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Two, Who Play Drums

By But ch Nor t o N

So I'm having coffee at Peet's with my dear friend, Lynn Coulter, and he says, "You should do an article about double drumming." He and I have joined forces in this new band called Mr. Squeeze & The Medicine Men (record due out spring 2012). We both reminisce about the days when groups we loved, or projects we were in, HAD two drummers. As a result of our playing together Lynn and I have formed a little drum juggernaut called B.O.S.S. (Beat Off Suicide Society) and we are reveling in the beauty of the two-drummer concept.

Now my little (very tiny) brain starts to postulate and ruminate on this subject. First off, it's a great idea and it is a springboard for a few of the things I've been thinking about lately that can be attributed to Two, Who Play Drums.

I'm on tour and there's always guitar talk: Every day, all day, all the time.

So, you've got a bass player who's a frustrated guitar player (he's allowed to talk about guitar stuff because the guitar players feel sorry for him, because he couldn't cut it as a guitar player, and as long as he's not

interrupting the "guitar discussion flow," guitarists will put up with him.), his tech, who played guitar in a million bands, the FOH mixer guy who used to play guitar but now mixes all the guitar players in the world, the monitor engineer who worked at a guitar shop in the '80s, the artist's manager who thinks the band NEEDS more guitar players, the truck driver who just got a "tele" signed by Joe

Bonamassa (who cares?), the merch guy who has a solo acoustic "instrumental" record he's trying to hock, the agent who shows up at the gig and starts to tell everybody how awesome Jeff Beck sounded the other night, etc.

THERE IS NO RELIEF FROM GUITAR DRIVEL.

I can't commiserate with anybody about percussive toys, Keith Carlock, or my new Pork Pie kit that's about to be completed any day now, nobody cares.

I had Eric Holland, from Swan Percussion, bring me an amazing new instrument (the Blackswan drum) to my Lucinda Williams gig in Austin. This is a mind blowing one-of-a-kind instrument and I wanted to "gab" about it for days after I got it. No one would hear me. They turned a deaf ear to my technical/mechanical/creative excitement. It is the bane of our existence.

Sorry, had to vent. But this ties into my two-drummer diatribe.

If the tables were turned and a four-piece band was comprised of two drummers, a singer, and only one lonely guitar player, would the drummers ignore the guitar player?

Of course they would! Human nature is human nature. It's not fair but I don't blame them for being excited about their instrument. I appreciate their passion. But throw me a bone once in a while!



I bring all this up to emphasize the importance of getting together with other drummers. We don't work together, like guitar players do, because there IS only one drummer in a band or on a session. Once in a while you'll do a gig and you run into another drummer, but playing together is another animal. Some of the best playing I've ever done is with another drummer. My Advice: *seek out other*

drummers and get together and "play," emphasis on the word PLAY. Ultimately that's why we do what we do: it's fun. Artists and athletes are the only people that get to use PLAY as a descriptive word for their labor, don't forget how fortunate we are.



When a student comes in they want to learn the latest cool song or lick that they just heard. This is common, and the way we all caught “the bug” to devote our lives to drumming. I help dissect and coach the student to master the musical excerpt in amongst rudiments, posture, accents, rebounds, breathing, hand positions, grips, dynamics, etc. I dedicate a portion of the lesson to:

1. Learning The Part, Verbatim.

Taking the musical excerpt, song or part, and listening closely to decipher what the drummer is doing on the recording. Many times I will have the part written out, but mostly I like us to listen together and play the part back and forth until we’ve got it down. It’s a give and take. I think the student needs to learn how to listen, so I try to let them “discover” the part. Then the student plays along copying the part on the recording. (Listen to excerpt #1)

#2. Playing “Off” Of The Part.

Here’s where the Two, Who Play Drums concept is implemented. I tell the student that this exercise is to adopt the role of the accompanist. The drummer on the recording is playing the “lead” part, and now your job is to play a supportive role. Pretend you’re playing in the band with this cat and his part is the main part. He’s the foundation on this track and you’re now going to be tasteful and lay down a part/groove against what he’s doing—making it feel good, making it fit together like two well-oiled machine parts.

This is a great exercise to do with another drummer or alone. Take turns reversing the roles. One time you’re the “lead,” the next time you’re the “foundation.” (Listen to excerpt #2)

#3. Playing On Top Of The Part, “Soloing.”

Now here’s the final part of the exercise. The student is now asked to play along with the track and be a soloist. Think of the drummer on the track as a rhythm guitar player and now you will embellish/solo on top of this track. I let the student take it as far out as they want and then we discuss. Did you stay in time? Were the



dynamics appropriate? Did you take the song to an appropriate place or did you just shit all over it? Is this something that you’d present to an audience? What were you thinking and trying to achieve? Were you listening to the other drummer? Did you play off of the other drummer? Did you go freeform or did you follow the song structure? Grade your performance for me. (Listen to excerpt #3)

Then, to end our session/lesson, we’ll do a two-drummer freeform jam. Sometimes I’ll start, or maybe I’ll let the student start. It can be a groove, a lick, an out of time cacophonous explosion, a slow dirge, a fast simmering soca, etc. We take it where it wants to go. Free. No limits, no criticisms.

There is nothing that can simulate Two, Who Play Drums. The visceral feeling of locking with another drummer or percussionist is unexplainable.

DO IT. SEARCH IT OUT. EXPLORE.
EXPAND. SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE.
SHUT UP AND LISTEN. LEARN FROM
OTHERS.

Exercises #1 - #3.

I am playing to the new Paul Simon track “The Afterlife” from the album So Beautiful Or So What. It was recorded in my drum studio, at home. I’m playing along with the track from my iPod, through my PA system. It is recording directly, with two stereo microphones in the room, into a CD recorder. No overdubbing or other effects. You may notice the minute lag in time (the drum set is across the room from the mic’s). It’s obviously dodgy, but it demonstrates the exercise. *



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