



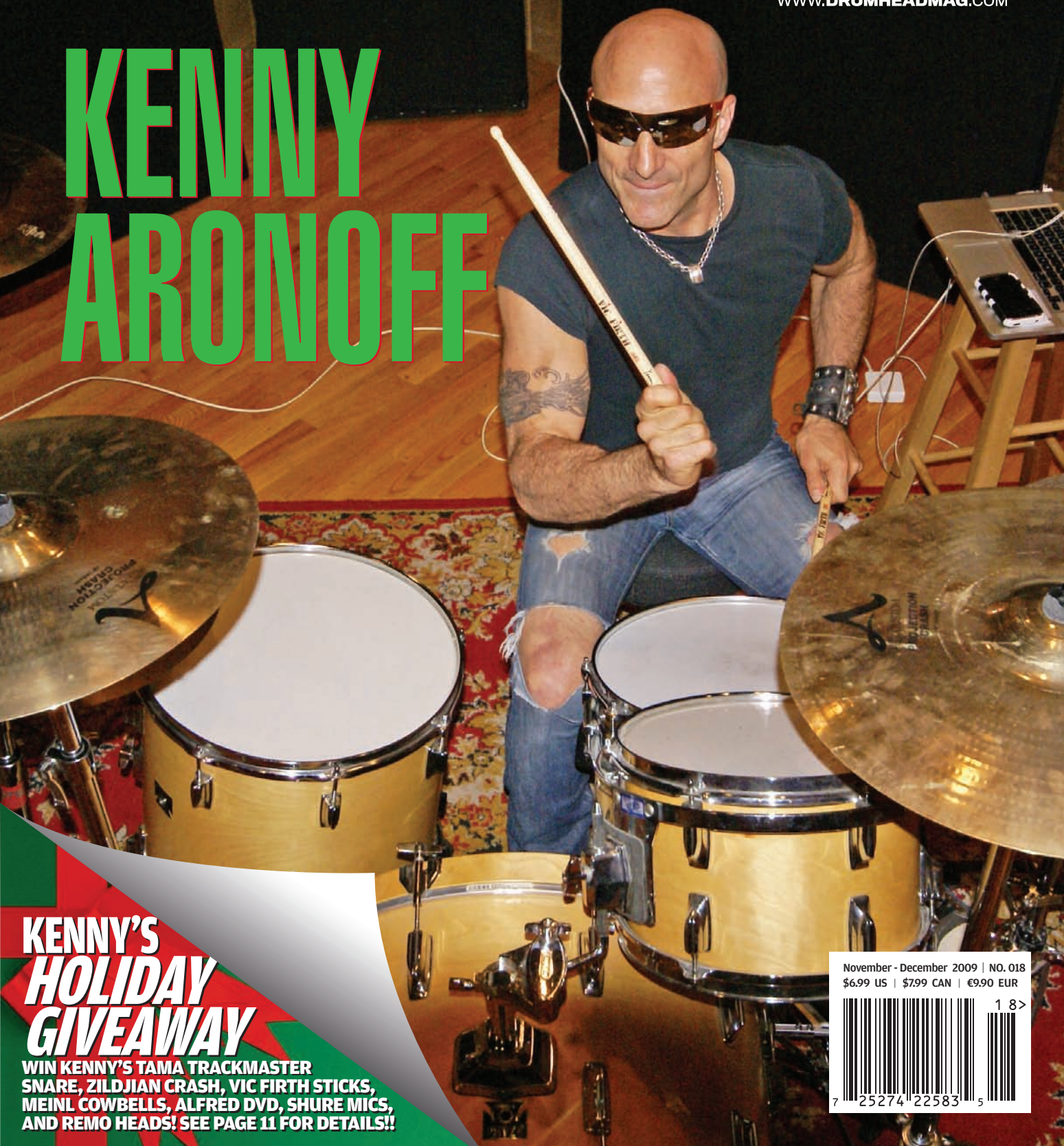
PRACTICE W/ THE PROS \* LESSONS \* AUDIO PREVIEWS

RASHID WILLIAMS BUTCH NORTON JEFF FRIEDL KELLY KEAGY

# DRUMHEAD

WWW.DRUMHEADMAG.COM

## KENNY ARONOFF



**KENNY'S  
HOLIDAY  
GIVEAWAY**

WIN KENNY'S TAMA TRACKMASTER  
SNARE, ZILDJIAN CRASH, VIC FIRTH STICKS,  
MEINL COWBELLS, ALFRED DVD, SHURE MICS,  
AND REMO HEADS! SEE PAGE 11 FOR DETAILS!!

November - December 2009 | NO. 018  
\$6.99 US | \$7.99 CAN | €9.90 EUR





# BUTCH NORTON HANDS ON

Butch Norton is a larger than life character: big dude, bigger personality, immensely talented.

Butch first rose to prominence with alt-rockers The Eels in the mid 1990s. The Eels' bittersweet lyrics coupled with euphoric, intimate songwriting proved the ideal framework for Butch to weave percussive tapestries through albums like *Beautiful Freak*, *ElectroShock Blues*, *Daisies of the Galaxy*, and *Souljacker*. The musical alchemy between singer/songriter E and Norton bewitched audiences both live and in the studio.

When Butch left the Eels over a financial dispute, around the time of the *Shootenanny!* release, his presence was sorely missed (fans are still lamenting his departure to this day). Butch had developed a solid reputation as The Eels' drummer and back up vocalist, and soon was expanding his horizons with other artists such as Fiona Apple, Tracy Chapman, Lisa Germano, Aimee Mann, Michael Penn, and Rufus Wainwright.

These days Butch is the centrifugal force in a super-tight band led by sultry-voiced rocker Lucinda Williams. The band, Buick 6, not only backs Lucinda, but has spun out their own mesmerizing CD without her (with a photo of Lucinda with her mouth duct-taped on the cover to illustrate the point).

The divine Ms. Williams and her Buick 6 co-conspirators have been touring to support *Little Honey*, Lucinda's latest musical offering. At a recent London gig sitting next to the legendary Ray Davies (of the Kinks), I watched Lucinda and the band slow burn through their blistering set. Mid-gig, Ray leaned over to me and whispered, "Who is that brilliant drummer?" When rock royalty is impressed with your playing, you have indeed arrived Mr. Norton.

Butch engages with music and life itself with total gusto. He's a charismatic raconteur, devoted family man and a total professional. To be truthful, any adjectives I'd apply here would simply not do the man justice. See, Butch Norton is not merely a musician but an experience.

Long may he run...







**INTERVIEW BY TERI SACCONI • PHOTOS BY JOSH HENRY**





**Drumhead:** Lucinda is an artist who mixes rock, country and blues. Have you calibrated your playing to fit this sound?

Butch Norton: Oh yes. When I got the call for the gig two-years ago I thought, “Okay she’s alternative country, with some Delta blues and rock.” The main thing is, I learned on the gig. The original guitar player, Doug Pettibone, taught me a lot. He left, but he helped me learn my nuance and how things should feel. I had to adjust, and I had to simplify. I had to re-think some things and to listen to a lot of Delta blues, Cajun-y stuff. I’ve always liked the blues, and Southern rock, like the Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Marshall Tucker Band. This is a little different, but the same. Lucinda has really traditional blues roots, too. There’s a certain grittiness. So I had to listen and be told a number of times, “Butch, don’t play it like that.” I’m still learning, always learning.

**DH:** What was it like in the studio recording *Little Honey*?

BN: Lucinda takes really good care of us. Doing *Little Honey*, we had a three-month lockout at The Village, which is a top recording studio [in LA]. Back in the ‘70s, the room we



recorded in was built for Fleetwood Mac, for the *Tusk* album, so it’s one of the biggest rooms in there.

Everything’s catered all the time; everything’s set up and there’s an amazing board. So we’d go and just record. It was fun, relaxing, creative and we could do what we were supposed to do. Lucinda would show up about seven at night, and then we’d go for three or four hours. We would get one or two takes of the songs and that was it. There was really a band vibe.

When we did this record, I was fulfilling

another childhood dream of mine. When I’m onstage with this band, the realization is that my dreams are coming true. With Lucinda, I have a place where I’m allowed to try things and that’s great.

**DH:** When you play live, you enter the zone where you are somewhere else.

BN: As I’ve told Lucinda, when I’m up there onstage, I go to this other place. I’m cognizant of being there physically, but I rarely see the audience. I think I’m doing things correctly, but it’s very much a spiritual thing.

**DH:** You’re doing double duty right now, your band Buick 6 is also Lucinda’s band too. How did that come about?

BN: It was the brainchild of Lucinda’s fiancé and manager, Tom [Overby]. We finished the tour for the *West* album, which had the amazing Jim Keltner on drums. That record was done in Nashville. Lucinda hated the instrumental tracks but loved the vocal tracks. So she came to LA and got Hal Willner to produce. Keltner came in and he had to play to Lucinda’s vocals with no click track. So it was just raw, just her vocals. So he built that album around just her singing, which



is astonishing, especially if you go back and listen to the *West* album. It's magical.

When I spoke to Mr. Keltner, I had joined Lucinda to do the *West* tour at that point. He told me that the making of that album was a nightmare in trying to get the drums to fit the vocals. He said, "God Bless you for going out to tour this."

So we were doing *Little Honey*, jamming in the afternoons, and Tom said, "Let's make a record of you all doing your instrumental things, and you guys will open the show next year." We said, "Great." When Lucinda wasn't there, we'd improvise and we cut a lot of these tracks and a couple of cover songs. That's the Buick 6 album. We open the shows for her and then we come back and do the set with her. We also sell our CDs at the gigs.

**DH: You're very busy, always working in LA on sessions when you aren't touring, but Lucinda is your main gig now, right?**

BN: Yes, we work a lot and it's great because we all want to work a lot. This is Lucinda's 30th year in the business, and she has worked steadily throughout the last three decades. We're now getting ready to do shows that celebrate her 30th anniversary. We'll be doing a series of shows that will cover selections from all of her records over the last 30 years.

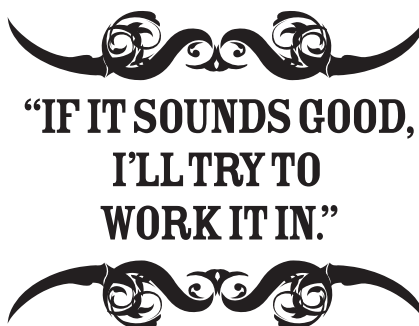
**DH: How do you remember your parts for songs from nine albums worth of music?**

BN: I have about 115 charted notes that I keep on my music stand onstage (see accompanying photo) She may call out a song from way back and I might need to know the tempo, so I'm ready for her. I've done this method for a long time. It's a piece of paper that I place on my bass drum that I can read while I play and I just follow along, measure by measure. I know where the kicks are, vocal cues, just the basic stuff that helps me manage. I keep the charts in alphabetical order and when I need one, Zac, my tech, pulls one out. She has a huge catalogue and

she doesn't like to repeat things, and she does a lot of covers and extra tracks.

**DH: You use all kinds of unusual items to great effect, for example, on "Heaven Blues" (off *Little Honey*).**

BN: I'll play anything I can get my hands on. I got this huge piece of plastic from one of my kids' Tonka truck sets. It was the plastic on the outside of it. It had a great sound to it when I squeezed it, so I kept it in my studio much to the dismay of my wife, who said, "What do you need to keep that for, don't we have enough crap?" But, sure enough, six years later I used it on an album. It makes a



great crunching sound and a syncopated feel, and went great with her guitars. I also used a manhole cover that my tech stole about 15-years ago in France. So it was clanking with the washing machine being hit, and the plastic, too. It fit the feel of the song, and if it sounds good, I'll try to work it in.

**DH: Watching you play is very inspiring. Your enthusiasm and great rock solid grooves, as well as your choice to add in so many different sound sources and musical elements is phenomenal. Many drummers could play that gig and get away with just keeping good time, but not you—you give so much more. What, and/or who inspired you that helped develop that?**

BN: It's a "meaty stew" of all the ingredients my journey in drumming has revealed to me, so far. Like all of us, we are the sum of what we've experienced or sought out. I started with listening and tapping out the beats on leather suitcases, to my mother and fathers record collection in the early sixties (country, soul, Latin, classical, old time jazz, swing, pop). I took notice of the orchestra in the pit when we went on field trips to the opera. The first band I was in was called APOSTROPHE (after the zappa album). I had never heard this type of stuff. I couldn't technically play any of it but I would "try" to fuse the percussion and drum set parts together while the older guys in the band would be getting stoned. I saw a vaudeville revue in San Francisco in the early '70s that started me thinking differently about the kit, "Why can't I add other instruments or flavors to my setup like they did back at the invention of the kit?"

Then fusion and prog came knocking and I was taking notes. Palmer, Cobham, Bruford, Peart, etc. were expanding the drumset into a mini-percussion section, and that sparked a turning point for me. I assessed my abilities. I wasn't going to be a jazz guy. I tried, but my heart was realistically in rock/pop/soul—the song and lyrics. I wanted to add more









to my palette of colors. Luckily I found Cal Arts and John Bergamo. I stopped playing kit and immersed myself in every other aspect of sound available to me at this amazing place and time. John let me dabble and experiment. I was NOT a studious guy but I performed in every possible ensemble I could: African, orchestra, new music ensemble, Balinese/Javanese gamelan, Indian tabla, percussion ensemble, monkey chant, film scoring, animation scoring, theater performances, live music with photographers, designing installations with sound for painters...and the most profound aspect of this experience, that would eventually have the most bearing on my style, was the accompaniment of modern dance classes.

It was here that there were no rules or limitations. You brought in a setup of whatever instruments/sounds you wanted (usually some cool new "ax" I had been practicing on), and it was up to you to make it groove and be musical. The dance instructors would show the dancers the combinations and then they'd count it off. You had to interpret and make it work on the spot. My set up would change everyday: djembe, hi-hat, coffee can, soda bottle, cowbell, wood box, maracas, finger cymbals, tabla, ghatam, etc. I learned to accompany with a huge setup and also how to do it with just one cowbell. I still accompany when I can.

The cats that I listen to and have followed are many. Jim Keltner is, of course, at the top of this list, but there are a lot of other heroes: Jim Christie, Jay Bellerose, Stephen Hodges, Donald Lindley, Mr. Bozzio, Trilok Gurtu, Pat Mastelotto, Manu Katche, Quinn, and most importantly Michael Blair. He did a record with Shawn Colvin back in the mid eighties called *Steady On*, and the amalgamation of kit/pots and pans/ percussion/found sound objects blew my mind. I highly recommend a listen to this record for anyone who wants to hear tasty inventive percussion, in the pop song idiom, done right.



Photo: Richard Pierce

out instruments when the song dictates a different flavor. It makes complete sense, and is especially easy to do since Vater came out with these Slick Nuts quick release cymbal fasteners. It's really awesome and appropriate to be able to have a different setup for specific songs. It's amazing and eye opening how differently you will approach a song with different sounds. I also change sticks when the music calls for a different style or intensity, even mismatching pairs, 5A in the left for a solid backbeat, sugar maple super jazz in the right for lighter ride patterns. I evaluate each situation and decide from there what the best course is. With Lucinda it makes sense to swap out cymbals here and there because she covers all styles of music over her 35-plus-year career.

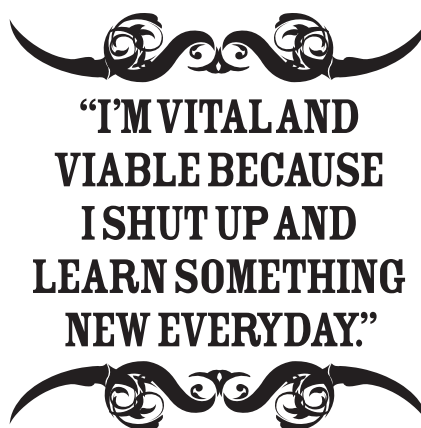
The interesting part is the shit I take from my bandmates for doing the exact same thing they're doing. They can't quite wrap their head around it. I tell them, "I don't really notice the difference when you switch guitars either!" Jealous mo fo's.

**DH: I can see what led you to all this.**

BN: Whatever sounds right, works. The drum set is one sound, and it's great. I like to put T-shirts or coins on it to make it buzz differently, which is very much like what Mr. Keltner does. When I went to Cal Arts (an art and music college in California) I stopped playing kit for four-and-a-half years. I studied percussion, and delved deep into that. I didn't get my degree. My goal was to soak in and perform as much as possible. I took what I could from the worlds of classical, Indian and Middle Eastern, Javanese, Balinese, South American and African percussion. We built a lot of instruments—that's where the "contraption kit" comes from. (CD Track 1)

**DH: Tell us about your contraption kit.**

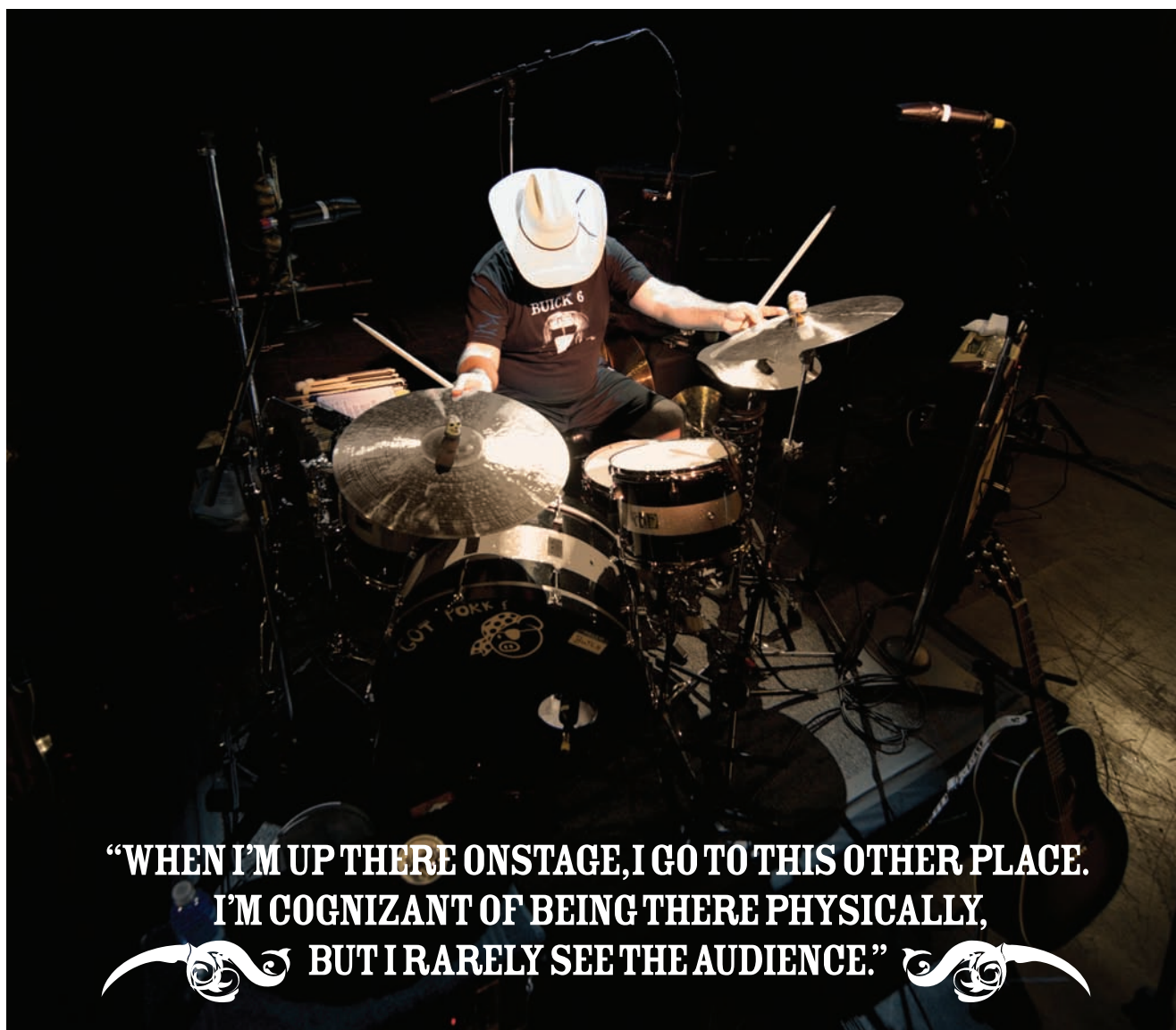
BN: I use it mostly live for Buick 6, and we wrote some pieces around it. It evolved from



**DH: You switch cymbals a lot during the gig, tailoring yourself to each song. Is that a request or your choice, and do you approach every gig that way?**

BN: I first started doing this about seven-years ago on the Tracy Chapman gig. It was completely my choice. The gig required me to cover several different decades of recordings/styles/drummers, and I didn't want to have 15 cymbals located around my kit. I like the four-piece, two or three cymbal setup. I decided it was time for the drummer to do what the guitar players had been doing forever, swap





**“WHEN I’M UP THERE ONSTAGE, I GO TO THIS OTHER PLACE.  
I’M COGNIZANT OF BEING THERE PHYSICALLY,  
BUT I RARELY SEE THE AUDIENCE.”**

my modern dance, yoga, trance, movement, improvisational-accompaniment projects. I developed this latest configuration for *Little Honey*, and part of the kit ended up on “Heaven Blues.” It is a bridge between the kit, a percussion rig, the junkyard and a toy store, which are the four inspirations for my instrument ideas.

**DH: You mentioned playing with Tracy Chapman and having to cover many different styles due to the drummers she previously used—from Denny Fongheiser to Manu Katche. What was your approach to that, and did Tracy have anything to say about it. Meaning, were you asked to be Butch Norton, or were you asked to be Butch Norton playing the others?**

BN: My approach was to play the parts verbatim. That’s what Tracy wanted. Joey Waronker had just done the *Let It Rain* album with her, which has a super cool and organic vibe, and she really wanted him to do the tour. But Joey was concentrating on his production chops and threw my name into

the hat. I think Joey secretly knew what the gig would entail, so he gracefully bowed out. Tracy was combining her new record with a greatest-hits compilation tour that I think the record company was seemingly, kinda of, making her do. My personal opinion was that deep down Tracy wanted to do the more vibey organic bluesy tour, which she actually did on her next tour a few years later. It was a big band and we covered the tunes faithfully.

I was asked to not be Butch Norton, and that was not a bad thing. I love Tracy and I completely enjoyed the gig. She knows who she is and what she wants. She can articulate that with exact clarity. Our soundchecks were three or four hours long everyday, and she would go out front with the FOH [front of house] guy and tune the room! She would give specific notes about how to play the hi-hat with the shoulder of the stick as opposed to the tip or bead: She can hear it. I love her attention to detail and passion. That’s what the gig was, much to the dismay of others in the band.

My difficulties came when I had to cover the Manu tunes. I don’t play anything like him and I tried. Rock Deadrick, the percussionist on the gig and one of her original drummers, the guy who played that slick-ass funky groove on the hit “Gimme One Reason,” pulled me aside one day at rehearsals and said, “Just play it like *you*.” Rock is a sweetheart and he could see that I was floundering. I’m sure he was also begging the drum gods to stop me from trying to sound like Manu (laughing), I really sucked at the challenge. Anyway, needless to say, we didn’t do a lot of those tunes from that period of Tracy’s catalog.

**DH: You have an oblong bench that you use instead of a drum stool.**

BN: It’s called an artist’s bench. That goes back to Cal Arts when I was accompanying a modern dance class one day and sitting on a normal drum throne. My back was hurting. My size was about what I am now, which is about 265[lbs]. A dancer pointed out that the back problem had to do with the throne. She said that



maybe for a smaller guy that stool works, but not for someone my size. She also said that my center was not supported all the time because I was moving around, and the throne doesn't support the movement. She said that I needed a four posted seat that would support me when I move. So I went home and my wife Lynn, who's a pianist, has an artist's bench, and I remember sitting on it for hours and never had a problem. So I tried it with the drums and I haven't had a back problem since. And they are easy to transport; adjustable, too."

**DH: Watching the interaction between you and the band during Lucinda's soundcheck, you seem to be the guy everyone defers to.**

**DH: Is there a facet of your playing that you'd like to improve?**

BN: I would have to say my brush technique. I had some lessons on brush technique when I was a kid, but I didn't shed on it like I should have. I kind of "ham-fist it" now and it's a source of frustration for me.

Now that I've outed myself I'll have to go and rectify the situation; thanks for bringing it up (laughing).

**DH: You left The Eels acrimoniously in 2003.**

BN: It was right after the *Souljacker* album/tour. I did the *Shootenanny!* record the following fall, but I was a musician for hire on that one. E had already planned to use me

one of my eyes.

Things were very tense between us, and the physical manifestation of our tension decided to travel to my eye. It was painful and gross. Funny how the universe works.



**DH: What are your best memories with The Eels?**

BN: The entire journey and process will always be a positive memory. From first hearing E's ADAT recordings of *Beautiful Freak* that he did in his basement, to convincing him that I was young and cool enough to be his drummer, to auditioning and rehearsing in my garage. E originally wanted to call the band Mohammed-Chang, the two most common



BN: I play with a bunch of musos. I'm just the facilitator and I'm good at getting things done. But you need to have all kinds of personalities in a band. Not everyone thinks alike. This was a problem when I played with E (aka Mark Everett, founder of the Eels) because it was hard for him to understand that not everybody thought the same way he did. A family is not made up of people who all think alike, but you're still a family. A band is the same.

My foundation, my roots are within bands. That's where I work best. A band is a group of people who share ideas. If you have a thought, but not the knowledge to back it up, then maybe somebody else in the band does. That's the symbiotic nature of a band. I've got a lot of musical ideas, but I don't always have the technical know-how to get it done. We saw Vinnie Colaiuta with Jeff Beck recently. He can play perfectly whatever you want to hear. I'm not that drummer. I'm not the most virtuosic player but I don't strive to be.

  
**"A FAMILY IS NOT  
MADE UP OF PEOPLE  
WHO ALL THINK  
ALIKE...  
A BAND IS THE SAME."**  


on that record and then our disagreement over finances occurred. He decided to keep with his original plan and we worked out an agreement for me to do the record. I was broke and needed the session. There were photos of that session, but I didn't make any of the final cut. E didn't want me associated with Eels anymore, and I had a huge sore in

surnames in the world. We played in coffee houses for the likes of Herb Alpert, Jerry Moss, Clive Davis, Lenny Waronker, Gary Gersh, etc. We were the first band signed to the Dreamworks label. The first video shoot for "Novocaine For The Soul" was a happy memory. Dreamworks spared no expense and got Mark Romanek to direct it; flying through the downtown streets of LA was very cool.

Other memories are hearing the single on KROQ radio in LA, our first tour in a bus, the first European tour, going on Conan O'Brien's show and "Later with Jools Holland," coming up with the idea for an overture for the Eels Orchestra 2000 (for *Daisies of the Galaxy* tour) and most importantly, to be able to work with an amazingly gifted and talented guy, E.

**DH: And the worst memories?**

BN: I always felt bad that E was frustrated with me for my lack of intellect. I could never match his, and I dare say that not many people can. He is of the genius type, always was and always will be. Also, my world



music influences were not something I was supposed to mention and I almost didn't get the gig because of that. But on the last couple of albums it wasn't an issue because the focus was solely on E, and I was not invited or asked to participate in interviews, which I understood from the beginning— this was E's baby. But it did hurt a bit.

But the most painful memory, that out trumps everything, was the death of my friend and drum tech, Paul "Spider" Hansen. Spider needed to get his shit together to stay on the tour and I had to tell him that he had to keep control of himself and his partying, as he was out of control at the time.

We were convinced that Spider was taking care of himself, so we all left for our first tour of Australia. On the last day off, in Melbourne, I was laying low in my hotel room for the day. I

heard a knock at the door and it was the hotel security guy with a local policeman. He asked if I knew a Paul Hansen. I immediately cringed and asked what he had done. The policeman said, "Mr. Hansen is dead, and we need you to come to his room and identify his body."

It seems that Spider had gone out on a bender the night before with an old roadie buddy from Australia, and he imbibed many different substances, which resulted in a massive coronary. His "buddy" freaked out and left him there, dead. I had to call Spider's mom in Boston, to tell her that her 45-year-old son was dead. Definitely the worst memory.

**DH: If E asked, would you ever play with him again?**

BN: I would. I don't know. I don't think E would want to, but who knows what the

future will hold. Three-years ago I would have said, "No," but who knows?

**DH: You're on the road a lot. How do you get the balance right between family and work?**

BN: Once I come off the road, I get back in the routine pretty quickly. My wife does all the domestic stuff, but when I'm home I do the dishes and most of the cooking. We also spend a lot of time together when I'm off.

**DH: Your two kids are very artistic (16-year-old Nathan is an accomplished television actor, and 11-year-old Nicholas is a budding film maker), but neither of them have opted into the family business.**

BN: Well, actually, when Nathan was really young I was doing a little coffee house gig in town and he'd climb on my lap and would

## GEARBOX - The Contraption Kit



1 Outer water holding Kenmore washer tub (bottom)

1 Inner serrated clothes holding Kenmore washer tub (top)

Remo Glen Velez 20" signature bodhran (seated on top of the washer tubs)

DW 5000 single chain drive BD pedal (hard felt beater w/duct taped "quarter" to striking surface for striking the bottom washer tub)

13" Heating duct drum (custom made by me. Stolen from a construction site when I was 13)

Slingerland Jam Session 16" floor tom w/attached 10" snare and reverse BD pedal

14" Remo Acousticon djembe

30" Paiste custom made sound formula/signature alloy cymbal

DW 9000 Series cymbal stand (customized to hold the 48 lbs. cymbal)

Small adjustable artist bench







## GEARBOX - Tour Kit

<b>Drums</b>
<b>Pork Pie Percussion</b>
26" X 14" Kick
12" X 9" Rack
16" X 16" Floor
14" X 7" Snare
<b>Cymbals</b>
<b>Paiste</b>
14" Twenty Hi-Hats
18" Signature Full Crash
21" Twenty Ride
<b>Swap out cymbals at the ready by my side:</b>
24" 2002 Ride
22" Dark Energy Mach II Ride
22" 2002 Crash
20" Signature Full Ride
20" Traditional Thin Crash
20" Signature Dark Crash/Ride (Once owned by Jim Keltner w/4 rivets at 12:00, 3:00, 6:00, & 9:00)
18" Ludwig/Paiste made in Germany 1960's Trash/Crash
16" 2002 Crash
16" Twenty Med Light Hi-Hats
<b>Cymbal Accessories</b>
1 Promark Rattler (for full sounding sizzle)
1 "Dime" dangling from a thin piece of tape for light sizzle/shimmer
Vater Skull Slick Nuts for quick cymbal changes

Various sizes of cut in half T-shirts for muffled/muted cymbal sounds
<b>Heads</b>
<b>Remo</b>
Kick: Ebony Ambassador w/logo and 6" hole cut at 3 o'clock on the resonant side.
Clear Emperor with Falam Slam patch
Rack & Floor: Coated Ambassadors
Snare: Coated Amb Top/ Clear Amb Bottom
<b>Sticks &amp; Mallets</b>
<b>Vater Percussion</b>
Hard felt bass drum beater, Bomber soft felt beater
5A Los Angeles (main pair), Jimmy Cobb signature
Sugar Maple Super Jazz, Blazer nylon tip, 1A's,
3/8 hickory timbale, Karl Perazzo's Drumbale
T-7 classical legato timpani,
T-6 classical general timpani, T-1 ultra staccato timpani
Whips, Wiretap sweeps brushes,
Wiretap retractable brushes, Wiretap heavy brushes
Splashstick, Splashstick Lite, Splashstick Jazz,
Splashstick Heavy, Monster Brush, Little Monster Brush
Various lengths and weights of triangle beaters
<b>Hardware</b>
<b>DW</b>
9000 Hi-Hat with Chevy truck brake spring as weight and sound source, 5000 Single Chain Bass Drum Pedal
9000 Series Stands, 6000 Series Flush Based Stands

<b>Percussion</b>
<b>Gon Bop</b>
Various shakers, tambourines, rattles, cowbells, woodblocks, and other banga, poppy, cracky sound things.
<b>On Bell Tree</b>
3 single suspended finger cymbals (Wuhan/ Chinese/ Indian) 1 Paiste antique finger cymbal strand.
<b>Microphones:</b>
<b>Audix</b>
Kick: D6
Hi-Hat: ADX 51
Overheads: L & R CX 111
Rack & Floor: MICRO D
Vocal: D4
Snare: i5 (Top and Bottom)
<b>Misc:</b>
Zydeco Metal Washboard Vest
Cans and bottles with rocks, bb's, bird shot, rice, pinto beans, and sand for shaking purposes.
<b>Found Sound Objects:</b>
A bottle with ridges for guiro effect, A Buick hub cap,
A hotel aluminum spun trash can, Plumbers Putty (reusable adhesive for muffling or attaching things to other things), 1 Large 4 legged "no back" hotel luggage rack w/attached board for stick/trap table.
1 Adjustable height artist bench





start hitting things. It was really cute. There was a little fascination there and we got him a toy drum set. Nate has the ability, if he ever wanted to, although he'd have to work at it. The same with Nick. But they have channelled that creativity into other metiers, other avenues.

My wife has guided them, but only because there was an interest on their part. Nick wanted to act, started to take some lessons, then got an agent. It blossomed and he got some acting gigs. Nick is only 11 but he's starting to do little films. He loves Tim Burton.

**DH: Speaking of Hollywood, you've done some soundtrack work too.**

BN: I was brought in for *Two For The Money* with Al Pacino, *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *300*, because I can read. I'm not a sight reader like Vinnie or Terry [Bozzio]; I'm not of that caliber. But I can read and decipher, and I know what the signs mean. It's nice work if you can get it. But I'm not part of that world.

**DH: You grew up in the Bay Area during the '60s and '70s. How did that influence you?**

BN: I grew up on the peninsula, in the Burlingame, San Mateo area, south of San Francisco. It was a great place to be growing up during the '60s and '70s, and everyone who was around at that time was a big influence: The Stones, Zeppelin, Creedence.

I was six-years old when I saw Ringo with The Beatles on "Ed Sullivan," and that made a huge impact, as it did with many. Buddy Rich was another big influence, and my mom would

let me stay up to watch the "Tonight Show" when he was on. I was always transfixed by any drummer I saw. My mom took me to see amazing artists like Sergio Mendez, Lou Rawls, Tony Bennett, and they all had great drummers and all had styles I loved.

I was in seventh grade when the theme from "Shaft" was everywhere, and I would play that hi-hat part incessantly [demonstrates]. All my music teachers influenced me. I would have never gotten out of high school if it weren't for my music teacher Mr. Rando. I'd still be in twelfth grade, doing it again.

In high school I was a football and basketball player. Then I hurt my knee and couldn't play sports anymore, and I got into all these bands. Mr. Rando was very inspirational and he let me experiment with drumming. He told me to go for it, and he must have talked to some of my teachers because I knew I flunked some of those classes. He had this sanctuary of the band room, so when I wasn't playing sports or working in the pizza parlour, I was in there.

**DH: How did you end up going to Cal Arts?**

BN: I joined Scientology to get over my pot addiction, which paved the way for Cal Arts.

**DH: Please elaborate.**

BN: It was quite a period. I was smoking pot a lot, and after two years, it was no longer a social thing—it was a bad habit

The bass player I was working with in a band invited me to come along to the DCG Center [Dianetics Counseling Group] because he was trying to get off the pot too, and he said

the center would help. So I went for a meeting and they were talking about getting me off the pot by taking a communications course. So I paid 50 bucks, did the class, gave up the pot, started running every day and I enjoyed listening to the basic principles that L. Ron Hubbard was talking about. It seemed very harmless. The root of his thing is that people misunderstand so much. The basis of that made total sense, so I started going back to them, started reading more books than ever before.

Then I went to see my parents and told them I had joined Scientology. This was in '78 during the whole cult frenzy, the Jim Jones massacre, etc. My parents freaked, "You're in a cult?!" I explained my justification for going, due to the pot. Up to that point, neither of my parents ever said, "No" to me. They thought I was nuts and wondered where this drum thing had come from, but they went along with me up to that point.

I asked them for a thousand dollars for more Scientology courses, and they said, "If you go back there, we're gonna have you kidnapped and de-programmed." I went back to the DCG center, told the guy that my parents had freaked out and threatened to kidnap me and he was like, "Whoa. You have to cut off from this now." There had been too much negative attention in the media at that time to take any risks on their part. I never returned.

So I went back to my parents and told them what had happened, and they said "Okay, now we'll pay for your first year at Cal Arts."

**DH: Is there a musician who inspires you, and with whom you'd like to collaborate?**

BN: Toumani Diabaté who is a kora player from West Africa. I bought this record [*In The Heart Of The Moon*] with him playing with Ali Farka Touré [the late West African guitarist]. I'm transfixed listening to these records.

I sit at home and improvise these simple grooves with it—there's no drums on any of these records. And I can hear all the places that they go, and it would be just a cool thing to do. It's very layered and I can hear where the groove sits. It seems very logical to me and it's not something I have to work hard to hear and understand.

**DH: What is your greatest strength as a musician?**

BN: Adaptability, putting the team first, realizing I don't know everything. I can turn somebody else's thought/idea into a workable concept, as long as I take my ego out of the equation and listen.

I'm vital and viable because I shut up and learn something new everyday. ✨

**▶ WEBFOOT**

▶ [www.buick6.com](http://www.buick6.com)  
▶ [myspace.com](http://myspace.com) ▶ [youtube.com](http://youtube.com)

**“IM NOT THE MOST VIRTUOSIC PLAYER,  
BUT I DON'T STRIVE TO BE.”**



Photo: Richard Pierce