



**BUTCH**  
Drumming for peace



**CHAD SEXTON**  
Straight talking with the 311 man

**BEATS WORKING**

Tips & techniques  
to improve your  
playing

AUGUST 2003 £3.60

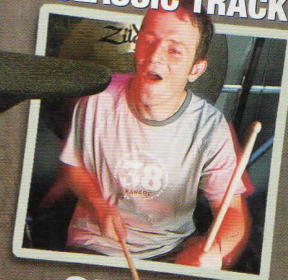
# RHYTHM

EVERY DRUMMER NEEDS

## RHYTHM ROUND TABLE

Drum gymnastics with  
**Thomas Lang, Johnny Rabb**  
and **Marco Minnemann**

CLASSIC TRACK



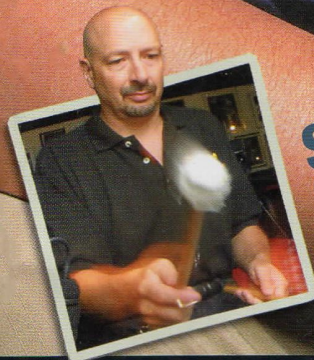
**CHRIS SHARROCK**

On the recording of  
'There She Goes'  
by The La's

**ABE CUNNINGHAM**

## DEFONES

"IT'S MY DREAM TO DO  
WHAT WE DO, IT'S THE  
BEST JOB IN THE  
WORLD..."



**STEVE SMITH**

Warms up for  
Rhythm Sticks

**PLUS!**  
Everything You've  
Ever Wanted To  
Know About Being  
A Drummer...  
Drum heads  
explained

**NEW LOOK GEAR SECTION! All the latest gear reviewed!**



Tama



Sabian AA



Drum Software Round Up



ddrum4 SE  
Electronic Drum Kit



Media with passion  
Printed in the UK

AUGUST 2003

£3.60



9 770957 659125

08




# PEOPLE

The Butchmeister gives his Tracy Chapman set-up a workout. Fast car not pictured...







# COWBOYS of the GALAXY

The man called Butch has built a colourful and musically-eclectic career for himself as a drummer and percussionist specialising in off-beat pop and out-there experimental music. Most famous for his work with the Eels, we met him on tour with acclaimed singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman.

Interview: Pat Reid Photography: James Cumpsty

**A** big man in a cowboy hat sits on a bench on Kensington High Street playing a variety of percussion instruments. Beside him, a handwritten sign reads 'Drumming For Peace'. When people attempt to give him money, he refuses. The police, he explains, have informed him that he cannot accept donations. The Great British public like what he's doing, though. A group of youngsters surround him and add human beatbox sounds and an improvised 'Drumming For Peace' rap. For a few minutes a mini-carnival erupts in West London. Later Butch confides that this kind of thing happens wherever he goes.

"When I'm on tour I like to set up on the street and do my thing and collect some money for a local charity," he says in the cultured tones that seem so at odds with his massive frame. "But they wouldn't let me do that here."

Butch is in the UK to play drums with singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman. I catch them at the Royal Albert Hall, and am surprised by how much I enjoy myself. I'd always thought of Ms Chapman as a corporate version of a folk singer, but her performance is genuinely affecting, and her band are wonderful – that perfect balance of absolute tightness and really great feel that you only get with the very best musicians. When Tracy sings 'Baby, Can I hold You Tonight', I actually have tears in my eyes. For pretty much the rest of the audience, it's virtually a religious experience.

Butch is best known for his lengthy tenure with the Eels. Fronted by the enigmatic Mr 'E' Everett, the band had two UK Top 10 hits in 1997 with 'Novocaine For The Soul' and 'Susan's House'. Their albums, including *Beautiful Freak*, *Daisies of the Galaxy* and *Souljacker*, have contained equal measures of lyrical soul-baring, avant-garde experimentation and beautiful pop melodies. But the Eels are a band that must be seen live, with E shambling on-stage in his pyjamas to sing 'Oh, What A Beautiful Morning' and Butch dressing up as a nun to play an insane variety of drums, percussion and, well, just *things*, really.

Sadly, when we catch up with Butch we discover that he and E have had a parting of the ways, although the big man features on the new Eels offering, *Shootenanny*. We repair to the hotel bar to grab a club sandwich and talk...

## **Rhythm: How did you get the Tracy Chapman gig?**

Butch: "Through the Eels connection. John Parish, who co-produced with E the *Souljacker* album, also co-produced Tracy's new record, *Let It Rain*. Joey Waronker played on

the album and Tracy wanted him to do the tour, but he wants to stay home and work on his production chops. So Joey told John, 'I think Butch is available'. And Butch *was* available because I had just left the Eels."

## **Permanently? Or is it just a temporary hiatus?**

"I think for quite a while. E and I are taking a break for quite a bit here because we've come to a crossroads, as it were."

## **How do you feel about that?**

"Upset. But it was a business thing. A year ago we were coming through Europe on the second tour for *Souljacker*, and I had to apply for bankruptcy. The Eels were a great, creative, wonderful musical outlet, but my partnership deal was not taking care of my family. I told management three years ago that this day was coming: 'We need to restructure, I'll give up my partnership if I can get a retainer or something'. So it started there.

"Eels don't sell records, we're not big pop megastars. That's not my beef, but this was a reality check. I got a call from E's accountant who said, 'E doesn't want to change the structure'. I said, 'Well, I made an offer for a retainer'. He said, 'That's way too much money', so I said, 'Well, why don't you come back with an offer?'"

## **But they never came back? Which must have put a strain on your relationship with E.**

"We still talk, the business is a separate thing. Good things musically were happening. We recorded *Shootenanny* in 10 days, mixed it and finished it in three weeks. I started working with Tracy Bonham and we did a duo tour of California – her on guitar and violin and me on drumming and percussion. We did some of her rock stuff, but also her beautiful ballads. Then the Tracy Chapman thing came up."

## **I never thought much of Tracy Chapman's music, but after the concert last night I'm a convert...**

"I went in like you last night, knowing the two songs. I'd heard she was kind of difficult. But the new album... wow, it's gorgeous, I was blown away. In the audition it was, 'Learn the songs. Note for note. Play the exact parts on the record. Do not deviate'. That's what she wants because that's what works. She was very quiet at the audition, and I didn't hear anything for a few weeks. Then I got a call from Beck to audition for his tour with the Flaming Lips as his backing band.



## ESSENTIALS

### Top 5 Tracks

**Eels**  
'Not Ready Yet'  
From *Beautiful Freak*  
(1996)

**Eels**  
'Climbing to the Moon'  
From *Electro-Shock Blues*  
(1998)

**Rufus Wainwright**  
'California'  
From *Poses* (2001)

**Eels**  
'Souljacker Pt. 1'  
From *Souljacker* (2001)

**Eels**  
'All in a Day's Work'  
From *Shootenanny*  
(2003)

### Top 5 Albums

**Tito Puente**  
*Puente In Percussion*  
(1956)  
Percussionists: Patato,  
Tito Puente, Willie Bobo,  
Mongo Santamaria

**Al Green**  
*Greatest Hits (1972-1975)*  
Drummer/percussionist:  
Al Jackson,  
Howard Grimes

**Led Zeppelin**  
*Houses Of The Holy* (1973)  
Drummer: John Bonham

**Buddy Rich Big Band**  
*The new one!* (1967)  
Drummer: Buddy Rich

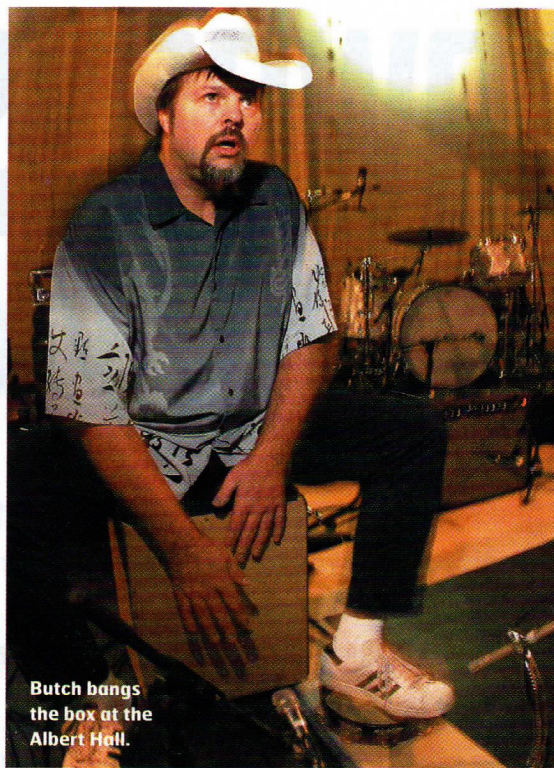
**Queens Of The Stone Age**  
*Songs For The Deaf*  
(2002)  
Drummer: Dave Grohl

### Top 5 Drummers

Buddy Rich  
Ringo Starr  
Sly Dunbar  
David Garibaldi  
Josh Freese

### Did you know that...?

Butch is renowned for his end-of-tour antics, famously appearing naked on-stage in San Francisco with a strategically-placed banana. Don't ask...



Butch bangs the box at the Albert Hall.



**"I'd never listened to a Tracy Chapman album and it was amazing. It was, 'Learn the songs. Note for note. Play the exact parts on the record. Do not deviate'. That's what she wants because that's what works."**

“So I go into the audition. Beck was three hours late and it was one of the worst auditions I have ever, ever done. The Flaming Lips guys playing Beck's music sounded like a train wreck to me. The bass player didn't look at me once, he didn't want me there. They told me that their drummer was in retirement, he didn't want to do the gig. Anyway, I'd learned Beck's *Sea Changes* album like I was told, but then Beck said, 'Let's do 'Where It's At''. Now, I know that song, but I don't *know* the song, so it doesn't groove, it's really not happening, horrible. About four days later I find out that they've got the Flaming Lips drummer out of retirement. I heard them playing live on the radio and it sounded great. It couldn't have worked with anybody else.”

### And then the Tracy Chapman thing started rolling...

“The call came, and it was very good timing. And here we are. Tracy is wonderful to tour with. She does extremely long soundchecks, three hours. She's very hands-on, she has amazing ears and she knows what she wants.”

### It seems to pay off. It sounded incredible last night, and the Albert Hall is notorious for making all bands sound like sludge.

“Every show has sounded really good. There's an ebb and a flow and it peaks at the end. I have to play very reserved, which I love, it's a different challenge for me. On the *Souljacker* tour I lost 35 pounds because it was full-on. I couldn't eat three hours before a gig, I was exhausted. This is aesthetically the opposite. The parts are very precise. I don't use any rimshots, it's all centre with the bead of the stick, and very low volume so her voice is up top.”

### So there's no room for improvisation?

“Well, the other day at soundcheck we did 'Give Me One Reason' and we improvised, we jammed on it. So the keyboard player went into 'House Of The Rising Sun' and Tracy went, 'Cool', and we did it in the performance that

night. At the end of the gig we do 'Get Up, Stand Up' by Bob Marley and it's never the same. So within the structure there is this openness, and that's the beauty of it.”

### Tell us about the band.

“I knew everybody except for the back-up singer Kat Adams, who was the *Starsearch* winner in the United States. Phil the keyboard player actually auditioned for the Eels a couple of years ago. The guitar player Joe Gore worked with Tom Waits and PJ Harvey, which is how he met John Parish. Dave Sutton the bass player, I've known him for 15 years. Rock Deadrick plays percussion and I substituted for him in this band Talkback when he went to do Tracy in '93. So it's all this big circle that comes round.”

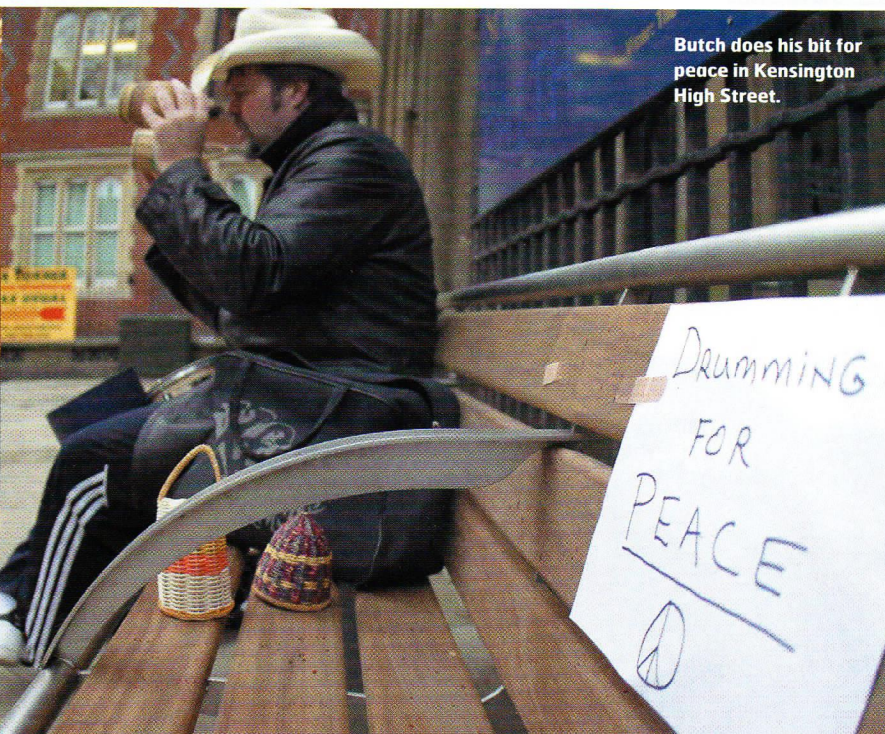
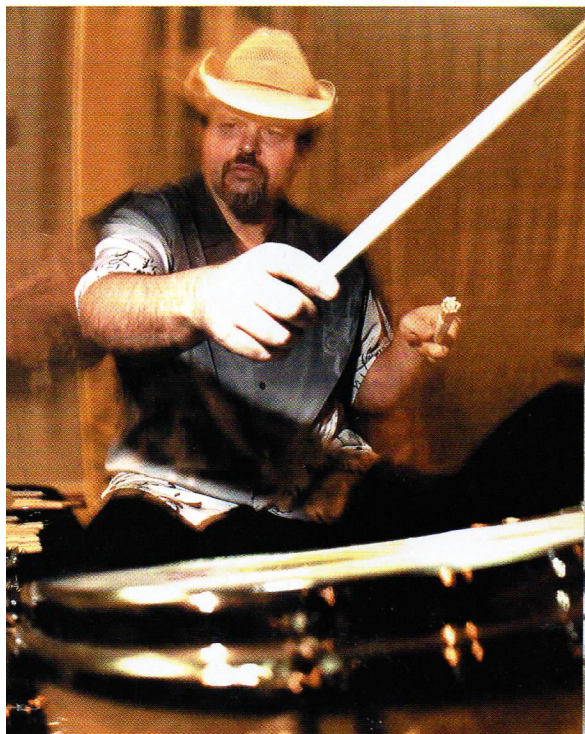
### You've always done a wide variety of side projects. What have you had going on recently?

“A lot of stuff. I was playing with Rufus Wainwright. It was amazing, the real rock'n'roll lifestyle – well, I would just go to sleep in my bunk, but the kids would be out every night. And Damaru is a duo that I have with Ray MacNamara. It's experimental, eclectic ethnic percussion.”

“The latest thing is I'm working with John Wilson who was in Meat Beat Manifesto. He left the band and went to Cal Arts, where I went to college 20 years ago. I was doing a performance art piece up there called *Accidents* and we got him involved. He and I have been recording and doing some strange things together, including an album called *Pig In A Can*. It's this 78-year-old blues harmonica player called Harmonica Slim. John recorded this guy talking in his living room. Harmonica Slim was a pig farmer back in the day, so this album is him doing harmonica and singing blues, and a lot of it is him talking about cutting up pigs and stewing pigs: 'The best part of a pig is not the ham, it's the ears and the nose. That's the best-tasting stuff...’

“With *Accidents*, we're hoping to doing an off-Broadway thing. It's kind of a *Stomp* meets Cirque Du Soleil, but a





Butch does his bit for peace in Kensington High Street.

**“Last year on the *Souljacker* tour I lost 35 pounds because it was full-on. I couldn’t eat three hours before a gig, I was exhausted. This is aesthetically the opposite. The parts are very precise.”**

➤ higher hybrid of arts. It’s percussion and movement with stilts and trapeze and stories and masks.”

**You’re well known for using drums, percussion and cymbals in a particularly musical and inventive way. How has that been working with Tracy?**

“I don’t use a huge amount of cymbals, but I like to have the tech, whose name is Smooth, change cymbals a lot. The drummers on Tracy’s albums have been Manu Katché, Omar Hakim, Russ Kunkel and Rock Deadrick, so I have to be all those guys. I’ll swap cymbals to give me different textures, and I’m very into manipulating the drums.

“On ‘In The Dark’, on the floor tom I’ve got these two pieces of tape with these straps, because Tracy wanted a little buzz on the floor tom but didn’t want the full snare sound. On that song in the studio Rock was playing part of it on a music stand! So I’m trying to recreate that sound with the floor tom and the bass drum. I call it ‘prepared drum sound’. I take a simple kit and I tape or dampen or attach something to the drums to make it sound different.”

**What’s all this about using T-shirts?**

“I have bags of T-shirts. I’ll take the sleeve of a T-shirt and cut it up and use it on the beginning of that one song, it sits on the snare so I get just a little bit of muffling. I’ll take a T-shirt and cut it lengthwise and it goes inside the hi-hat for ‘Across The Lines’, so it deadens it. I still get a little bit of a ‘chick’ but it’s a very different sound. On some reggae stuff at the end of the show I’ll tape up some T-shirts and the drums are now reggae-ised, dead – like Sly And Robbie.”

**Other drummers would use electronics to get similar effects. But you’ve never done that at all?**

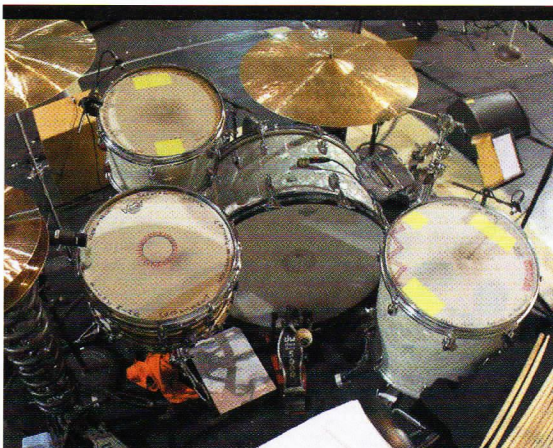
“No. I didn’t work in the ‘80s, I was unemployed. I did not get the Linn drum, I didn’t like Simmons. I thought, ‘Why do you need Simmons to recreate the sound of drums?’ I collected more and more percussion, drums and acoustic instruments. I have the Roland Handsonic, because I can go in the studio without getting out the tablas, and I can tune it quickly, but that’s the only electronic thing I have.”

**And sooner or later, the rest of the world came back round to your way of thinking.**

“Starting around ‘92. I’d developed my thing and people started digging the prepared drumset and the stuff I was doing live without having to plug anything in. It’s very organic and people started liking that again.”

**A big part of the attraction of ‘80s electronic drums was visual – they looked right for the time. And yet there’s nothing more visual than the spectacle of a drummer going crazy on an acoustic kit.**

“Real kick, real response, yeah. It totally baffled me. It’s like going to a concert and having five keyboard players playing all these violins and things. After half an hour of that... I have a strong connection to seeing a physical instrument there and seeing someone physically playing it. I mean, I’ve seen Bobby McFerrin singing with one guy on handclap, and that was insane – it filled this huge hall and it didn’t need anything else. I would rather see real people playing their instruments and coming together as a group, an interactive community experience. It’s more expensive to do, but when you do real art and real performance, that’s what it’s all about.”



## GEAR

**Drums:** Slingerland 1974 Buddy Rich White Marine Pearl kit: 24"x14" bass, 13"x9" rack tom, 16"x16" floor tom, 14"x6" Ludwig bronze snare

**Cymbals:** Paiste  
“A huge variety...”

**Plus...**  
DW hardware & stands, Meinl percussion, Fat Congas string cajon, Vater sticks & mallets, Tama Rhythmwatch, Wuhan finger cymbals, Remo heads, AKG D-112 and Shure Beta-52 mics