but thought I could probably pull something off. My initial enthusiasm turned to despair after about 20 useless takes, by which time I had blisters the size of M&Ms on my fingers. Tom Greenwood [engineer/producer] spurred me on and we eventually got something that I thought sounded passable. It really highlighted how difficult it is to do the simple things. Playing a single bent note with the right vibrato and accurate tuning and the right tone is way harder than it looks.

JM: What did Andy have to say about the solo? And is he playing it every night as it was recorded?

JC: I think he was surprised that it turned out sounding pretty reasonable. It's only about 10 bars on the fade out, so it's not too prominent. We haven't played that track live yet, so who knows what he'll do. When we play the new songs live he tends to play an approximation of what's on the record. We spend so long listening to the tracks over and over when mixing that they tend to stick in your head. He'll remember the general structure, but we're not a band that aims to play anything note for note like the record. That's the way I prefer it. I always loved Sting and Peter Gabriel concerts because they'd play songs differently and they'd be much more exciting than if they just tried to replicate the recordings.

JM: Here you are going on seven years with the band, on a pretty steady schedule...sounds like all's well in the camp.

JC: I love the guys in the band; they're like family to me. We get on extremely well and it rarely feels like work.

Sometimes I question if I would want to do the Madonna gig or something like that. I feel like in those situations, it would be great for the CV and it would pay really well I'm sure. I would be dealing with things like management and so many people on the road all the time. I would be a lot less free to give any input. I like making things. I like the fact that I can be involved with the album cover design, or the tracks that are going to be on there or touring; getting involved in all aspects of it. It really is just the four of us essentially.

The year before I got this gig, I wrote down where I wanted to be in five years. I remember the list: I want to go to New York, I want to travel and see places and be paid for it, I want to play various big venues, stadiums. We've done those things. I've been checking off the boxes.

JM: Was this the first thing that came along after writing the list?

JC: At the time, I'd auditioned for The Blue Man Group and it was looking like I was going to get that gig. Then there was a female singer that I was playing with who had the funding from a multi-millionaire, and that looked like it might go somewhere. There was another gig too, so I was wondering what my future would be, "Is it going to be this, this or this?" And it ended up being none of them (laughing). They all fell through for one reason or another. Then I got a random text message saying: "Do you want to join Wishbone Ash?"—a band I'd never heard of, and that's been the last seven years of my life.

JM: Do you think about the next seven years?

JC: I don't have a plan. And if I did, I'm not sure it would work out quite as imagined.

I'm happy here, and I'm open to all possibilities. I just keep my eyes open and occasionally check my bearings to see if I'm still heading in the general direction I want to go. ✨