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# **TERRY BOZZIO**



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An album that blew my mind and affected my direction was *A Farewell to Kings* by Rush. I ordered it at age 16 through Columbia House with a batch of other LP's. I didn't have much stereo equipment; certainly did not have a good stereo; so I took car speakers, wired them up to my receiver, and used them as headphones to listen in on this record after I heard it through my 'not so hot' stereo.

This recording helped me understand my calling on the drums. It convinced me that it was okay to play a kit with lots of tones and sounds, and to use those percussion instruments from the school orchestra in music that rocked. It was the most 'new' thing I'd ever heard. This experience helped me understand that the few other drummers in school that told me I should play a small kit because it was groovier to do so, could go now die in a propane fire for all I cared. Neil's drumming shed light on what a person is supposed to do with gifts and talents they are given: do some work and develop it!

From beginning to end, *A Farewell to Kings* is instructive, showing that a drummer can not play so much (as is heard in "Madrigal"), play funky (as is in "Cinderella Man") and play in an absolutely psycho, creative bombastic way (as in "Cygnus X-1").

God bless those Rush guys for creating from the heart and most likely not listening to critics tell them to play simpler. By the standards of progressive music today, their music was simple; it made sense too. The time changing was just too much for those who couldn't deal



with it, and just perfect for some great friends and me who 'knew' we were listening to something special.

I practiced more than ever after hearing this record, and I'll always listen to it remembering where I come from. I will never, ever be 'better' than Neil Peart, no matter what my limbs end up being able to play. After all, if the things that I play are still derivatives of Neil's and several other drummers, and if a derivative is never 'greater' than the prime (because it would not exist as it is without it), then I'll always be humbled by the existence of *A Farewell to Kings*.

## Butch Norton (Lucinda Williams, Buick 6) on Herb Alpert & Lou Rawls

The Beatles on Ed Sullivan were the impetus for me (and most of us drummers in the early '60s) to play the drum set. But the only music that I had access to was my mom and dad's record collection. They had a decent RCA stereo system with four speakers. I could set up my brand new metal shelled bass drum with two metal toms attached at '10 and 2 o'clock' with the faux piece of wood that had a space gauged out of it to look like a wood block (it didn't make any sound), and a 10" round metal disc with three rivets in it to approximate a cymbal in between the toms, in the living room in front of the stereo. This kit came with a wood beater-spring activated bass-drum pedal and a front head with a photo of four white teens in tuxedos rockin' out!

The first two records that I remember flogging away to were Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass *Whipped Cream And Other Delights*, and Lou Rawls *Carryin' On*. This was around 1966.

The Tijuana Brass album was great for three specific reasons:

#1. The production was clean and crystal clear and I could distinguish every note/beat of Hal Blaine's drum kit from the other instruments, which made it easier to try and copy the drum parts.

#2. This record covered a wide variety of styles: marimba band, samba, Spanish ballad, show style, groovy stripper ragtime, pop, traditional Italian, polka, all very cinematic instrumental music with concise exact arrangements.

#3. The most important reason, for my young mind, was the seductive cover of the album. I would stare at it constantly, imagining what this beautiful exotic woman looked like underneath this mountain of cream that she playfully sat in.

The Lou Rawls album was a complete opposite of the Herb Alpert record. It was super soul, blues, gospel

and jazz all wrapped in this amazing baritone voice Lou had—it just brought you into the tunes. This was "players playin'". I still haven't found out who played on this record, and, unfortunately, it hasn't been re-released by Capitol on CD yet. His version of "On Broadway" is sick and the band is swinging, grooving, and killing. It was very sultry and thick, and ten years before the "smash" George Benson cover.

I'll never forget my mom taking me to the Venetian Room at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, when I was a few years older to see Lou Rawls in person. It was an old-school-dinner club setup and we sat two tables back. I was straining my neck all night just glued to the drummer, and of course Mr. Rawls who was so smooth and elegant. This was five or six years before he hit it big with "You'll Never Find" and all those other great '70s Philly hits he had.



Photo: Richard Pierce