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TrapKAT SKS



Peter Erskine



Multipads

Erskine's e-experience

Professor Peter Erskine's interest in drumming is more than academic. Since picking up sticks at age four, he has played with some of the biggest names of jazz, fusion and pop. Besides performance, Erskine has dedicated himself to drum education, and currently teaches at the University of Southern California. And electronic percussion has never been far from his arsenal. Erskine shared some thoughts with digitalDrummer editor Allan Leibowitz....



digitalDrummer: You were certainly an early starter in drumming, reportedly picking up sticks at the age of four. Tell us how you got started and how you stuck to drumming in those early years.

Peter Erskine: I have wanted to be a musician for as far back as I can remember. I began playing the drums at age four and started taking drum lessons at five. I have been studying music continuously ever since, simply because I have always wanted to be a musician. Luckily, my father had been a musician when he was in school (studying to become a doctor), and so I received a lot of encouragement and support from him as well as my entire family.

dD: What disciplines and skills did you learn as a child that made you the drummer you are today?

PE: Discipline came about as a result of good parental guidance and example, combined with the fact that I simply enjoyed playing so much — I would practise the drums before going to school in the morning as well as in the afternoon and evening after I came back home from school. And I was always listening to music. My first teacher was very patient and loving, important qualities when dealing with such a young student! Most of the drum heroes and mentors I have met throughout my life have been generous and nurturing when it comes to sharing their information and passion for this music. I learned to respect the music and the musicians from these masters, many of whom I met at summer jazz camps. I attended these camps beginning in

1961 when I was seven years old, up until high school ... whereupon I went away to the Interlochen Arts Academy for year-round training in music.

dD: At what stage did you realise you wanted to be a professional, and how did you go about making that happen?

PE: Well, I got my American Federation of Musicians union card when I was 14 years old, and began working that summer of 1968 at various hotels and clubs in Atlantic City, New Jersey. But I knew that I wanted to be a professional from the start, and that's also why I spent so much of my time practising and listening to music. I calculated that I played the drums — in practice and in concert — 10,000 hours by the time I was asked to play with Weather Report in 1978.

dD: Speaking of Weather Report, your resume includes a who's who of entertainment. What have been some of your recording and performance highlights?

PE: My new book "No Beethoven," (available soon as an electronic book title from the Apple iBook store, etc.) contains MANY stories that took place in the studio or on tour ... here is a short story about my first recording with Weather Report, after my first rehearsal/audition, but before our first trip to Japan where I premiered as their drummer in concert during the summer of 1978. My first recording experience was to do a hi-hat overdub on Joe's tune "Young and Fine". He wanted to tinker with the feel of the fine drum track that Gadd had played, and I set up a hi-hat in a small iso-booth and played along with the track from start to finish while Joe watched

a World Cup soccer game on TV in the control room. When I was finished, I took off my headphones and climbed around the mic stand and walked into the control room. Joe seems to be concentrating on the game. I ask, "How was it?" to the room. Zawinul replies: "You tell me." And so I say, "I think it was good." "Okay, then," he says. "Watch the game."

That story told, I feel very blessed to have played with so many great and interesting musicians. Loved the albums I've done with vocalists Joni Mitchell, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Seth MacFarlane ("Music Is Better Than Words," an incredible swinger of an album) ... proud of the Weather Report stuff, most excited by my own recordings on Fuzzy Music! It's a good life.

dD: You are very active in education – not only as a faculty member at Thornton, but through clinics, books and DVDs. What motivates you to want to share your skills with others?

PE: The art and craft of music includes the passing along of information to next generations; I am merely following in the footsteps of my own musical heroes. Knowledge is best when shared. (My father was a great teacher as well...).

dD: What's your view on the impact of the Internet and video piracy on training DVDs and the like? Is there still a future in the industry when people simply rip off your material and post it on YouTube?

PE: Today's technology makes it easier than ever to offer instruction and to share information. Somehow, in the giving, there is much reward, and the digital revolution is creating a new paradigm and relationship between the musician and his or her audience. It's an exciting as well as frightening time to be a musician, but mostly an exciting time to be an educator as well as a musician. The sobering reality is that the economics of the music business are undergoing drastic change. Piracy has long been a problem, and the advent of digital technology has made it far more widespread than most of us might have envisioned. But it's a new reality that must be met more by smarts than a knee-jerk or brute-force reaction. The challenge is in getting our audience to understand that ensemble music of good quality cannot be created solely on a machine in someone's second bedroom. I am confident that the demand for good music will win in the end, and the music community can take clever advantage of the possibilities that networking offers us. Like any form of democratisation, there will always be growing pains.

One very exciting development has been the creation of the iPhone, iPad and the world of apps.



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Imagine: a worldwide distribution network that not only gets your creative enterprise out to as many people as possible – globally - but also allows the creators to update their work and get those updates to all of their customers automatically. This is genius! So, I see the app as a very important part of the new paradigm in reaching our audience. Educationally as well as enthusiastically (i.e., the enthusiasm I have for my music), I created the *Erskine Joy Luck PlayAlong* app with developer Lucas Ives. Current music-minus-one offerings allow for one tune, minus one instrument, to be downloaded and used for 99 cents; with my app, the

user has 11 songs, minus drums or minus bass or minus piano, along with scores, parts and transcriptions, educational text plus extras like the album tracks as well as session photos, etc., all for US\$4.99. And now that the technology is in place, we plan on creating more and more PlayAlong projects utilising different styles and instrumentation, to give aspiring musicians something aside from fusion or big band-based practice tracks. The initial response to this is very encouraging; people seem to love it. I'll also make one of these with the Roland kit one of these days; certainly, Roland V-drums or the like is an excellent way to utilise something like the *Erskine Joy Luck PlayAlong* app by the end-user.

dD: *Okay, now to the nitty gritty for our readers. Can you tell us about your electronic percussion experiences? What gear have you owned over the years?*

PE: I've long been interested in technology and gadgetry, from using reel-to-reel, sound-on-sound, tape-bouncing techniques to create my audition for high school (Interlochen, I quadruple-tracked a percussion ensemble piece for one of my audition selections), to being part of the team that created the drum sounds on the Oberheim DMX drum "machine", to creating a variety of sample libraries (for Yamaha, for "Living Drums" and, most recently, for Cymbal Masters' "Virtual Erskine" library, which just won a Drum! magazine "Drummie" award for best sampled library this year!) ... all along the way utilising the best that the music industry has had to offer in terms of electronic percussion, including Synare, Simmons, Yamaha, KAT, Korg and Roland, et al. The good part is that a world of sound can be available at your fingertips with electronic percussion; the bad part is when and if someone kicks out the electric cord: then there's silence! But when everything is working, then anything is possible!

dD: *What electronic percussion gear do you currently have – and how do you use it?*

PE: I currently use the Roland TDW-20 module and pads kit for electronic recording, practising and performance. I'm eagerly awaiting the new Roland TD-30 kit for playing and triggering purposes. While I have played electronic drum sets in concert (with Weather Report, Joe Zawinul's Weather Update, Vince Mendoza and Gary Burton), as well as on recordings (Weather Report, Steps Ahead, Rickie Lee Jones and my own solo albums), I currently use electronic percussion mostly as a compositional

In the next issue



Profile: Jonathan Atkinson

If you can plug it in and power it up, Jon Atkinson will be interested in hitting it. Currently on tour with Howard Jones, Atkinson has played with many of the '80s greats like Paul Young, Midge Ure, Belinda Carlisle and Kim Wilde.

The iPad as an instrument

More than a portable device for checking mail, the iPad is becoming a serious percussion instrument, thanks to bold new apps and powerful interfaces. We check out some of the current tools.

The beaterless bass

A new European e-drum maker turns the bass pedal trigger on its head with a beaterless pedal attachment. We put the Krigg to the test

Analogue Drums

It's not a name known to most VST enthusiasts, but Analogue Drums has been around since 1999, producing drum samples from tape. The Kontakt-based collection includes vintage kits from Ludwig, Slingerland, DW, Gretsch and Rogers together with Zildjian, Sabian, Paist and Bosphorus cymbals. We review some of the offerings.

All that and more in February ...



This promo video shows Erskine on his acoustic kit and on the virtual version.

device to help me envision or realise a musical project or dream. Music contains rhythm, melody and harmony, but it's all about SOUND and feeling. New sounds can help to create new feelings. We have a lot to thank Thomas Edison for!

dd: Let's talk about your Platinum Samples offering. How did the Virtually Erskine project come about and how did you find the process of recording your gear and grooves?

PE: Michael Vosbein deserves the credit for bringing me and the incredibly talented and knowledgeable John Emrich together. The electronic drum world is most lacking in drum set sounds that convey or resemble what jazz drummers bring to the musical table in terms of touch and quality of sound. Our challenge was to capture what years of playing experience and enthusiasm have brought to me so that these qualities could be shared with more creative musicians, drummers and non-drummers alike! We spent a lot of time recording MY drums and cymbals in MY studio, with MY touch — I played every single note ... many times and at many dynamic levels! John put everything together masterfully, and the result is as close to the real thing as I can imagine.

dd: John Emrich produced a video demo of the Virtually Erskine product featuring you playing your acoustic kit and in split-screen playing the VST version on a TD-20 and the sound is shockingly close. What's it like playing the VST version of your own acoustic kit – and do you have to adjust your playing style in any way from the acoustic to the electronic version?

PE: It felt like the real thing! Of course, when playing ANY kit in a particular room or setting, one is faced with making choices, and these happen pretty quickly in the scheme of things when playing improvised music. That said, the demo is a first/one-take performance on both kits. Pretty clever idea of Mike and John's, actually. It certainly shows how good the samples "play" and sound, as well as how playable the Roland V-Drum kit is.

dd: Okay, so you're a Roland endorser but also have your name on a VST product. Do you envisage that there will soon be a convergence that allows you to play your own samples on a Roland kit and is this a direction you would like to see happening?

PE: "Convergence" is a good word as well as a good thing. With everything in music, one style or song or sound can influence the next musical step ... Joe Zawinul, master musician and synthesist, pioneered the acoustic playing of electronic sounds, i.e., his music always sounded organic because he heard his music that way. INTENTION has a lot to do with any musical venture, whether on an acoustic or electronic instrument. The qualities of phrasing, rhythmic placement (consistency, accuracy, swing, funkiness, etc.) come through no matter the instrument. Archimedes said "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world". Give me a sound that's good enough, and I can move the world, too.

dd: As someone who clearly trained with acoustic drums and understands them intimately, do you see electronic percussion

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ever replacing acoustic drums or do you see the two co-existing in the future?

PE: Robots will not replace flesh and blood humanity, and machines or sample libraries will not replace acoustic instruments — completely. There IS a displacement in the labour force - both musical

and otherwise. This is the price of technology. But there's nothing sweeter than the sound of an acoustic guitar being played in a meadow, or congas and bongos being played on a summer day, or an acoustic jazz group swinging and burning in a jazz club ... not to mention the sound of a symphony orchestra in its full glory. Electronic instruments are tools, and any tool in the hands of a master can yield art, just as a mechanical tool in the hands of a fool can result in a complete mess.

Aesthetics aside, the electronic drum set allows us at the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California to teach a classroom of drummers at one time versus one-at-a-time instruction. The drum lab class has become one of the more popular classes at the university, for music major and non-music students alike! I like that, for a student needing two hours of college credit, beginning drumming beats a course in Medieval German Literature, at least when it comes down to fun. And that's what drumming should be, ultimately: fun. I have fun with my acoustic AND electronic drums, and that's part of what life is all about.



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