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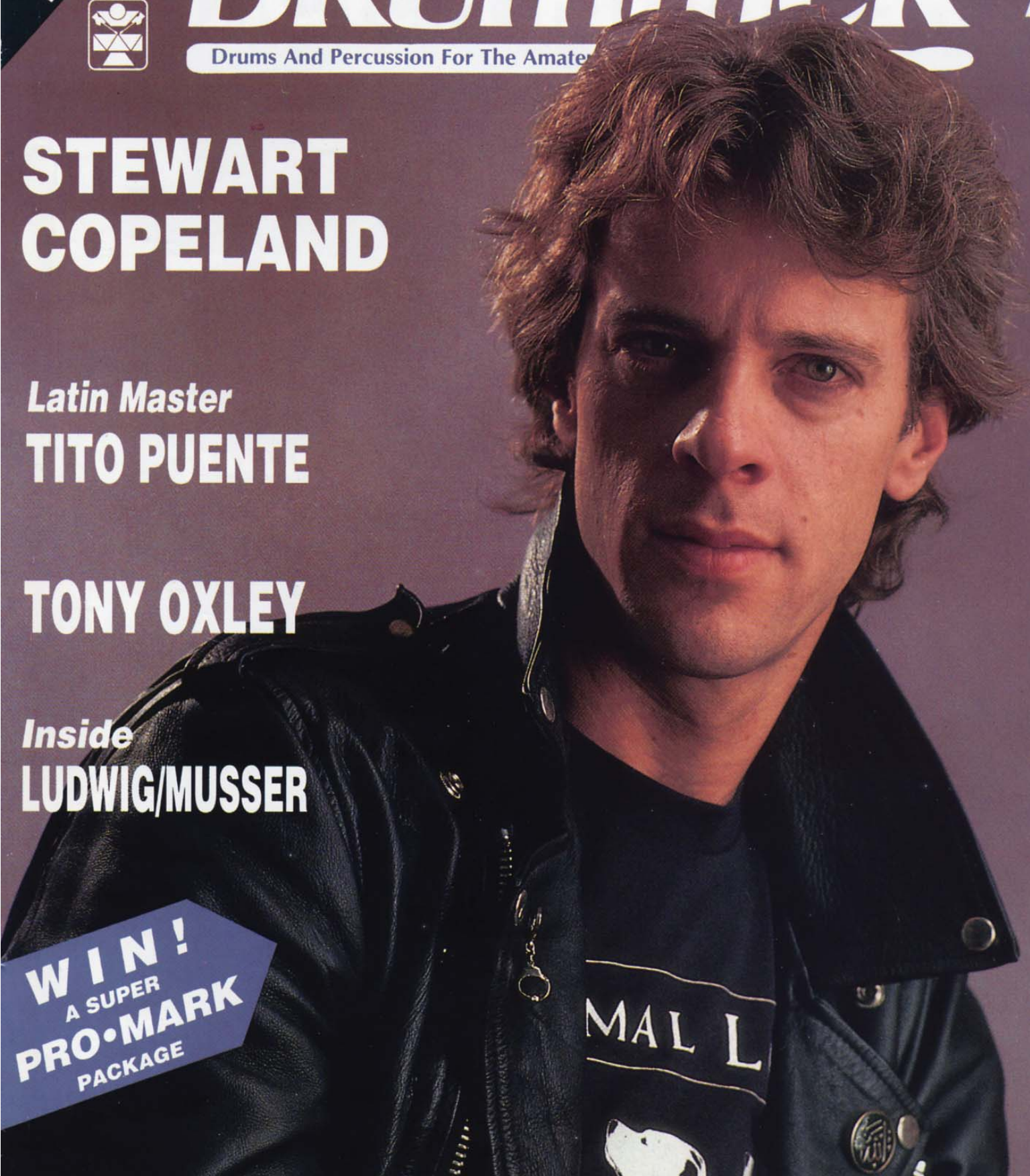
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## David Tull

by Dave Black

Raised in Berkeley, California, David Tull found the San Francisco Bay Area an excellent environment in which to grow as a musician. At age nine he began studying percussion with San Francisco percussionist Peggy Luchessi. Inspired by the wealth of jazz and ethnic music around him, David soon focused his attention on jazz drums, studying first with local drummer Paul Yonemura, then with Kurt Wortman, a member of Art Lande's Rubisa Patrol. The Berkeley schools had an excellent jazz program led by Phil Hardyman, which served as a daily workshop for David. Also, making regular trips to San Francisco jazz clubs like Keystone Korner, Tull took in as much jazz as he could.

David moved to Los Angeles in 1981 and spent five years as a percussion major at California State University, Northridge, a student of Joel Leach. By graduation in 1986, he had been in the renowned CSUN "A" Jazz Band for three years. In 1987 Tull joined Maynard Ferguson's explosive group, *High Voltage*. After seven tours and two albums with that band, David returned to L.A. to participate in some local projects.

**DB:** How did you get the gig with Maynard?

**DT:** The audition process for Maynard Ferguson is done by tape and recommendation most of the time. When someone decides to leave, Maynard asks all the band members if they have any recommendations. Once he gets a few names, he has those people send in tapes that really show what they can do.

In my case, Billy Hulting, a great percussionist and a friend of mine, was with Maynard when the drummer at that time decided to come off the band. Billy heard the news that there might be an opening, so he recommended me and told me to call the MF office and send them a tape. The next morning I put my tape/resume package in the mail. After a week or so, I got the call that I was the one. Two weeks later I was in Ohio to begin rehearsals.

**DB:** Musically speaking, what are some of the characteristics about the Maynard Ferguson band that stick out in your mind?



Photo by Lissa Wales

**DT:** Musically, Maynard's band was extremely fulfilling. It's a player's band in that people come not only to see Maynard, but also to hear the band. *High Voltage* is not just a backup band for Maynard. Each member is expected to participate creatively all along the way. Maynard works hard to foster an atmosphere of freedom of expression among all the players. Every band member is given ample solo time each night, and each night is a little different from the last.

Musically, one of the key elements was the great variety of styles that we performed every night. On a given night the audience would be treated to burning Latin, straight-ahead bebop, and driving funk, and occasionally Maynard would even sing. This variety was one of my favorite elements of that band, because every song was its own bag and was treated in its own way.

Adding even more to the variety, we did a special six-week tour and album with a 15-piece big band in the fall of '88. That was an especially refreshing change because it was a completely different style of

playing. That kind of variety really kept the gig interesting.

One detracting element was the constant pressure to maintain a high degree of energy on stage. When people think of Maynard, words like "burning" or "explosive" come to mind. There is certainly a lot of that inherent in his style. The problem came when we wanted to bring the energy level down and have a moment of calm. I was always aware that such moments had to be handled carefully, because I knew that the audience was looking for that next high note or that next fast lick. It was sort of like having a ceiling on your musicality, and I think all the players felt that to some degree.

**DB:** What recording have you done with Maynard?

**DT:** I have recorded two albums with Maynard. 1988 was a great year to be on the band because we did two albums in a three-month period. Late in the summer we recorded *High Voltage 2* with the small group. Then in the fall we did *The Maynard Ferguson 60th Birthday Big Band Album*. *High Voltage 2* was Maynard's second album with a seven-piece

group. Except for Maynard, however, it's a completely different group of players than the first *High Voltage* album. One of my favorite things about this album is that it really reflects the personality of this particular group of players. We developed the material on the road for about six months before going into the studio to record it. As we toured and wrote material, certain stylistic characteristics began to emerge that were particular to these players. The result is an album that I feel makes a fresh statement.

Another exciting aspect of that album is that we were able to capture the energy of live performance on tape. We went into the studio immediately after a tour and put it on tape just like we played it live. Unlike many album sessions, we made scant use of overdubs. If something didn't go right, we just did another take with the whole band, thus preserving that live energy and spontaneity.

As for the material, I am very pleased with the combination of tunes. I'm excited because *High Voltage 2* contains an ar-

rangement I did of "Star Eyes." It's thrilling to hear a great recording of something I've written.

**DB:** Tell me about the big band tour and album.

**DT:** The whole project was only six weeks long from the first rehearsal to the last album session. This short time span made the project attractive to some great players who normally would have not gone on the road. As a result, we had a truly amazing horn section. Working with a band of that caliber was really a blast. Every night was such a kick!

The album was recorded immediately after the tour. We were under time pressure because the High Voltage group was about to leave for Japan. We played the last big

band concert in San Francisco on a Friday night. On Saturday morning we were in Santa Barbara to begin recording. On Tuesday the small group left for Japan!

In contrast to his recent fusion-oriented projects, Maynard decided to make the big band more of a straight-ahead jazz band. On tour, we did do a couple of Latin and funk tunes, including my "Star Eyes" arrangement, but the bulk of the material that we recorded is more straight-ahead big band style.

I'm really pleased at how the album turned out. It's especially exciting that we recorded the original arrangement of "Blue Birdland," Maynard's famous theme. I don't think he has ever recorded it before, so on this album we made a little history.

**DB:** Did you enjoy writing for the Maynard Ferguson band?

**DT:** Yes. For me, composing and arranging is a way of expressing a whole other side of me that can't be expressed on the drums. Much of the music the MF band plays is written by members of the band, so I decided to submit something. I put together an arrangement of the old standard "Star Eyes" and brought it into a rehearsal. It went over great, and Maynard took to it right away. We performed it with the small group for months and recorded it on the *High Voltage 2* album.

Right after we recorded that album we did the big band tour and album. I put together a big band version of my arrangement, and we played that throughout the tour. It was very satisfying to write for such an amazing horn section.

**DB:** How do people react when they find out you're a drummer who writes?

**DT:** It's interesting to see how people react. Within the MF band, it was just like anyone else bringing in a tune. I appreciated their respect, since I know that some drummer/writers are not taken seriously by their peers. But Maynard dug it, and sometimes commented about it when announcing the tune.


I think people in the audience, however, were more surprised to find a composing drummer. Often people would come up after the show and say, "You did the 'Star Eyes' arrangement?" I think they were checking to make sure they had heard right. Still, it was always a positive reaction, and I was glad they liked the arrangement.

**DB:** When you are playing six nights a week with a band like Maynard's, how do you remain fresh and creative show after show?

**DT:** That can be a challenge, especially when the traveling schedule becomes intense. Freshness and consistency are extremely important for an up-and-coming player like myself, especially since I never know who might be in the audience on a given night. There are going to be good nights and bad nights no matter what I do, but I've found a couple things that help me.

First of all, on a jazz gig like Maynard's band, I make a conscious effort each time I hit the stage to search for new ways of treating familiar material. Once a show



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becomes familiar, it's very easy to click on the "autopilot" and treat the material the same way night after night. If, however, I decide before going on stage each night that I'm going to find at least a couple new things to do, it keeps the creative juices flowing. The key is that it takes a greater effort to search for something original than it does to rely on habits developed in previous shows. By setting a conscious goal to find new ideas, I force myself to put out that extra effort when I might not have otherwise.

Half of the challenge of playing so regularly with a high-energy band like Maynard's is maintaining my endurance and stamina. Playing two hours with High Voltage is not unlike performing an athletic event. When I'm on the road I don't always take care of myself as well as I should, but I try to at least be aware of how I'm treating my body. Traveling can make it difficult to get regular exercise, and finding good food on the road is a challenge too. The bottom line is that if I'm in bad physical shape, it's going to have a negative effect on my playing, so I take keeping fit fairly seriously.

**DB:** How did touring with the Ferguson band compare to what you had imagined it to be like when you were in high school?

**DT:** Road life was very much like I had always imagined it. Happily, the main difference between my early perception and the reality was that the members of the band didn't all hate each other. I had al-

ways heard stories about how rough it was to tour with a band and how bitter all the guys were, but the people I toured with were all agreeable, and the tone was almost always one of friendship and mutual respect among us.


One myth that I believed as a high school student was that once you play a band like Maynard's, making a living is just a matter of answering the phone as the gig calls pour in. I figured that all the players on Maynard's band had already made it "big time" in the music business and had more work than they knew what to do with. The reality is that for most players, it's just not that simple.

I am an up-and-coming player, and I feel

that I have a lot to offer. However, it takes more than just musical talent to carve a niche for yourself in the music business. I joined High Voltage having spent the previous year working a part-time day gig to help pay the bills. My days in town are now spent making phone calls to establish new contacts, doing clinics, teaching, rehearsing for gigs, and trying to find time to practice. I will say that my phone rings more than it used to, but I think many student players would be surprised at how much hustle it takes to get by, even if you've been on a band like Maynard's.

**DB:** In your early development as a musician, what experiences do you feel were most important in getting to where you are

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**DT:** It's hard to pick just a couple of events, since there is such a long series of crucial moments in any musician's growth. One important event, though, was my first serious exposure to Brazilian and Cuban rhythms. I took an ethnic hand percussion class taught by Jerry Steinholtz at CSU. That class opened a whole new world to me. The class didn't teach drumset at all, but learning to play congas and hand percussion taught me about how Latin players phrase and the rhythms they use. Applying this concept to the drumset changed my whole approach to playing. Even in non-ethnic settings, there are endless applications. In addition, I learned how to better interact with a Latin percussionist. All this was of great importance on Maynard's band.

Another very important event for me was realizing that in order to succeed, a player must not only have the ability to play, but must have the ability to work well with other musicians. This consideration is especially important when a group goes on the road, because the band members not only perform together, but also live together. If a player has an attitude that alienates him or her from the rest of the band or makes him or her difficult to work with, such as an inability to handle criticism or sudden changes, that musician is almost unuseable. There are no blanket rules, but it seems that the players I know that are working the most are the easiest to work with. No matter what is said, the answer is, "No problem. Let's try it out."

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Among the experiences that really helped me were the many hours of listening that I did early on. When I was in high school I used to go into San Francisco every week to catch whoever the great player was at Keystone Korner. When I wasn't at a live show, I was listening to every jazz album I could get my hands on. Gradually I built my concept of what a good, sensitive drummer does.

**DB:** What can a talented student player do to increase the chance of getting a gig like Maynard's?

**DT:** Unfortunately, a lot of it has to do with being in the right place at the right time or knowing the right person. However, I feel that it's important to do whatever preparation I can so that when an opportunity comes along, I'm as ready as possible to take advantage of it.

It would definitely behoove any young player to become as versatile as possible. I am on a never-ending search to learn ways of playing that I'm not familiar with. The more styles I can learn, the more hireable I will become. I never know what the next call might be, but whatever it is, I want to be able to say "Yes" when it comes. It sure pays off when a call like Maynard's comes along.

I feel that sight-reading ability is absolutely essential to any player today. The need to play a brand new chart as if you already know it can pop up any time. I can't imagine anything more frustrating than not getting a gig because of an inability to read the charts, even though you could

play them great once learning them by ear.

Finally, I would recommend keeping an up-to-date promotional package ready to send off when needed. This should include a brief resume, a good picture, and, most importantly, a demo tape with short examples of your best recorded playing. Often when the call comes for a gig, there isn't time to put such a package together before the deadline. It would be foolish to get a call for a great gig and miss it because you couldn't get a tape together in time.

**DB:** What projects are you currently working on?

**DT:** I recently formed my own band, called House Of Games. It's a contemporary jazz quartet, with drums, guitar, bass, and key-

boards. We've been gigging around Los Angeles, playing some of the college campuses, just trying to develop a following. We've cut a demo that so far has been pretty well-received, and we plan to do some more extensive recording shortly.

I've also begun doing clinics at schools around the southern California area. I go to high schools and colleges and talk about jazz and drumming. It's exciting for me because many student players have not been exposed to a lot of jazz. Over the years the school music programs that I've been involved with as a student were so important to me. I love having a chance to give back what I can to that system.



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