

Drum Tracks

CONCEPTS FOR THE INNOVATIVE DRUMMER

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DRUM BRUSHES - PRODUCT REVIEW

S T E V E



SCHAEFFER

DB: What percentage of the studio, TV and movie work that you do is with electronics equipment?

SS: Conservatively, 80%. Initially the studios were afraid to use electronics, but because of the sophistication of the kind of equipment that I have, they count on having electronics because it has added dramatics for their TV shows. They look forward to it. Shows that I do quite often need electronic backing, they depend on it. Most of the Hanna-Barbera cartoons that used acoustic drums for years are now electronic drums—mostly Simmons because of the ability to play them like an acoustic set of drums.

DB: What record projects, movies or TV shows have you used electronic drums on?

SS: The biggest production movie that incorporated them was a movie called "Romancing The Stone." Other movies that I've used them on are, "Country" with Jessica Lange, "Gorky Park", "48 Hours" and "Best Defense" with Eddie Murphy.

DB: What about record projects?

SS: On record projects I've been using a digital/analog set-up. My triggering set-up is an MX1 and MXE developed by Vince Gutman of Marc Electronics. I combine it with a rack set-up that Don Walker of Underscore developed.

DB: As a drummer did you feel threatened when drum machines came out and, if so, do you still feel threatened?

SS: Well, I think I'm a little bit of an exception to the norm. In the very beginning I felt that if somebody wanted a spontaneous thing to happen, that there was no way on any instrument that a machine is going to replace that human aspect. I came to prominence during the disco period when I really became popular because I could play machine-like music. I use to play tracks that were fifteen minutes of 4/4 on the bass drum and a 2 and 4 back beat non-stop. I wish the

electronics would have been around at that time because it would have saved a lot of painful blisters on my hands. I'm involved with computers and I'm not afraid of using them. The drum

machine has given me a new career. It has opened up doors that otherwise would have never been opened.

I believe that drum machines have taken some work away from drummers who made a living doing demos. There were a lot of guys that made a living doing demos. This is the way technology goes and you have to go along with the times.

DB: Do you think that drum machines will ever replace drummers?

SS: Well, I'm sure they will in some ways, especially with the machines becoming more sophisticated. If you want your Yamaha DX7 to play with my electronics that's great, but the reason I got involved with music is because I love playing. When somebody wants me to play music, then they're going

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to call me to play music with them. When I have to make music for a particular kind of project, like a space movie, then nothing is going to sound better than certain kinds of machines. In playing live, there is a certain amount of excitement. You are not going to get a drum machine to play like Billy Cobham did in the Mahavishnu Orchestra. It just doesn't work that way.

DB: What is the attitude among the older colleagues that you work with, including Emil Richards, Joe Porcaro and Larry Bunker, towards drum machines? Are they accepting them?

SS: It depends on the individual. Someone like Emil who is a unique individual, would buy every percussion instrument when guys didn't want them. He is one that can

understand what's happening better than a lot of people. Larry Bunker is another person who is very high on my list of people who have technological type minds. He is responsible for the wireless systems that we use in the studios today. Joe also has been receptive. I imagine that anyone who gets replaced by machines is going to resent them, but you have to look at it this way; If you lose one job and gain one, or even two because of a change, it evens out. We are all in the same

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situation. I play my drum machine like I would play. Sometimes it's better, and sometimes it lacks certain kinds of subtleties.

DB: What's the difference between a real sounding drum machine, as opposed to a rhythm box?

SS: One sounds great and the other sounds terrible. I have to admit that I've heard certain things with a rhythm box that lent itself to a certain kind of beat. A good example is Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing." I really liked the way that sounded. They have a sound that is unique to them.

DB: When using electronic drums in a recording situation, do you fine yourself programming the machine, or using your acoustic set to trigger them?

SS: The context of the music tells me when I have to use one or the other. On most of the scores where the conductor

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is conducting free time and not using a click, there is no way I can do something like that because there is no pulse to sync it. In a case like that I have to play pads on sections where it comes in and out of time. If it's a record project or a chase scene, I have programmed a lot of things.

DB: How do you feel about the electronic age and electronics?

SS: I'm enjoying it. If I have to play a music date and play real simple music, I can get involved in a different way with a machine than I do with the actual playing. I actually enjoy the machine. I don't know where it is going, but I'm really enjoying it. I pay my bills by computer. Some people are afraid to do that, I really get off on it.

DB: Do you get frustrated by the fact that anything that you buy now becomes obsolete within a year.

SS: Financially, it's a burden for a guy like me who has to continually buy equipment. A thousand dollars use to be a lot of money for a drum set. You could buy a fantastic drum set for a thousand dollars. Now, to spend thirty thousand dollars a year is not inconceivable. Then you have to go out and get the expertise of someone like Don Walker or Vince Gutman to help put it together and make it work for you. The next year there is something new that comes out. As a working person, every producer wants the latest stuff and you have to keep on buying it. It is a never ending catch-22 situation. I'm already involved in it and so I'm committed to doing that. It would be nice to be able to say that this is the definitive thing and that it's over with, but it is never over and probably never will be. That is the plain black and white. As long as I have the money to invest, I will continue to buy. I think that Mike Lang had a good way of putting it when he said, "If you're a tuba player you go out and spend maybe \$3,000.00 on a beautiful tuba

and that's it for however long your career is." For someone like me, I have to eliminate half of the equipment every 6 months to a year and start all over again.

DB: When listening to the radio or a record, can you tell if it's a drum machine as opposed to a live drummer?

SS: Yes. When you work with the machine you become accustomed to the sounds. Now, if it is really subtle and they use a Linn snare and bass drum with a guy playing live on top of that, then it's not so easy to tell.

DB: What medium do you enjoy playing for the most? TV, records or live.

SS: I only play live dates every once in a while. Recently I did a couple of concerts with Henry Mancini and Bill Conti. When you say playing live, I think of playing with a group. My time schedule doesn't allow me enough time to spend rehearsing with a group, although I miss doing it. Each area that I work in has its pluses. I like the aspect of refining the part of a record date and spending a whole three hours getting one perfect track. On the other hand, I like the challenge of going on a film date and knowing that you've got one run down and then you've got to make it. There is something special about doing that. When it's happening it's just fun to be there. You really feel good about any aspect of it. I'm just

happy to be working.

DB: Where do you see the music business heading within the next ten years?

SS: The music business always seems to go through similar kinds of cycles, but with different kinds of music. I think that real space age music has not arrived yet, as far as that kind of sound. It might not happen within the next ten years. I imagine within the next ten years that you will hear orchestras playing with synthesizers integrated into them. The film business is a good area because it incorporates both heavy duty rock, jazz and some very symphonic things. Over the years what you see on music scoring stages represents both ends of the culture, more than any other area that I've seen. I think it's just going to get more integrated than it is right now. I think that the roles of musicians are going to have to change. I think that we have to be a little more intellectual to deal with these kinds of changes. For the people who need only the organic thing, it will also be there for them.

DB: Thank you Steve for sharing your thoughts with our readers.

SS: Thank you.



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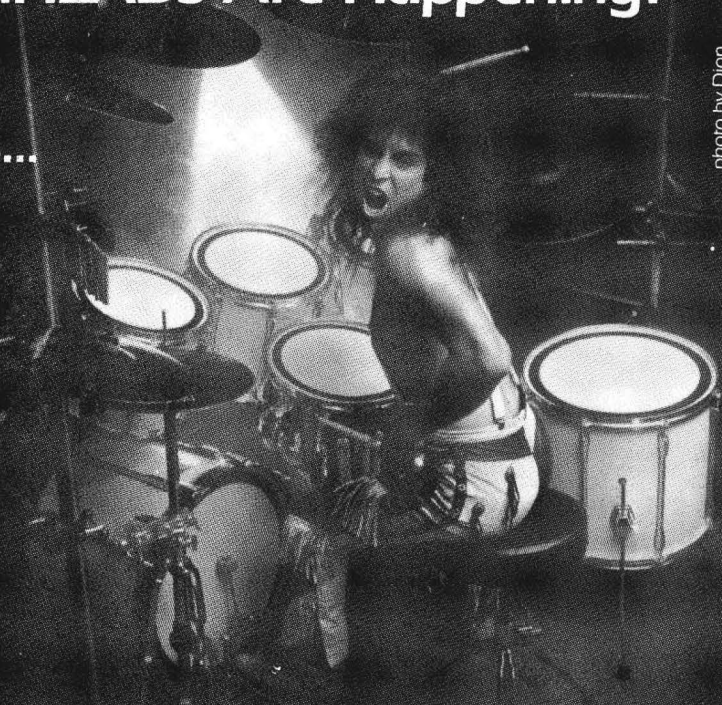


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