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DRUMMER



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ZORO

Back with Kravitz

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Reliving

A photograph of a man, Zoro, wearing a gold beanie and sunglasses, playing a drum set. The word "SABIAN" is visible in the background. The man is shirtless and wearing a gold chain. The drum set is gold and pink. The background is dark with the word "SABIAN" in large letters.

Zoro is one of the hardest working drummers. Back with his former boss, the 'Z' man is taking his infectious beats to venues around the world

If all drummers were as pro-active as Zoro my life would certainly be a lot easier. Zoro 'the drummer' truly is a well-oiled one-man marketing machine. Hardly a NAMM show or drum event passes without the broad rimmed hat whizzing by shaking hands left, right and centre. E-mail updates arrive on a monthly basis at least. It's enough to put any right-blooded European off completely. Unless you've seen him play, that is...

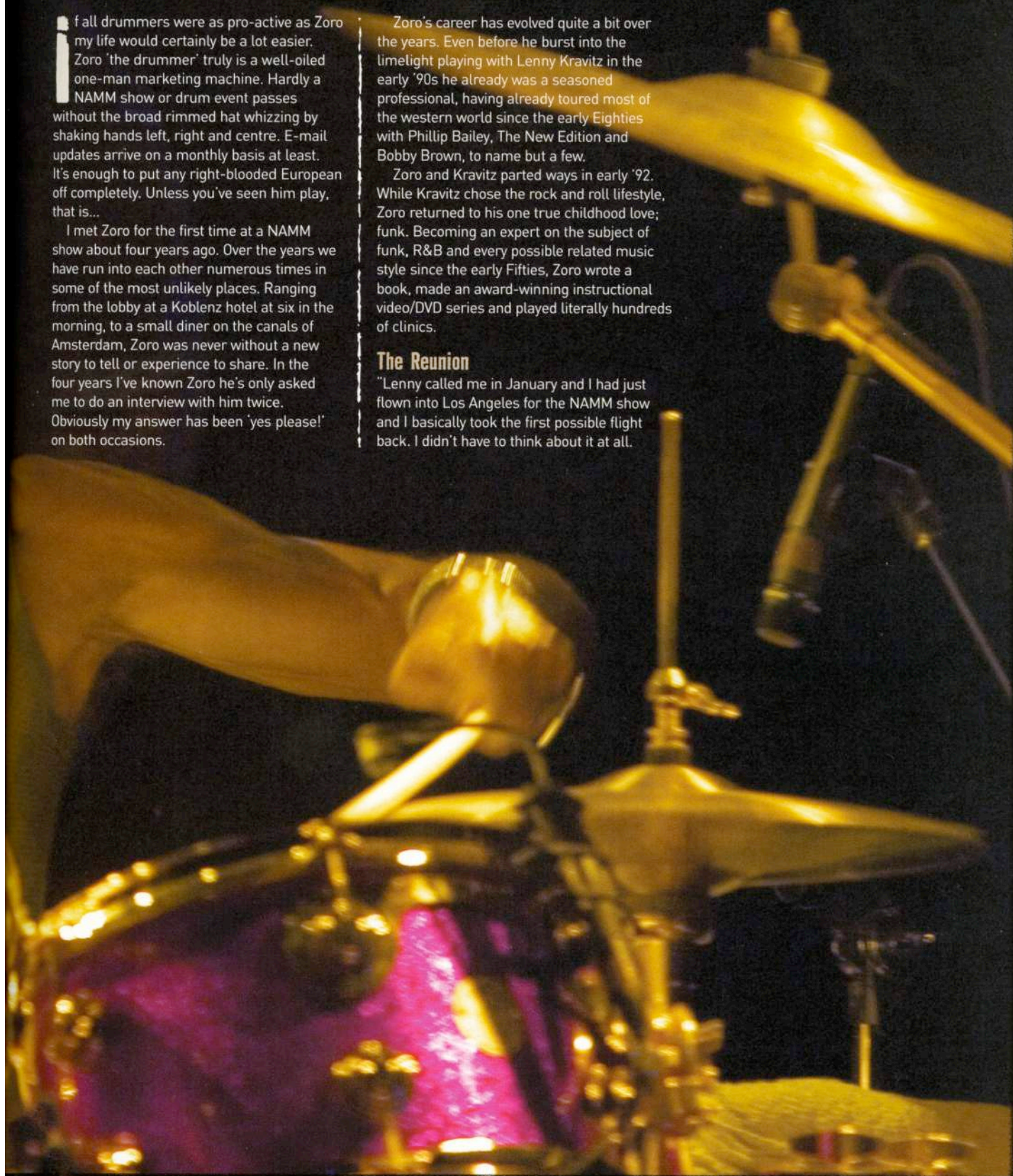
I met Zoro for the first time at a NAMM show about four years ago. Over the years we have run into each other numerous times in some of the most unlikely places. Ranging from the lobby at a Koblenz hotel at six in the morning, to a small diner on the canals of Amsterdam, Zoro was never without a new story to tell or experience to share. In the four years I've known Zoro he's only asked me to do an interview with him twice. Obviously my answer has been 'yes please!' on both occasions.

Zoro's career has evolved quite a bit over the years. Even before he burst into the limelight playing with Lenny Kravitz in the early '90s he already was a seasoned professional, having already toured most of the western world since the early Eighties with Phillip Bailey, The New Edition and Bobby Brown, to name but a few.

Zoro and Kravitz parted ways in early '92. While Kravitz chose the rock and roll lifestyle, Zoro returned to his one true childhood love; funk. Becoming an expert on the subject of funk, R&B and every possible related music style since the early Fifties, Zoro wrote a book, made an award-winning instructional video/DVD series and played literally hundreds of clinics.

The Reunion

"Lenny called me in January and I had just flown into Los Angeles for the NAMM show and I basically took the first possible flight back. I didn't have to think about it at all.





It was like everything I had been working on for the last couple of years suddenly fell into place.

Somehow it was the logical thing, me rejoining Lenny. I have really evolved over the last couple of years, Lenny has really evolved, it seemed almost predestined that we would meet up again. Lenny could have called anyone but apparently, I was the first one that came to his mind."

The Parting

"When I left Lenny in '92 it was at an important stage in my career. I had to make up my mind on what I was going to do. So I did some serious soul-searching and decided to go back to my roots to really make an in-depth study of R&B music. I had of course always played R&B and I'd always put in plenty of time studying, but this time I wanted to go back to the very origin of the music. So what I did to start out with is buy and listen to every R&B album I could get my hands on. Simple as that. I must have listened to hundreds, possibly thousands of records, some dating back to the 1930s. I studied all the grooves and really took the music apart. The way all the parts worked together, everything."

Working It

"It wasn't long until I started incorporating my new knowledge into some of the clinics I did. It really went down very well and more and more people came to my clinics to check out these grooves. Apparently some of these things I was playing were all but forgotten by the drumming community and the knowledge I had of them was pretty unique. That's when I first came up with the idea to put them all in a book. I worked on that anywhere between four and seven years. It was a massive task and I also had to divide my time between being on the road and spending some time with my family. When I finished the book I landed a publishing deal with Warner Brothers, which also led to the making of the three *Commandments of R&B* videos. Both the book and videos were a huge success. I had started my studies to become a better player and have a better understanding of the music but it turned into so much more."

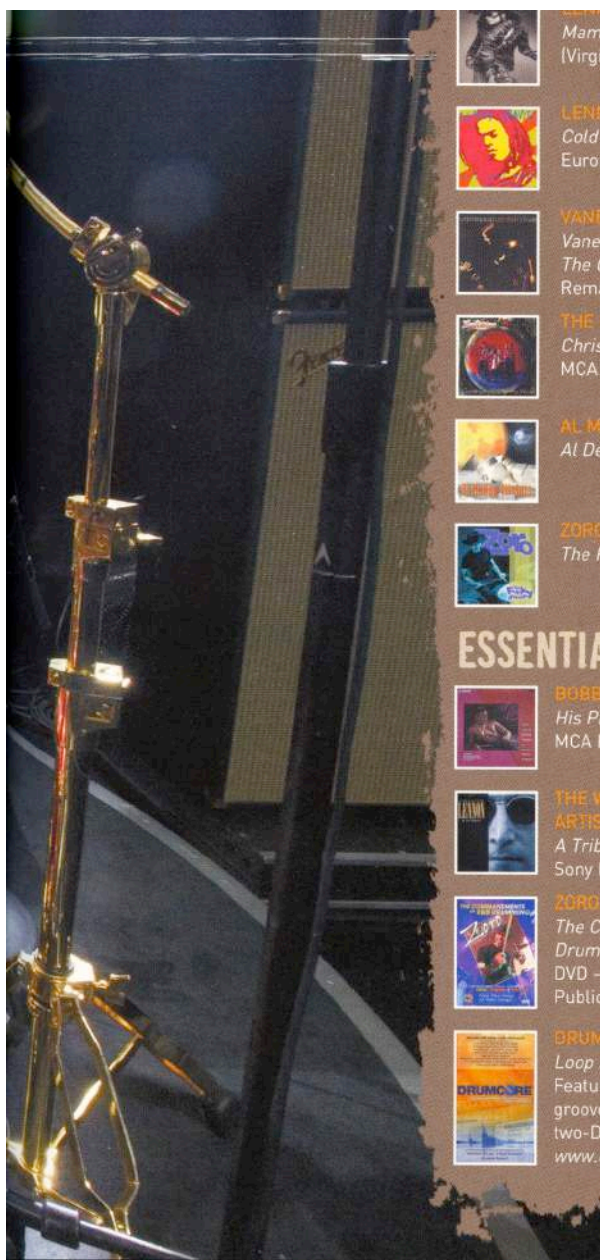
Teaching It

"The success of the book and videos also opened up an entirely new world for me. It was like all of a sudden my career had changed

from being a band-drummer to being a clinician. For the most part of four years I made a living just doing clinics, master classes and teaching. It has been a lot of fun to do and it has been greatly gratifying, but it was getting to a point where I was wondering how I could take my career to the next level. This was around December 2003 and by that time I had decided that 2004 would be the year in which I would take it up a step. 'More for 2004' was my motto. And in the third week of January I got the call from Lenny."

Fixing It

"Lenny had me stay at his house for the entire time we were preparing for this tour. He flew me over to Miami and literally had me work, eat and sleep in his house for three months. Lenny wanted me in the best possible shape before going on the road. He really worked me hard for those three months and it did pay off. He had arranged for a private fitness instructor and he had a chef that put me on a special diet to burn as much fat as possible. I'm in better shape now at age 42 than I was at 18. And I have to be. The shows on this tour average out at two hours each night and Lenny really pushes the



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ZORO
The Commandments of R&B Drumming
DVD - Warner Bros Publications



DRUMCORE
Loop Sample Library
Featuring a multitude of Zoro grooves in a state of the art two-DVD set (Available at www.drumcore.com)

Image: Shaune McDowell

band to the max on stage. When I step down from behind the kit I can literally feel my heart pounding through my chest. So, for the duration of the preparation period, we would spend at least a couple of hours at the gym each day. Then there'd be rehearsals with the band of course and all sorts of things that needed to be arranged before starting out on the tour. We did two video shoots, a couple of TV shows and I had a complete makeover as far as my wardrobe goes. It's pretty interesting to see what it takes to go on the road for two years with a production of this magnitude. And Lenny wants to be involved with everything."

Setting It

"When the time came to think about the stage-setup Lenny wanted to incorporate my drum kit as a part of the overall design, so we talked about what he wanted for a bit and then took the idea over to the guys at DW. Normally I only play a four piece, although I have played bigger kits in the past. For the new tour Lenny wanted something that had a bit more of a 'rock and roll' look to it, so DW made me this very special kit. The kit is a regular DW Collector series in red sparkle lacquer finish,

topped off with 24 karat gold-plated hardware. Every single nut and bolt on this kit is gold plated, down to the tension rods and the bass drum pedals. It's totally outrageous. Apparently the bass drum pedals took them forever because they made them from the regular 5000 series pedal and every part had to be hand cleaned before the plating process. So, for this tour I'm playing a kit with double bass drums, three rack toms and a floor tom. The guys at Sabian also made me this huge gong to add the finishing touch to the classic rock look.

It took me a while to find a set-up I was comfortable with, especially with the second bass drum taking up all that space, but I really like the extra melodic options I have now. It changes things around a bit and makes it all a bit more challenging from a musical point of view. Lenny has even given me a solo spot every night at the end of the song 'Fear', and with this big kit I can do all these Cobham-esque patterns and fills. It really freshens things up a lot."

Playing It

"Playing with Lenny is always a challenge no matter how much time you put in rehearsing.

INTERVIEW ZORO

Images: Shaune McDowell



"In this style of music you have to play with passion. If there's no passion there is no way you're going to captivate the audience's attention for a full two-hour set."

We prepared a huge list of songs for this tour and Lenny builds a set from that. The basic set is pretty much the same every night, but he likes to change some stuff around every now and then and he might even decide to drop a song when he doesn't feel like it. Also there are a lot of small changes in all the songs. Sometimes we'll try something different in sound check and if Lenny likes it we'll keep it, even if it involves turning an entire song inside

out. It's really difficult to remember all these changes when you've been playing songs a certain way for the entire tour. And of course there are times when Lenny will go off on stage and take the song wherever he feels like going. That's when the ears come into play and we all keep our eyes on him."

Coping It

"When I'm learning a new song I rarely sit behind a drum kit. I just really listen to a song very closely and try to focus on all the different parts and transitions. I listen to all instruments individually so I know what the other guys are doing and I really listen to the feel and the groove and the sound of the drums. For this tour, the first time I played most of these songs was during band rehearsals. If I just put on a disc and start playing to it I somehow never really learn the structure or the feel. Usually, I'll end up jamming to the original drum part

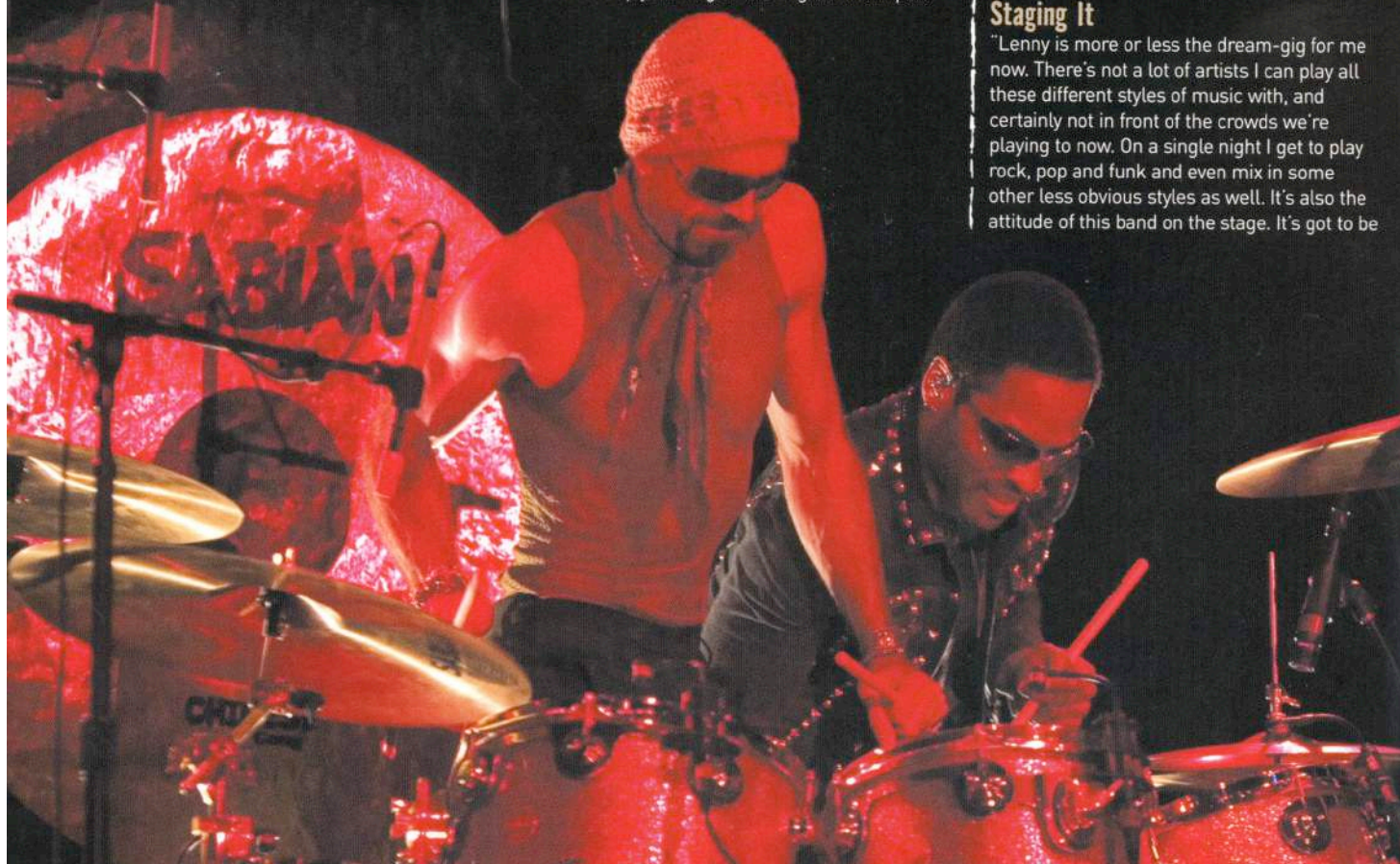
instead of playing the part itself. By just listening it's much easier to really get into the drum part. Lenny always wants everything to be played exactly like it's played on the record. I can come up with parts of my own, but they have to be the exact same feel as on the record. And with Lenny being a drummer as well, there's no way he won't notice if I'm off. Lenny still plays all the parts on his own records and although he is a very capable drummer, he is not a schooled drummer. Sometimes he'll come up with a beat or a pattern no schooled drummer would ever come up with just because the way he plays it feels too awkward to begin with. I've had this happen a couple of times while I was learning the songs. Luckily I've known him since we were both teenagers so I don't feel at all awkward asking about these things. And he doesn't feel weird about it, either. He'll just sit down behind the kit and show me the way he played it. I can then either emulate it or come up with a way that's a bit more comfortable for me to play."

Evolving It

"Musically, Lenny and I have grown a lot closer over the years. Maybe it's because I have grown as a drummer and Lenny has grown both as a songwriter and a performer. It was one of the first things we both noticed when we sat down and played together after all those years. Lenny told me he couldn't believe how much I had evolved over the years. And I feel the same about him. It's like we're much more on the same wavelength this time."

Staging It

"Lenny is more or less the dream-gig for me now. There's not a lot of artists I can play all these different styles of music with, and certainly not in front of the crowds we're playing to now. On a single night I get to play rock, pop and funk and even mix in some other less obvious styles as well. It's also the attitude of this band on the stage. It's got to be



INTERVIEW ZORO

image: Shaune McDowell



image: Peter Muller

ZORO THE NAME

Zoro might be a somewhat odd choice for a stage name, but 'Zoro the

drummer' has gotten so intertwined with it nobody seems to remember his real name. Even the mighty Internet could not reveal the Z's real name and the man himself isn't telling. He was, however, quite willing to shed some light on the origin of his name. "When I was about 17 years old I had really long hair. One night I had a gig and my hair was in a terrible state. There just wasn't anything I could do with it and there wasn't any time to figure out what to do. So as a last resort I put on this hat someone in my family brought home from a Spanish holiday. The gig apparently went quite well and after that I got referred to as the drummer in the Zorro hat a couple of times so the nickname soon stuck. I decided to take out one of the 'r's though, just to make sure nobody would mistake me for the masked avenger."

fireworks every single night and everybody is putting in a hundred percent all night long. The audience pick up on that sort of stuff. I mean, you can play the perfect gig from a technical point of view, but in this style of music you have to play with passion. If there's no passion there is no way you're going to captivate the audience's attention for a full two-hour set. When we get off the stage now each night we leave the audiences screaming for more."

Reaping It

"I played with Lenny in his very first band. That was when he was 16 years old. The band was called Wave and Lenny did his very first gig with them. Before that he had only done vocals in a church choir. I played with Lenny on his very first gig and I was with him on his very first world tour. That's how long I've known him and it's very gratifying being back on the road with him. In some ways I have been very lucky because I got to skip all the years of really hard work. Lenny is bigger than ever right now. We're playing the biggest venues around the world and we're staying in some of the best hotels out there. When we first started there was hardly money for a single hotel room, now I get to taste the fruits of the labour I put in all those years ago."

Working It (part II)

"I've still got several things going on besides the Kravitz gig, although I had to put quite a few things on hold for the duration of the tour. This tour is set-up pretty widespread. We get plenty of days off, there's enough time planned for all the travels and we're never away from home for more than six weeks at a time, so I still get to see quite a bit of my family. During the off days I try to keep as busy as possible. I'll try to set up a clinic, or I'll do some lessons here and there. That's actually a form of self-protection because if I don't have anything else to do I'll end up shopping and there'd be no money left at the end of the tour! I've shipped all kinds of stuff home during this tour, most of it for my wife and kids. Another project I've been involved in is the Virtual Drummer School website. Like the name says it's an online school on which students can download lessons for a small fee. There's quite a few well known drummers involved in this already, and I'm very happy to be part of it. My first lessons should be online in the beginning of 2005. Another project I have been very busy with is recording and compiling a sample library of R&B grooves. They'll be released by a company called Drumcore. They had me play every groove and fill I could come up with at every possible tempo, and they recorded it in one of the most state of the art studios I have ever seen.

I'm very excited about this project, as it is something I had wanted to do for years. The quality of the recordings is just stunning."

Rebuilding It

"2004 really was a year in which I have completely reinvented myself. I've changed my image, my career, my wardrobe, my physique... I've even gotten myself a new hat. I think it's what every artist needs every now and then."

GEAR BOX

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Two 20 x 16" or 22 x 16" Bass drums
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13 x 9" Rack tom
14 x 10" Rack tom
14 x 16" Floor tom
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Hardware: DW
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Cymbals: Sabian
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20" Hand Hammered Thin Crash

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Sticks: Vic Firth Zoro Signature stick

Heads: Evans
Toms: G2 Clear Batter, G1 Clear Resonant
Snare: Power Center Reverse Dot Batter, Hazy 300 Snare Side
Bass drum: EMAD Clear Bass Batter, EQ3 Black Resonant

Accessories: EQ Muffling Pads for Bass Drum (4), Min-EMADs, Magnetic Head Drum Key

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