



# Zoro & Lenny Kravitz

Making The Mark Of The "Z"

BY ELISA WELCH MULVANEY

**H**EY, THAT'S BOBBY BROWN'S DRUMMER!" exclaimed several enthusiastic fans as Zoro, yes, Zoro, picked his way through the crowd. It was intermission at the concert he'd just played with Lenny Kravitz, opening up for Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers. The fans were partly right. Zoro had been Bobby Brown's drummer until just last year. He had accompanied Brown when the latter graduated from backing the New Edition to fronting his own band a few years back. Evidently, the consecutive positions had gained Zoro quite a lot of recognition.

Especially for a drummer.  
Maybe it was the hat.

"I went to these bullfights in Mexico City with my mom one year, and I bought this sort of Zorro/Spanish hat as a souvenir. I never really meant to wear it, I just put it on my wall. Then I started getting busy in L.A. Every day I'd be rushing off from one

place to the other and my hair would be a mess, so I just started throwing this hat on my head. Pretty soon people started calling me 'Zorro.' When I got the New Edition gig, they thought that was my name, and I just never told them any different.

"When I'd be on tour with New Edition," he continues, "they'd introduce me as 'Zoro.' When the concert would be over, I'd get all these fans coming up and saying, 'Hey, Zoro, you're really great...' They wouldn't remember anybody else's name, even though everybody got introduced. So I figured, 'Well, I'm onto something here...'" In order to distinguish himself from the swashbuckling swordsman, *our* Zoro spells it with one R.

His collaboration with Lenny Kravitz was a long time in the making. The two

had met in 1980 when Zoro, fresh out of high school in Grants Pass, Oregon, first moved to Los Angeles and was looking for musicians his own age. He discovered Lenny playing a guitar recital at Beverly Hills High School. They began jamming frequently, and worked together on numerous studio sessions which Lenny produced.

Lenny was a bit of a musical prodigy, having studied classical percussion techniques in junior high school, and taught himself to play the drum set. He was also fluent on guitar, keyboards, and bass. Zoro had only been playing drums since his senior year of high school. He remembers, "Being a late starter, I realized I needed a quick education in music. I went to Berklee College of Music in Boston around '81 and '82. After Berklee I moved back to Los Angeles and did session work for some Motown acts, and a bunch of different R&B gigs."

Zoro credits Lenny with getting him an audition for the New Edition gig back in 1984. Later, while Zoro was touring with Bobby Brown in support of the latter's highly successful second album (*Don't Be Cruel*, MCA), Lenny was at work on a recording project of his own.

It was his debut album on Virgin Records, *Let Love Rule*, for which Lenny wrote all the music, and played most of the instruments—including all of the drums—himself. His basic 4-piece Gretsch kit and Zildjian K cymbals ("the *old* ones," he stresses) provide the album's earthy grooves.

"I finished up with Bobby Brown in May 1989," says Zoro. "Lenny had been calling me while I was on tour to keep me up to date. In between gigs, whenever I was off, we always did projects together. Finally the time came for us to reunite. He brought me and my wife out to New York to live with him and his wife, and the rest of the band. We all lived together from Day One."

**"The band is allowed to just go up there and jam. . . In my other gigs I wasn't allowed that type of freedom."**

The band—Lenny, Zoro, bass player LeBron Scott (formerly with Curtis Mayfield), guitarist Adam Widoff, saxophonist Karl

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Denson, and keyboardist Kenneth Crouch—rehearsed every day for the whole summer. According to Zoro, they learned Lenny's arrangements note-for-note as a starting point. Then, when they were thoroughly acquainted with the music, they began to open it up with their own interpretations.

The total immersion experience has paid off in the form of artistic emersion. Of 1990's consistently sold-out headlining tour of Europe, Lenny observes, "The whole band is really starting to gel. I don't know if you've heard Zoro lately, but as of just a couple of weeks ago, it shifted into high gear and he's really playing *ridiculously*. You know, it takes time. You have musicians coming from different backgrounds trying to gel into what I'm doing, yet still expressing themselves at the same time. Some people that play all the instruments on their record will have a band play exactly note-for-note. I like the guys to feel as though they're creating as well, or else it would be totally boring and ridiculous."

In transit from Brown to Kravitz, Zoro has altered both his style and his hardware. To drive Brown's funky '80s R&B, he was playing a large kit augmented with lots of

electronic effects. For Kravitz's music, he has gone back to the acoustic basics. "I'm using a nice, simple Premier 4-piece, their Resonator series: 13" mounted tom, 16" floor, 22" bass, and a 5-1/2" brass snare drum. I use Sabian hand-hammered cymbals, Evans heads, Vic Firth sticks—American Classic Rock. And I'm using the Crown SASS mike, with no effects, no anything."

The band performs Lenny's original music almost exclusively, with one notable exception: Jimi Hendrix's "If Six Were Nine." Zoro recalls with amusement, "Lenny just sort of jammed it out in rehearsal one day, and I came up with this groove that was really funky. Lenny goes, 'Yeah, man, that's a cool version of that.' And I was like, 'Cool version of *what?*' 'That Jimi Hendrix tune.' 'Oh, I just thought we were jamming.'"

For Zoro, a high point of the European tour was the band's appearance at the John Lennon Tribute in Liverpool last May. The Kravitz ensemble contributed a rendition of "Cold Turkey," Lennon's opus on the ravages of heroin withdrawal. "Then everyone came out at the end and did 'Imagine' and 'Give Peace A Chance.' It was really wonderful," Zoro remembers. The concert is slated to be aired on worldwide television October 9 (Lennon's birthday). Check your local listings!

**W**hen people began to remember his name Zoro figured, "Well, I'm onto something here. . ."

Zoro is pleased with the opportunity to branch out from electric R&B into the more eclectic, rootsy sounds and attitude of the Kravitz band. "In the '70s and '60s, people were doing a lot more jamming onstage. In the '80s everybody said, 'This is going to be just like this, we'll have the drum machine programmed for this many bars,' or whatever. And that's cool—you need to have your show tight, to a certain degree. But we have a lot of openness, a lot of looseness. The band is allowed to just go up there and jam. And if you make a mistake, no big deal, you know? Lenny takes the attitude that, 'So what if we make one minor mistake? We might have a great 20-minute jam that will never happen again!' In my other gigs I wasn't allowed *that* type of freedom." •