

[Main Menu](#) | [Bruford Clinic 1993](#) | [Bruford Interview 2002](#) | [Wertico Clinic 1998](#) | [Ginger Baker](#) | [Neil Peart #1](#) | [Z'EV 2007](#) | [René Creemers](#) | [Fritz Hauser](#) | [Andrea Centazzo](#)

Paul Wertico is a lesson in counterpoint. For 18 years he was the pulse behind the **Pat Metheny Group**, spinning out rhythms on his signature dual flat rides. Metheny's highly melodic sound covered a lot of different styles. Paul also is well known for his jazz playing in the celebrated **Union Trio** and with vocalist **Kurt Elling**. Paul's own trio plays a highly charged fusion of styles, while his playing with **Ear Wax Control** reached the outer fringes of experimentation and free playing. If that isn't enough, Paul is also the current drummer for the legendary Polish hard rock trio, **SBB**.

Easy going, and with a likable personality, Paul loves to communicate his music and ideas with others. At times he is highly focused, explaining minute details of techniques, while at others, he exhibits a child-like abandon, taking off on a tangent, exploring ideas in the moment. He can truly be a kid in a candy store.

I've seen Paul give 8 or 9 clinics over the years and each one was completely different. This is a transcription of a clinic Paul gave where he was in an extremely playful, yet articulate mood. I invite you to come along and experience...

# Paul Wertico's Musical Language

**Milwaukee Drum Expo  
November 14, 1998**

**Text & Images - Michael Bettine**



How are you all doing? It's always fun to do clinics. John put a twist on things and asked me to do African hand drum techniques. Since I'm Polish and Lithuanian I said, "Yeah, I can do that." A lot of times I give out hand outs and go through a bunch of technical stuff. But I'm just going to play. I brought along some weird stuff with me too. I'm intentionally using a smaller drum set [DW - 10/12/14" toms, 22" BD, 6 1/2X12" snare, Paiste cymbals - 14" Traditional HH, 18" Traditional Thin Crash, 20" Traditional Light Ride, 20" Signature Flat Ride] than you might usually see me play. Because when you have a smaller kit it makes you focus in, instead of having all that stuff to hit. I did a gig the other day where it was just a bass drum, snare, and ride cymbal. And then I brought some other stuff that we'll talk about. I'll kinda pull it out as we go along. So if you don't mind, let me just play a drum solo. I'll kinda make up something. OK?

*[Plays a long solo covering a wide range of techniques and dynamics. Uses sticks and hands.]*

Thanks. If you guys aren't awake now, at least I am. It's funny, to play up here, because I have a 3 year old daughter and it's kinda hard to play at home. You don't mind if I just play and make it up as I go along? It's funny, I do a lot of recording stuff in Chicago and I get called for some really weird stuff once in a while. I just did a date - did you ever play with one of these things? *[Takes out a 10 gallon plastic water cooler bottle]* I did this *[Covers his drums with a white blanket]* at the Modern Drummer Festival and one other time in New York with an African band. The acoustics were so terrible in the room that I just threw a blanket over the drum set. I loved the way it sounds.



Have you guys seen these Tubz yet? (these are Paul's red plastic tube beaters that are sold by Pro-Mark. He has a standard pair and a pair with tambourine jingles attached.) I get called to do a lot of sounds and don't always bring a big drum set. I play great instruments like DW, Paiste, Evans, Pro-Mark, etc, but I did the the Al Frankin *Late Line Show* (in Chicago) and I just played on cardboard boxes with Tubz and used heads that were detuned. It's really fun because as musicians we get to do what ever we want and as drummers it sounds kind of interesting.

*[Plays his covered drum set (with water bottle in place of the snare) with Tubz and Meinl Birds shaker pods.]*

So as you can probably tell, I just sort of make this stuff up. It's a lot of fun, especially when stuff falls apart.

**Question: Have you ever thought about using deer antlers (as a beater)?**

Oh yeah, I use that stuff. I've got some weird stuff I'll pull out later. The first record I did was an African record using chop sticks on bongos for the snare drum. Really anything goes. Knitting needles - I love knitting needles. I don't know how to knit, it would probably come in handy on the road, with all the time I spend on the road. They make a really beautiful sound. Here's a really cool sound. *[Plays set with 2 metal beaters from an electric mixer. Spins them on the rims and heads.]* Can't go on forever, I don't want to bore you guys with just a bunch of stuff. But to me, I've always kind of made up my own drum set, built things, and it's part of the fun of playing.

How many of you were at (Paiste rep) Ed Clift's fine clinic this morning? He was talking about finding your own style and finding who you are. Some people are kind of born with their own take on things and some people try to find it, and some people are happy just to sound like other people. We're all individuals, so whatever works for you. I was always kind of crazy and just sort of made up stuff. I looked at what other players did, but instead of trying to copy, I tried to figure out what this did to the music. So I came up with my own vocabulary. Some

people love to play with me, some people probably don't. At least I know where I'm at, and that was always my goal.

It's great to have all these instruments, but to me, when I was growing up, I would just play on a snare drum with the lights off for like three hours and just try to figure out what I could get out of the snare drum, what I could get out of a tom-tom, a cymbal. There's so many sounds you can get that are fun.

There's a real cool record called **Bang!**, that got 4 1/2 stars in Modern Drummer, that's me and another drummer (Gregg Bendian) just improvising. But it's all prepared drum set. What I mean by that; with prepared piano in Classical music they put clothes pins and paper clips on piano strings to get all these sounds. You can do the same thing with drums [*plays a bit on toms with small cymbals . . . (Tibetan tingshaws?) rattling on heads and rims*] . . . stuff like that. And it's fun. Sometimes accidental sounds are real interesting [*rubs small cymbals on cymbals, heads, each other. Lays them on head and hits them with sticks*] So I may go on for a long time with that, but I might get into a daze. In doing stuff like this, you just find out cool stuff that works.

[*Plays more, hits his finger with a stick. Experiments with sounds. Lays bird rattles on cymbals and heads. Hits drums & cymbals with rattles.*]

And the thing is, especially with drum set, a combination of great instruments like the stuff up here and real garbage, it's really fun to do that. My wife and I have lived together for years and she can't cook supper because I keep all this junk. Once in a blue moon I'll get a call for something and "That's what I've been looking for." I can't even recognize it anymore but it makes the right sound, then probably breaks. All music is just sound and communication with the other musicians, with the audience hopefully, and there's this sort of internal thing where the really good musicians have to get something out with what we do.

When I was young, I talked to a friend of mine who put up with me in high school and college, and she would tell me stories that would scare the hell out of me. Like we would be driving, I would hear something and I would just pull over, work on rhythms - I just didn't think about anything except music. One time when I had a little house in a suburb of Chicago, I'd get home from these gigs at 3 in the morning in the summertime, with the windows open, and put on Jeff Beck or whatever and start wailing. And like one time my next door neighbor said, "Didn't you hear me knock at 4:30 in the morning?" I said, "No." He said, "Man, you're lucky I didn't kill you." For me, all these things are just passion and for better or worse, I made my career out of discovering things. There's so many guys with technique that can play paradiddles as fast as anything, break up all these linear patterns and play in 19/8, all these great things, and I can sort of do a little bit of all that stuff. But for me, I figured it's my life, and I only have so much time on this planet to do what I do, so my thing is just sort of discovery.

This is a drum set I've never played before, but I did bring a couple of things that would be interesting, but usually I don't even bring those. Usually I talk about snare drum technique, but

they've made me an African drummer today, so I thought I'd bring some stuff that sounds African. Even with Pat Metheny, we play a lot of Brazilian music, I have no idea what I'm doing. I just always listened to music and just figured out what would sound good with it. If anything you walk away with today, is just to have fun playing drums. You've gotta work at it, especially if you're going to be a pro, especially now in this day and age, you have to be really proficient.

But even if you're like just playing one beat, to me if you're a great blues drummer and all you can play is like the 'shuffle from doom,' you're probably going to work. You'll probably get called for a lot of studio work, because a lot of times people who play like a good groove, or play a couple of good grooves are gonna get a lot more work than people that can play one-handed rolls and twirl like they're in a circus act with dancing cats on their shoulders. Because that's kind of absurd for drummers. As far as I'm concerned, I can't even go to drum conventions. For me, drums are like this inner communication. I've always felt like you've got to get out what you've got to get out, but you've got to have fun with it. If music's not fun you might as well be an accountant or something making more money. So if you walk away with anything it's to go home and have fun, just find some stuff in the kitchen and dent it up a little bit.

### Question: What was it like the first time you played with Louis Conte?

He's a great percussionist from L.A., he's originally from Cuba. He's like the first call percussionist in probably pop music, with like Madonna, he was just out with Phil Collins. He's always working. I remember on days off [from the Pat Metheny Group] he would fly back to L. A. and record with Chaka Kahn, Chicago, or what ever. And he's one of those guys who's really a master of all these idioms. When you hear him play a conga it's the most beautiful sound, the most beautiful groove, very creative, he can play anything. For me, playing with someone like that it was a thrill just to hear what he could do. We hit it off.

I always try to tell my students music is like language. I try to take it a step further, "So music's a language, what does that mean?" What I mean is that you're communicating using a different language with other musicians and with people in the audience. So what's the language that you have to learn? Like any other language you have to learn the words, how to make sentences, how to pronounce things, form paragraphs that make sense. Basically that's what music does.

If you're a drummer, this [drum set] is sort of our translator of rhythms, sounds, concepts - it's pretty abstract - in our head, so people out there can tell what I'm thinking. So this is sort of my *Paul-to-earth translator*. The whole thing is that when you start playing you have these visions, these ideas of what to do. But it's like you're a young kid who can't really get your ideas across. I have a young 3 year old girl, and she's brilliant. But she had trouble communicating. Milk was like "bitten," different words that were gorgeous, she could come up with a whole language herself. The same thing applies to drums. The first time you sit down to play it's a blast, and that's something you need to keep in touch with, but if you want to communicate with other musicians they have to understand what you're going to say. So if you're playing like,

"ding ding ding ding," the bass player's going "ding ding ding ding," you have to have enough control to go "ding ding ding." It takes years just to train your muscles to be able to react evenly, so you can go like this at will. Then you start playing your ideas and keep on practicing stuff - hopefully you learn from outside influences too - but the stuff who you are. It's kind of scary, like I said earlier, sitting down at the drum and seeing what sounds you can make. Those sounds are what the audience will come away with, getting the impression of what you're doing.

So Louis is one of those master Ph D in drums, like on many levels. He's such a deep spirit, he knows so much about so many different grooves and they're all fantastic. I've seen some guys that have no technique at all but they're such a deep spirit that it's amazing. That's the beauty of music. In your life you meet a lot of different people and sometimes you can play with really proficient musicians and be bored out of your mind too. It's like you have to find your mate and it's the same in music. You have to find guys you can play with, whether or not anyone else likes to play with them, because half the music that became famous has been people breaking all the rules and say, "Hey , this is what we do."

You know, be-bop or jazz was looked down upon, rock and roll - they're still saying when will rock die, it don't know. Be-bop is a jazz style that came up with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in the 40s and musicians as great as Louis Armstrong called it "Chinese music." He just didn't hear that, like gibberish. And avant-garde came up, there's all these different styles. A lot of it was done by people who said, "I'm just doing this. I don't care about anyone else." It's like a "damn the torpedoes" type of attitude. Sometimes people are lucky, or ahead of their time and get forgotten.

The beauty of playing drum set is that all of us are different. If I had everybody come up here and play the same beat, everybody would have a slightly different take, their sound, their feel, their dynamic level - we're different people. Our density is different. Some guy with a bit of weight will sit down and hit a snare drum, "Bam." and it will tear your head off. Then you get a little guy who might not have that same ability. Or fast, I've always been a little bit fast, or slow. Other people did the groove thing and did well at that. That's the inspiring thing about music and what's kept me in it for all these years. Touring is fun, it's great to see the world, but it gets hard when you have a family. But I wouldn't trade it for anything.

**Question: What's it like playing and touring with Pat Metheny and is there anything coming up next year?**

We're off. We just did 8 months touring and I talked to them yesterday. They're writing new music that we'll probably record in late spring, early summer. And then start touring at the end of next year. I'm really fortunate because that's a high profile gig I've had for 16 years and it's dealing with musicians at this higher plane. They're vision of music is so deep. When I first met Pat and Lyle they could take something, some people just scratch the surface and then move on, these guys have been able to take each little detail and get further and further into it. And my drumming had to do that too. When I got the gig with Pat I thought I knew the music. But there were these little details I had to learn and every time I learned these details there were

like 10 little details inside each detail, like a box that kept on opening up.

So for that music it's like a never ending quest to have fun and just play at that level of musicianship. We play about 3 hours every show and you just go into this dream for 3 hours without a break. And when I come home to Chicago and start playing club dates - there's a lot of great musicians in Chicago, but they're doing club dates and weddings - sometimes you get in the habit of just playing and watching the girls go by. Your concentration gets broken, and when I get home I bring this back home and they get like that. It's been a blessing for me and a lot of other people.

Also I do a lot of other things. I have this album out there called Live In Warsaw with this trio I have with these really great musicians in Chicago. By the way, the guitar player (John Moulder) is a Catholic Priest. He works at a Church. He's a great writer and one of the most passionate guitar players ever, and I've done a couple of records with him and tour.

I've got another band called Union with a really good piano player, Laurence Hobgood and a bass player (Brian Torff). We've got that and Earwax Control, a crazy band. Let me tell you about Earwax Control. Pro-mark puts out these collector edition CDs. The new one's out with Phil Collins, Elvin Jones, me, and a couple of other people. I've got a cut from Earwax Control called *Mein Herr Ball*. We've been together 25 years and when we play we brought whatever we would play - everything is totally improvised - and that's what really kept me going in that direction of fun playing, because we would bring television sets to the gig. There would be a TV out there and the audience would start laughing. There would be like Elvis and would be playing this horrible stuff and it was like one of those bands that was totally fun to do.

Let me tell you the story about *Mein Herr Ball*, it's pretty out there. We were recording in the keyboard player's studio basement and we're playing but the sound kept going out in his P.A.. So there's all these weird breaks, and we're the last thing on the CD, and it just stops because the tape ran out. But it's all this guttural, the bass player is making these horrible sounds and when we listened back we thought it sounded like a cat that's got a hair ball, because the whole time there's all this choking, and at the end it's like the cat suddenly got happy and then ran out and got hit by a car. So we called it *Mein Herr* - like the German - *Ball*. We always had fun in that band.

The other thing is this drum duo called **Bang!** That's another thing that was totally improvised with prepared drum set. The other drummer (Gregg Bendian) is a player from New York. One time I went to hear him and we met, we talked, and he said, "Let's get together and play." I taped it and it came out great so we decided to put this record out. It's got great reviews.

So in my life I've been real fortunate to hook up with those kind of people. It really comes from just having a lot of fun playing music. I hope that all you guys, when you study or play, really have fun. Because even a wedding - the other day my wife, who is a musician, we thought she had pneumonia, and she had this gig where she was playing auxiliary keyboard at a wedding.

But she couldn't go. It was the day before and the guy who hired her said, "I don't care, I need a ninth person on the stage. Paul, would you play Latin percussion?" I said, "OK, I'd go." I don't have a tuxedo, but I went anyway and I had a blast. They were playing polkas - the whole thing is just to get the dance floor moving and having a good time. That's what music's about, beside the artistic cover of Modern Drummer stuff that everyone gets into.

Sometimes we look at people and think they're so hip, they have all this cool garb and rhythms, but actually they're playing great rhythms, but they're playing festivals, playing at like fertility rituals, weddings and stuff. Part of being a musician is staying in communication with people and having a great time and making other people feel happy, because that's what we're doing; communicating these positive vibes through sound and for some reason human beings can pick up on what we do. Does that make sense?



**Question: Do you ever have any nights when it doesn't seem to come together? And if so, what do you do about it?**

You know, I don't any more. I used to have them all the time. One thing I figured out is that sometimes I would have a great night for me, I'm flying and playing all this stuff, and I'd get off the stage and no one would say anything. I'd think, "You're not hip," or whatever. And then sometimes I'd have a really terrible gig, and I wasn't really feeling that good, so I really had to make it through the gig, listen harder, zero in on the music. At the end of the set or end of the night, almost without fail, people would say, "Man, you sounded great tonight." Wow, I'm thinking it was horrible! But then I went "ding!" I was listening, I was playing with the other musicians, doing something that a lot of times drummers with the best intentions, are practicing and let your chops get the best of you, get too ahead of the music. Maybe when I was feeling really good I was pushing the music too much, maybe not leaving enough space. So now I've taken those things and even if I'm having a bad night, I feel off or I'm sick, I'll make it a

good night by taking a step back and focusing on the music.

Because the music, in its ideal form, is like a utopia. 3 or 5 people getting together to be better than each guy individually, it's like the power of all those people together. Like any country or religion is supposed to be. It's supposed to be where everybody is working together to make everyone sound good for the benefit of everyone. So to me, that's the most fun about playing. Now when I practice - I don't practice as much as I used to - I kind of know how to practice too. I'm not practicing stuff, it's like when you're young and get a drum book and there's like 20 exercises on the drum. I was one of those guys too, you want to learn all 20 exercises so you can go on to page 2. You play the 1st beat. . . got that, you know, and it was horrible. I didn't have any idea what I was doing. So now when I play I really just try to get back, look at things, try to get the groove going, understand what I'm doing even before I go to exercise 2. Maybe I won't even go to exercise 2. So what I'm doing there is trying to fine hone my craft and art so that I can benefit everybody else. It's really terrible to play with a drummer who's playing a bunch of stuff that sounds terrible.

And I think that happens a lot in all phases. And bass players who play all these fast stuff and their intonation is out to lunch, he's not listening to what's going on. Guitar players that play too loud, sax players that play long solos over the rhythm section and have nothing to say, but keep saying it forever and ever. It's just stuff like that.

I think that once a musician gets to a certain level they feel happy just to be having a good time. I've gotten to the point now where playing the ride cymbal, "bing-bing-bing-bing," with a good bass player, and you've got a piano player comping off that, that's all it needs. I don't have to hit a snare drum if I don't want to. And that's a really great feeling to get to, but it takes years to get to that level. Because a lot of times you'll have a bad night and start playing more. It's like [*slowly*] "do-do-BA-do." Well that doesn't feel very good so you go [*faster*] "do-do-do-do-BA-do-do-do." And before you know it you're going [*very fast*] "do-do-do-do- . . ." It starts sounding like crap. You just really have to practice with that stuff in mind to make your craft, and your art, and your language as clear as possible.

Anyone have problems with their playing . . . problems with their lives . . . problems with their car? Anything?

### Question: How often do you practice everyday?

You know, what I do now is play so much that I don't really practice much at all anymore. But I work out, I mentally stay in touch, I listen a lot, and I do a lot of stretching exercise and strengthening exercises to keep my body in good shape. Because sometimes if you play all the time, it's really nice to get away from all of it. Too much of a good thing sometimes, you know?

If I haven't played for a couple of weeks I really get anxious to play. So that's what I've been doing. But I never try to get out of the music. Even when you play music on stage - did you

ever see horn players, when they finish a solo they sit down and smoke a cigarette, talk to people. They are outside the music and they should stay in the music. I try to do that with my whole life, try to stay with the general flow of what's going on. And I have a 3 year old daughter - in fact *Live In Warsaw* has a drawing by her when she was 1, and my wife's got perfect pitch, and I've got pretty good pitch too, and my daughter's always sitting on this amazing stuff. So I kind of almost like practice just playing with her. Because music can't come from a vacuum. If someone's got nothing to say but all this technique, it's basically just like talking garbage and using a lot of words no one understands. And it doesn't make any sense to anybody. In your life if you can find the things that balance your life, then when you sit down at that drum set, instrument, whatever, you're going to have something to play, something that just comes out naturally. So I kind of stay with that flow.

That's why kids are so much fun. My daughter, I've already stolen 5 licks from her! Because the way she hits a cymbal - she did something with a brush, you usually don't cross a brush like that . . . but she was doing it and it sounded great. So I stole that from her. She did this cowbell thing . . . there's this little rattler in there and she put it on the floor tom, I was playing the bass drum and hi-hat, and she was doing this wild stuff. Gregg Bendian, the other drummer on *Bang!*, we went over to his house one time and she sat down at the vibes. She did this thing where she wasn't just hitting the vibes with the ball, she was hitting it with the ball and like a rim shot. So she was getting this great 'click'. I've also got these chimes at home and she was doing this at like 7 months . . . she'd go like this and then hit them. So I've taken all these things from her because it's so natural. And I'm thinking, "God, this is the way she's looking at this, naturally, she doesn't have to take lessons to learn the proper way to play drums.?"

There's so many ways to play the drums. One reason I might sound a little different than other people, it's not just the rhythms I'm playing. It has to do with how I hold the sticks. A lot of people hold the sticks with all their fingers, kind of tight, where you do this [shows a tight grip with fingers wrapped around the stick]. So when you hold all your fingers on the stick it's a great sound, it sounds real nice and gives you a sort of articulation on the cymbals and the drums, but it also kind of deadens the drum and changes the overtone series. I always play really loose. I can't play like this. So my sound is going to be different. Let me demonstrate. On a snare drum if I play with all fingers [*plays snare*], or like this if I play loose [*plays snare*]. Can you tell? Hopefully you can. [*plays again*] Boo-boo-boo. . . ba-ba-ba, hear that? It's like a different pitch. [There is a slight difference between the tone - dark/light]

Same with the ride cymbal. I think in terms of circles and rolling when I play. On a ride cymbal if you're playing with all fingers you get this [*plays*]. The way I play is [*plays*]. Do you hear the difference in sound? So that's one reason I sound different than someone who studied with a different teacher. I'm self taught basically. But I don't use that (grip) for everything. For certain things having your fingers sounds better. If you're doing a tight funk thing [*plays a funk pattern*] it's going to sound better. It's going to articulate a little bit better. That's one of the things I do.

There's where I hit the drums. How you hit a drum and where you hit it is gonna change the sort of message you'll have to the audience and other people listening. If you hit a drum and you don't care where you're hitting it on the head, you're going to get a bunch of different sounds [*plays tom on different areas of the head*]. If I'm playing jazz or Latin then I want to utilize that. But if I'm playing a rock gig it might not project, because the further out from the center I get the overtone series comes into play, the attack's not as full, as meaty. . . so if I'm playing rock I have to make sure to just hit the center. Musically, after all these years of playing, I sort of know what's going to work for certain types of music and I use the drums as my translator and I know they know a lot more words than some people give them credit for.

You know, a lot of people just have double basses and all this great stuff, and it's great if you just play this tom is this pitch, and that tom is that pitch, it's kind of cheating the instrument. Because good drums, like these DWs, there's so much music that you can go on for ever. So you experiment and practice, and try to get into the history of what you're playing. Find out everything they have to say - really broaden your vocabulary. [*plays a samba type beat with cymbal bell and toms*] It utilizes pitches, the overtone series, you know when you hit a drum harder [*plays increasing volume on a tom*], it's not just the volume and velocity, but the pitch changes. The drum gets tighter because the head is stretching more, so you can actually have one tom tom and play a bunch of cool stuff.

And that's the thing when you start thinking of music as language. I always try to tell people wherever they play, they're basically breaking silence. Just like nothing's happening and then all of a sudden you've got [*hits cymbal*] that sound. It could be like the most important thing, the biggest event coming out of the silence. So you have to make sure what you're doing is worth listening to.

So back to how I sound different than someone else sounds. I use a lot of dynamics. If you're playing pop music you want everything to be pretty straight ahead. Louder and softer, but not in a big way. The music that I play, and with Pat Metheny, every phrase goes up and down in dynamics. Everything is always moving forward and gets this 3 dimensional quality. So even though the rhythms might be the same, it's going to have a different melody, it's going to have a different circular form. The other thing is how you play the snare drum. Western players, fusion players, we have the tendency to play the snare up and down. [*plays snare*] It makes sense and sounds cool. But it's like hammering a nail. That's great for playing a beat that's real tight, but if you're going to play a beat that swings, if you go side to side [*plays with a more circular motion*] you get a completely different language happening. So for 2 beats you get 2 sounds. With 4 beats you get 4 sounds. That applies a lot of ways to playing drums. If you're doing a fusion thing and you want to do like a snare drum "rat-a-tat-tat," if you play straight ahead [*plays on snare with one sound*]. I would go [*plays again changing the sound*], that sort of stuff. It just gives it a more shimmer, round sound. Here again, it's not for everybody, but that's what I really like.

Another thing is playing into the drum. We're always taught to come off the drum [*plays snare*]. But I like to play [*plays into the head with buzzes and muffled hits*]. Then plays with a

*combination*]. So that gives you a whole different attention, a whole different meaning. That's sort of what I hear so that's my message to the folks. Does that make sense?

### Question: How are you doing, in your solo, a single handed roll?

The easiest way to do it, now everyone is going to be doing one handed rolls, it's kind of a Latin technique. You get this [plays a roll on snare doing what Johnny Rabb would later make famous as the *Freehand Technique*]. So what you're doing is going back like this [plays butt end of stick down past rim. . .] and you get this thing going like this [brings it up with tip going down towards head]. So you get 2 things from 1. That's basically what it is. You can put accents in there. It's a nice thing, I can do it left handed too, but it's easier with my right because I'm right handed. That's all that is, but I'm not trying to use that as a trick. A lot of times I do it and no one asks, and I'm glad. To me, that's just another technique if I want to do a bunch of stuff with this hand and have this sort of wall of sound going on.

There's so many different techniques that you can use on drum set and all of them are right. When I grew up the Beatles were just coming out and people were always busting Ringo because he didn't know how to play because he played matched grip. That meant everyone was playing traditional grip. Now, most people play matched grip, go figure. So there's really no right or wrong way. If it sounds good and you don't hurt anybody else, or yourself, then it's OK. That's the way I look at it.

And you've got to have good instruments because if you have bad sounding instruments and try playing in a regular band, try to play with a band that's trying to sound beautiful, it's like talking in an ugly voice. It's going to make everything sound ugly. If you have cymbals with horrible overtones, or real dead, or they're real trashy; or if your drums just go *pfffft*, like that. For some music it's gonna be cool. I remember hearing this drummer, Kansas City Red, I went to hear him play in this blues band because I heard he's real interesting. He had this really funky red set of drums, like from Sears & Roebuck. He had 2 tom toms but they were facing out so he couldn't hit them. The cymbals were broken, the hi-hat was broken, the snare had no snares on it, and he couldn't play. But man, he played the greatest grooves. He was doing like a weird shuffle beat and he sang too.

For Blues music, and traditional Blues where a guy's playing guitars with 3 strings and stuff, it really sounds great. I think of Blues . . . [Plays heavy shuffle with bass drum on all 4]. . . that's all it is. It rocked the house. He probably couldn't go "da-da-da-da" to save his life. So he just broke it up. I was sold.

A long time ago I played in a steel drum band, *Magnetic Monster* it was called. I didn't want to use a really good set of drums, because the whole thing was sort of this poor island sound. I found these really old drums and put cardboard underneath the heads - they sounded horrible. They sounded great with that particular thing. So to me it's knowing when to sound good and when to sound bad. You have to be able to sound good on most gigs, so the kind of drums and

cymbals you have really matter. Because if you're playing drums that don't sound good and you're playing in a band that is trying to sound good, they're going to bust you. They'll find a drummer who has good drums. And the same thing goes for cymbals. I use a lot of cymbals with Pat, sometimes I'll just use a few cymbals. There again it's a choice that I'll make. If I'm playing sort of a rock band or a be-bop band, I want a washy cymbal [*plays on his kit and 20" Traditional Light Ride*] Because I want that wash. But with Pat Metheny I use the flat rides. Because it's pretty crystalline sounding, and there's a lot of detail, a lot of 16th notes, a lot of sounds. So if I play a lot of fast stuff I'd rather play a flat ride because it stays out of the way. [*Plays on his kit and 20" Signature Flat Ride*] You can hear everything a lot better. So to me, especially if you're starting out, if you have - your parents are going to hate me - if you can afford to buy good sounding instruments then they'll get an appreciation for what does sound good. You don't want to play something bad. And it doesn't necessarily have to be expensive, but an instrument like this is just going to sound good. That's the advantage. So if you're playing with a garage band, or your high school jazz band, you could even use these drums in a bunch of different circumstances and you'll sound better than playing garbage.

### Question: How long have you been playing?

Man, too long! I started when I was 12, and I'm 45. So that's a long time. You do the math. And I'm still working on simple stuff. That's the funny thing, because when I grew up, since I was self taught, I just put on records and kinda wailed and had a blast. I had to go back and work on my time, work on coordination facility - try to get everything in line - so now when I practice I'm not practicing some ridiculously hard stuff. I might just groove, I'll put on an Al Green record or something and play with that, and make sure that everything's functioning.

### Question: When you started at 12 what was your practice schedule?

Practice schedule? Man, you're talking to the wrong guy. I joined the grade school band, so I learned snare drum, learned how to read, but, like any kid I just practiced as much as I wanted to. I was lucky, my parents wanted me to play an instrument, except the drums, and I could just kind of play them. Does that make sense? It's like by a year or two I was already the head of the percussion department. I had friends who had played since they were 8. It was just weird, I don't know why, but it was just that kind of thing.

So I started practicing more I think later on. But again, I was practicing weird stuff, just put on AM radio and wail. Put on the Hollies or something. And it took me a long time to get that. Bobby Elliot, the Hollies drummer is really good, and I should learn what he does as well as all this other stuff. But that's where all that came from.

It's not so much how you practice, but what you get out of it. You can really waste a lot of time playing the same stuff and not learning anything, or practicing wrong. That's back to the book and learning all 20 exercises on one page. If you just practice 8 hours a day and learn everything wrong, you just develop a bunch of bad habits and you have to switch down the road. So anybody, if you practice a half hour a day and really focus, listen to your time, your

sound, make sure your getting better every day. That's a lot more valuable than just playing 4 hours and wasting your time. So it's really important to get everything out of life. Anything's like that. If you study a book - did you ever read a book and not remember anything that was in there, because the television was going on? It's like you've got to focus on what you're doing, because you can always do something else later. Take things as they come.

**Question: If you're playing more of a rock gig, will you use a brighter set of cymbals?**

Like Ed Clift was saying before, Paiste makes a lot of different types of cymbals, some sound great for jazz, some for studio, some for heavy metal, so I bring a bunch of different cymbals according to what the gig requires. To me, these Traditional cymbals sound really good in the studio playing rock. I did some record dates where it almost sounds like Steve Gadd's cymbals, with a dirtier sound, which is really cool. I don't know if you'd want to play a heavy metal gig with these because you might crack them.

**Question: I saw you a year ago and your drum sticks seem to be a little longer.**

I've got my own signature drum stick, Pro-Mark makes them, and they're kinda big. Are they longer? No. I hold the sticks way back here though. The difference why I use those as opposed to what I used today is that Pat's gig depends a lot on cymbals and a lot on the flat rides. There again it a choice of knowing what sound you want. So if I use the sticks I'm using today, the ride cymbal sounds like this [*plays washy ride*]. If I use my sticks it sounds like this [*plays a more defined ride*]. It's a bigger sound. So people think I'm playing small sticks because I'm playing all around the kit. They're not heavy, they're bigger with a ball on the end and they get that sound. We do a lot of stuff, like *caxixi*, the basket things Brazilians use, a lot stuff we play is based off those kind of rhythms. If I'm playing [*plays fast, intricate ride pattern*] you really need that clarity and that stick sound in there. Plus we play really loud sometimes, from a whisper to a roar, these sticks do all that. When you play soft with them you still get a full sound that projects to the back of the room and if you beat the crap out of the drums they're great. I helped develop them too.

They look longer? Well, some people think I'm bigger too. Some people think I look bigger on stage. So, I don't know. When we play there's sort of an aura, or maybe the lights. I don't know. . .

**Question: Do you use China cymbals?**

I love Chinese cymbals. To me there's a couple of different ways to use them. They're not my favorite to use, they kinda sound 'outside' of the kit to me. So for that 'overdrive' at like 150 DB with double basses, that's what it sounds like to me. But I've got a couple of Chinas that sound real mellow, so if I play around the cymbals, they actually kinda fit in the flow. Because I think in terms of drums and cymbals as sort of almost like a piano a bit - everything's got to fit together. And the way I have these drums tuned, I've been getting into tuning this [10" high

tom] like a timbale, and tuning stuff different, even though it's a set of drums, so it's not just like 3 different pitch toms. They all kinda function at different emotion for me. Cymbals - I think you have to have a whole range of melody in your set of cymbals. So even if you have 2 cymbals, or if you have 30, you don't want ones that are like, "Wow, where is that coming from?" Unless you're really going for that. And Chinas always had that sort of vibe to me, "Wow," outside of the norm.

I'll play a little bit . . .

© 1998 Michael Bettine