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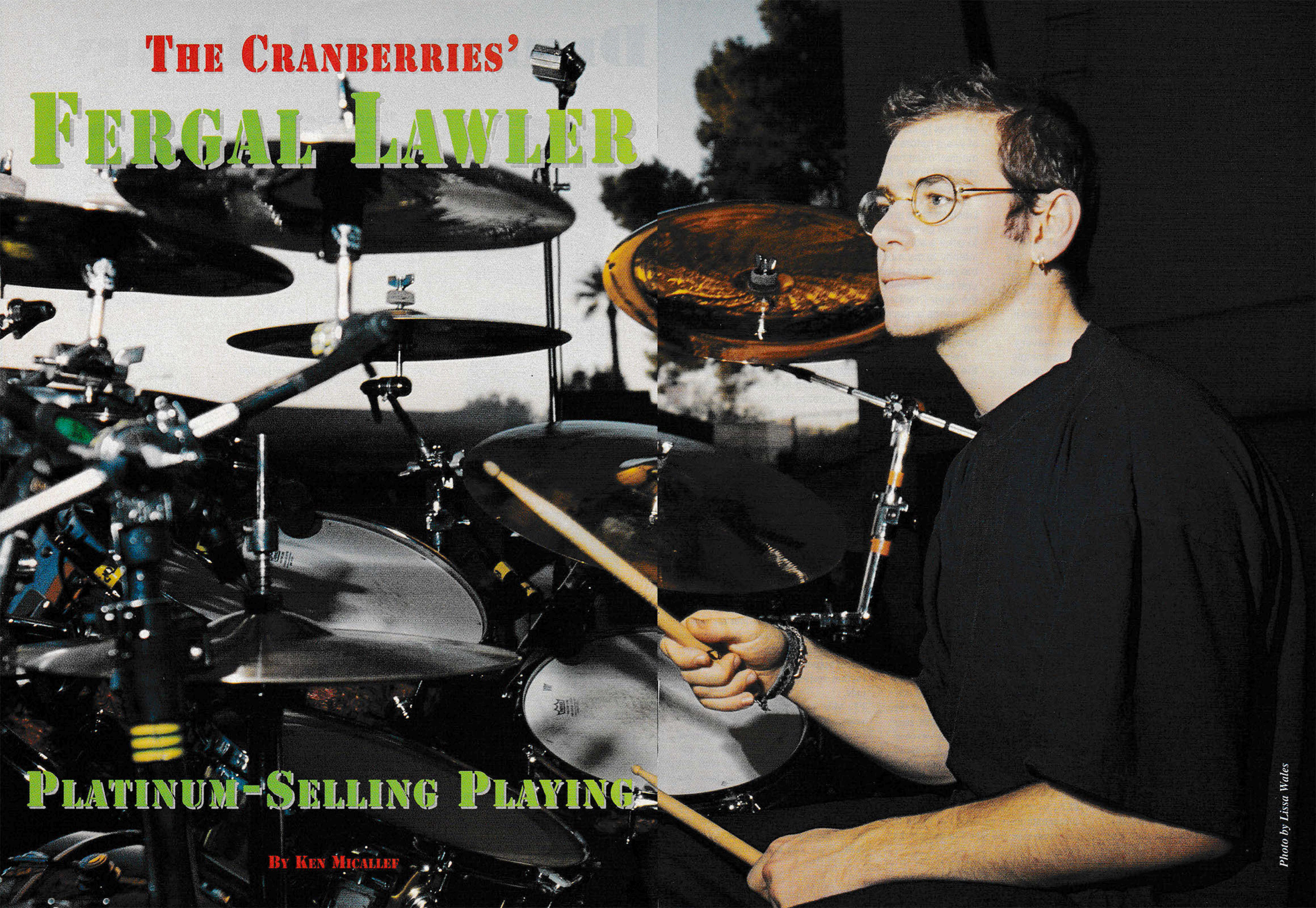


THE CRANBERRIES'

FERGAL LAWLER

PLATINUM-SELLING PLAYING

BY KEN MICALLEF



Fergal Lawler rips off his shirt, spraying sweat in all directions, as he pounces on the groove to "Zombie" from the stage of Syracuse's Landmark Theater. As petite singer Dolores O'Riordan hoarsely wails the chorus, "In my head..." Lawler delves into a rhythmic trance all his own. Body bouncing, arms flailing, head rocking, mouth agape, the curly haired drummer seems possessed, his lean torso lurching to and fro like the single hand of an unseen, inner clock. As the song repeats the verse, Lawler flashes a quick smile at bassist Mike Hogan, the pair effortlessly locking in over the hi-hat pulse, which, though not slick-studio clean, is visceral and raw, as befits the mega-selling song. Tonight the Cranberries will play all their hits: "Ode To My Family," "Dreaming My Dreams," "Linger," and "Still Can't..." as a screaming audience erupts at each opening note.

Backstage after the show, Lawler clowns around with drummer Joey Peters, from opening act Grant Lee Buffalo, while ignoring taunts from Dolores about "beating on elephant's skins." Fergal is relaxed and cheerful, even though the Cranberries will be leaving shortly on yet another long bus ride on this seemingly never-ending tour. But having worked a variety of odd jobs in Limerick, Ireland for most of his teenage years—from hairdresser to a janitor at a Stop 'N' Shop, the twenty-four-year-old drummer is gratefully sitting on top of the world as a member of a group whose recent second album, *No Need To Argue*, has sold over five million copies.

The Cranberries' blend of melancholy melodies and powerful pop aura, initially heard on 1993's *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?*, has made them the biggest band out of Ireland since U2. But even more than that band, the Cranberries' dark, wistful Irish lilt has allowed them to break through stifling cat-

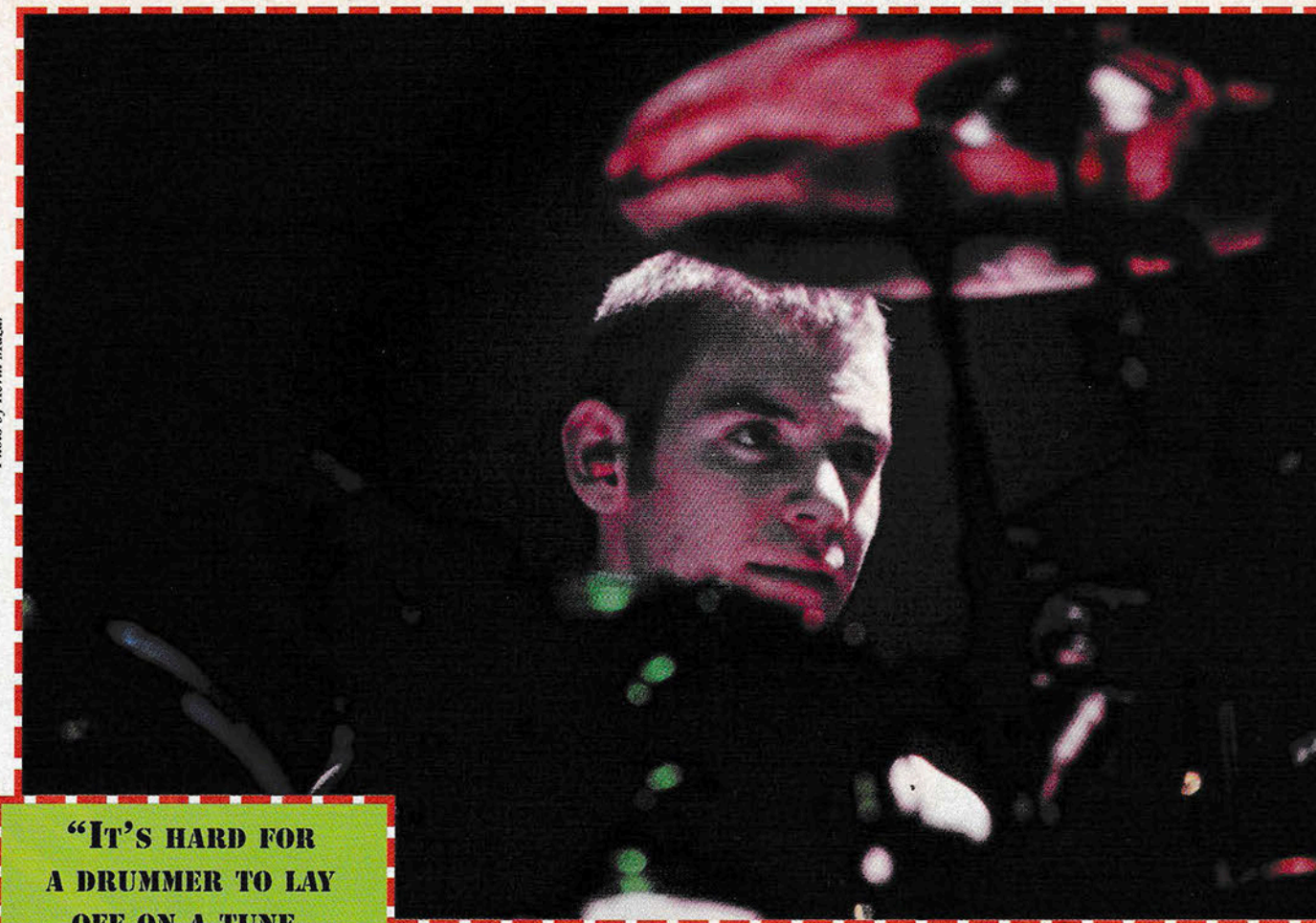
egories. They've reached out to a musically bipartisan audience that is simply seduced by the mystery of their heartfelt songs and by the brooding charm of four close-knit musicians who have seemingly blasted out of nowhere. The son of a flower shop owner and an airport worker, Fergal Lawler played drums with brothers Noel [guitar] and Mike Hogan [bass] for a couple of years before finding Dolores O'Riordan. Something magical must have happened, because within a short period of time a bidding war among London-based record companies broke out over the band.

With big hands that carry blisters as road scars, Lawler's style grew out of techno and '80s rock, and his own generously tasteful approach. Always aiming to color a song rather than brand it, Lawler listens intently to the music—often with eyes closed—to find the perfect part with just the right nuance. His is a natural talent, developed through close friendship with the other Cranberries and a desire to give their engaging songs a quality of lushness, whether it's the haunting din of "Zombie," the gentle jig of "Linger," or the funky accents of "...Be With You."

Ireland has an ancient musical tradition based on the dark beauty of the land and centuries-old folk traditions. Lawler seems to draw on that timeless tradition, his drumming being a palette of atmospheric cymbals, popping drums, and evocative percussion. Resembling a cross between Stewart Copeland and U2's Adam Clayton, the self-effacing Lawler doesn't accept compliments well, preferring to focus on the music.

Like a handful of drummers before him, from Ringo to Copeland to Dave Grohl—musicians whose role it is to grace million-selling songs with rhythmic thrust—Lawler knows how to add his own design to a sound embraced by the world.

Photo by Kevin Mazur



"IT'S HARD FOR A DRUMMER TO LAY OFF ON A TUNE, BUT SOMETIMES IT SOUNDS SO MUCH BETTER WHEN YOU DO."

KM: Are you primarily influenced by music or by musicians?

FL: I get into the band first, then after a while I may like the drummer. It's more musical. My influences include Stewart Copeland, definitely...and I used to listen to Sting's stuff after the Police, which is where I started to get into Manu Katché. And Dave Palmer of the The is great. He's one of my main influences. I just think he is really solid.

I don't like the shapers, the posers (imitates drummer rolling around many toms), the ones who play all over the music. I don't like that kind of style where drummers play a lot of patterns, trying to show off how fast they can play.

KM: Your use of splash cymbals and space within a groove reminds me of Manu Katché, but in concert you play really hard—it's like Dave Grohl meets Stewart Copeland.

FL: [smiles] Well, that's a serious compliment. Thank you. I do get really carried away...I get into it. Some of the songs are really angry. I'm really passionate about what I'm doing—even if the playing sometimes suffers because of it. But I don't mind, it's a big adrenaline rush and I get totally carried away.

KM: On the records you're very tasteful.

FL: I have to calm down a bit there to concentrate more on what I'm trying to play style-wise and how I'm going to hit things.

KM: It's interesting the way you and bassist Mike Hogan interpret the music. If the Cranberries were an American band you might take a more obvious, harder approach, but you've stylized the rhythm section with a subtle funk attitude.

FL: Mike and I have been friends for ten years, and this is really the first band any of us have been in. I got my first set of drums six years ago for Christmas and Mike and [guitarist/brother] Neil got their instruments a few months later. We started playing then and just grew together. We didn't have any lessons, and we couldn't play any covers, so we just started playing bits and pieces.

KM: Were you doing harder stuff or

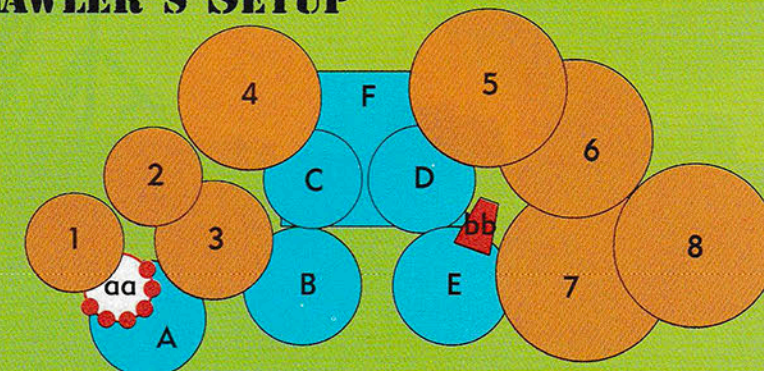
more moody material like the Cranberries?

FL: It was close to what we're doing now, and some of it sounded like New Order or Joy Division meets the Cure. That's what we listened to back then.

KM: On songs like "Yeat's Groove" and "Disappointment" you and Mike play counter-rhythms, or you'll put the snare on beat 3 instead of 2 and 4. Did that grow out of the techno-dance styles of those bands?

FL: It grew out of everything we've heard. I quite enjoy Rob Ellis, the drummer who used to play in PJ Harvey [currently with England's experimental Laika]. He's one of the most amazing drummers I've heard in my life, the way

LAWLER'S SETUP



Drumset: DW

- A. 9 x 13 tom
- B. 4 x 14 brass piccolo
- C. 8 x 10 tom
- D. 10 x 12 tom
- E. 12 x 14 tom
- F. 16 x 20 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 10" A splash
- 2. 10" EFX 1 splash
- 3. 14" Quick Beat hi-hats
- 4. 17" Rock crash
- 5. 18" Rock crash
- 6. 18" Rock crash (lower in pitch than #5)
- 7. 22" Rock ride
- 8. 20" Z China

AA. LP mounted tambourine
BB. LP Hard Rock cowbell

Photos by Annamaria Di Santo

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he does things off time. I'd like to get into more of that eventually.

Technically, I don't really have a clue half the time. I just kind of close my eyes and listen and eventually start working things out. I'll have someone tape the soundchecks, and then I'll listen back and get ideas. When we're playing the show it's kind of hard to think over the volume and the crowd.

KM: The band works up new material at the soundchecks?

FL: Yes, that happens all the time. Someone starts playing, Dolores sings whatever comes to her until she can compose proper lyrics, and we have the beginnings of a song. Sometimes she will come in with the chords and the lyrics, pretty

much the bulk of the song, but sometimes we make it up at soundcheck. We just all join in. Dolores is the voice, but we're her backbone. It's definitely a band thing.

KM: So the songs almost compose themselves sometimes.

FL: Mmmm...yea, these days. Some songs [snaps his fingers] are just like that. Others are a bit of a hassle, you have to work on them day to day.

KM: So you hone your part as the song develops.

FL: Exactly. I get the main rhythm in my head and then decorate it from there. I love decorating things.

KM: How else do you create a drum part to fit a new piece of music?

FL: It depends on who writes the song. If

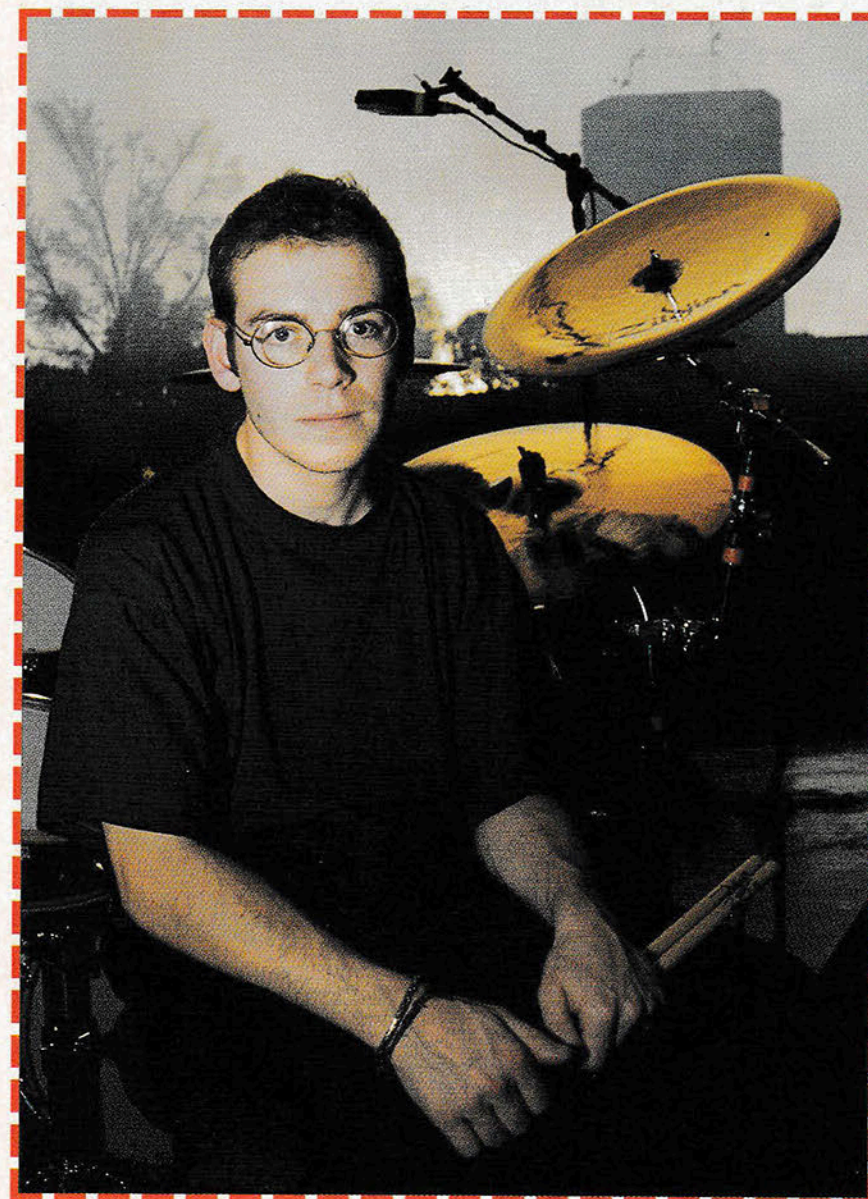


Photo by Lissa Wales

Kenny Aronoff

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DIDN'T WE JUST SAY SO?



Kenny Aronoff - talk about a studio drummer! This guy's been in the business since the eighties! Want names? He's recorded for John Mellencamp, Bob Dylan, John Bon Jovi, Elton John, Bob Seger, Meat Loaf, Chris Isaak, and many, many more. And he's toured with most of them, too. Kenny was also voted best Pop/Rock drummer by the readers of "Modern Drummer" magazine four times in a row. On top of it all, Kenny teaches at the University of Indiana where he passes his craft on to future pro's. Of course, a live wire like Kenny needs reliable equipment. Luckily for him, he can get anything he wants. Anything at all. But experience tells him to go for the best. Kenny chooses Meinl Percussion for his bag of tricks. You know what? So should you!

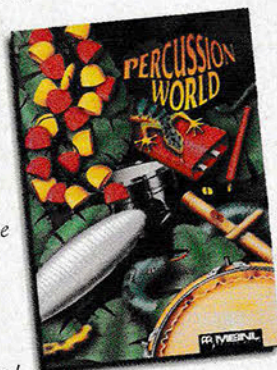


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it's Dolores, then I cue off of her. If Noel writes it, then I cue from his guitar. It usually starts with guitar, though, and that's where I get the rhythm from.

KM: The drum pattern in "Everything I Said" is unusual, with that neo-clave on the snare drum.

FL: That's fairly old. We'd been touring Europe and it just came about on a sound-check. It's just three beats in a row, but it fits the song really well.

KM: I notice you'll use mallets, multi-rods, sticks, and sometimes even have a stick in one hand and a mallet in another. Does coloring the music with different textures come naturally to you?

FL: I always loved getting unusual sounds. That's why I try to incorporate the mallets—it makes the toms sound so full. They sound very different. Our sound man likes the multi-rods, so I wrap them with gaffer's tape so you can hear them in the bigger halls.

KM: Is this a democratic band? Do each of you make suggestions regarding the other's parts?

FL: Now and again, but most of the time we're left to ourselves. When someone starts playing, you pretty much know what to play. All of our songs are based on emotions—some are sad, some are angry, others are happy or upbeat. You can get the gist of a song by closing your eyes and listening to it for a few seconds. Some songs might demand a tom-oriented groove or a darker, China-cymbal sound. It's all based on feeling.

I get the biggest buzz coming up with new songs. That's the most challenging thing. Playing live is great and it's really

physical, but the studio is more about using your mind.

KM: Does the band rehearse a lot when you're off the road?

FL: We're almost *never* off the road. We've been on the road almost nonstop for the past three years. We had a month off after recording *No Need To Argue*, and we just went home. Most of the time touring is great, but we're starting to get a bit pissed off now—we're beat. We started this tour in July of '94, had off for Christmas, and that was it. On our days off during a tour we try to check out the town. Yesterday I bought a Gretsch snare drum for \$50 from the House Of Guitars in Rochester.

KM: Is the new material closer to "Zombie"? Is it heavier?

FL: We have seventeen new songs, and they're all different. Some are laid-back, some have more of a "Zombie" edge.

KM: Do you play hard in the studio as well as on stage?

FL: Yes, but it's more solid. Live, I just let go, sometimes too much. But after so much touring my playing is much more solid.

KM: Mike and Neil Hogan are subdued on stage, and there are no guitar or drum solos.

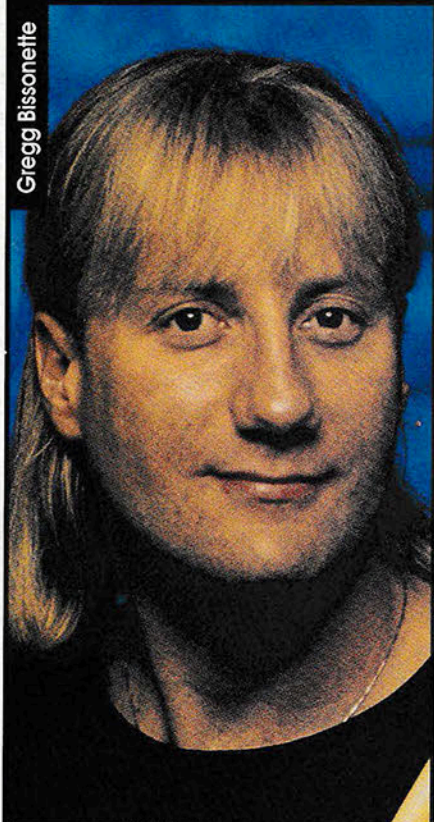
FL: We all hate solos—guitar, bass, or drums. The lads do riffs that are part of the melody, but none of us like that Van Halen shit. That's fine for them, but not for us.

KM: When you're performing live, do you maintain the same tempo as on record?

FL: It varies. I used to be really bad about speeding up. I was getting carried away. Now some songs are faster and some are slower than on the records. After a while you get into a habit of playing a song at a

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Gregg Bissonette



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Artist	Album Title	Drummer
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PJ Harvey	Dry	Rob Ellis
The House Of Love	Babe Rainbow	Pete Evans
the Cure	any	Boris Williams
the Police	any	Stewart Copeland
Pearl Jam	Ten	Dave Kruzen
Pearl Jam	VS., Vitalogy	Dave Abbruzzese
Nirvana	Nevermind, In Utero	Dave Grohl
Porno For Pyros	Porno For Pyros	Stephen Perkins

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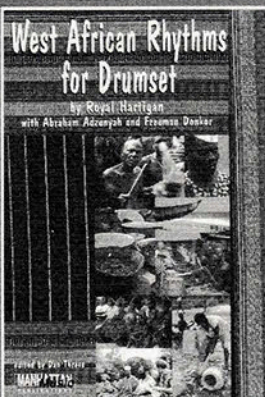


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certain tempo.

KM: Singers can be demanding about tempo. Is Dolores a stickler for exact tempos?

FL: If she can't catch her breath, then the song's too fast. I understand that. I sing all the songs to myself most of the time, and that's how I know where I am within the song. And Dolores is a wonderful singer, her sense of time is amazing. We all click together as people and as players, and that's why this works. I think people can relate to our music, even a song like "Linger." We get a lot of mail from people who understand the feelings and the passion behind the music. Dolores writes about everyday things, but she's not afraid to say what she feels, and that connects with people. She knows how to put it into words—it's magic.

KM: A lot of Irish music, even back to Gaelic times, is very brooding, mysterious, and beautiful. Is it that soulfulness that appeals to people?

FL: Well, the Irish are all very passionate people. For thousands of years there have been musicians, poets, and artists—every single person in Ireland plays a musical instrument. It's crazy, especially in the summer when there are festivals. People line the streets with instruments. Any pub will have people playing music. There are so many bands when you consider the size of the country.

KM: I heard the band playing an Irish jig during soundcheck.

KM: Some of it's okay. I like to hear it in bars, but I wouldn't go out and buy a record. I've heard that stuff all of my life, so I can play it if need be.

KM: Was *No Need To Argue* easier to record than the first one?

FL: We knew a bit more of what we were doing this time, definitely. The new one is a lot better than the first, but I'm still not happy with some of the sounds. But that's what keeps you going. Each one gets a little better.

KM: If the Cranberries is your first band, how did you learn to play?

FL: I used to watch Boris Williams of the Cure in their *Orange* video, basically trying to learn his beats on that. And I liked Stephen Perkins from Porno For Pyros.

When I got together with Neil and Mike, we rehearsed at my house. Back then we called ourselves the Cranberry Saw Us.

Before Dolores, we played with this guy who sang with us for six months.

KM: Do bands form in Ireland for the same reasons as in the U.S.?

FL: I guess so; you have the ones who love music, and then the posers, who just want to be famous and be on the cover of a magazine. Actual fame is a pain in the arse, something I still don't like. [scowls] We were all so very shy, on the first gig we played we just kept our heads down. We played six songs and ran off the stage. I used to actually get sick from stage fright. I got sick for the first couple years, but now I get a great buzz from it.

KM: Are the other members of the band moody people?

FL: All four of us are. I have my moods, but I try to be social. And when you get to know the rest of the band, they're lunatics. We've been touring together for the last three years—together every day—and all the crew are very close as well. It's like a big party on the road. It keeps you going. Everyone has a good sense of humor, and that helps keep you sane.

KM: This is your fifth tour of the U.S. What has surprised you?

FL: Back home everything is laid-back, but here it's go, go, go. I don't watch TV here anymore, I can't handle it. It does my head in. There are too many advertisements on TV—buy this, buy that—it drives me nuts. I watch movies instead.

KM: How has such worldwide, platinum success affected you?

FL: It hasn't really. Living in Ireland, we have the same friends we always had. The only people who hassle you are the ones who never knew you in the first place. They have an attitude. We switch off this whole trip when we go home. We're just normal people. I don't think we could do that if we lived in New York or London. We'd be hanging out with all sorts of bands, and it would probably affect our music. But in Limerick nothing ever changes, we can still be ourselves. I mean, I still live with my parents, I haven't even had time to buy a house. It's hard to plan in advance.

KM: You did plan in advance for your filming of *MTV Unplugged*. That was a little different.

FL: We played at the Royal Albert Hall. We opened up in black suits and tails and then changed, came back, and rocked out.

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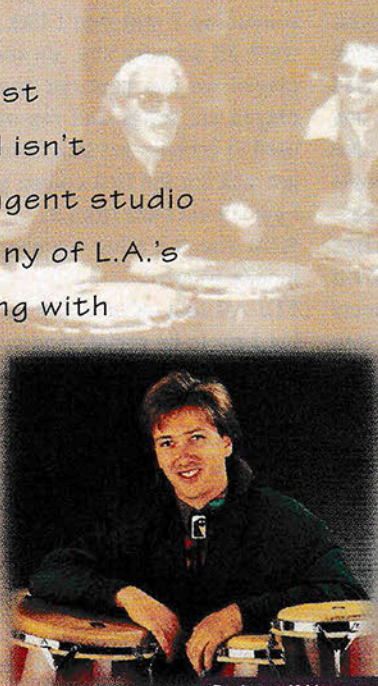
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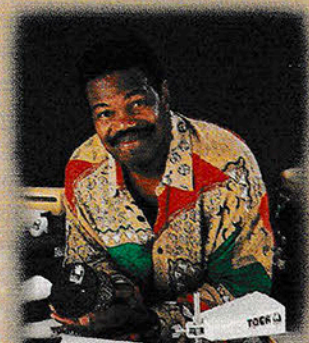
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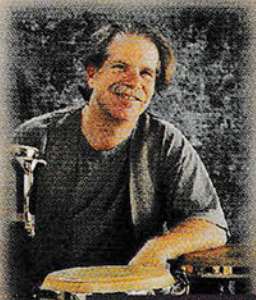
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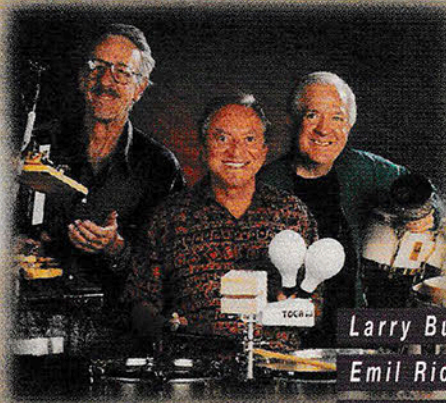
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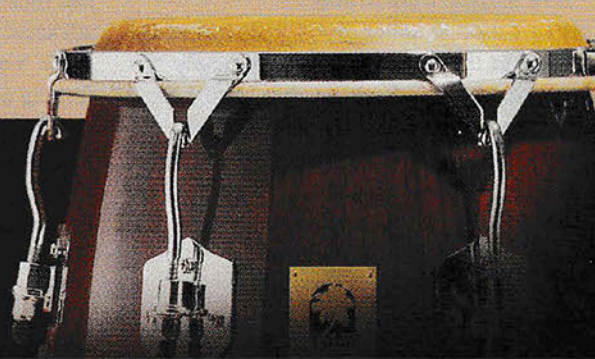


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KM: Why do you play DW drums?

FL: I started off with Pearl, but the DWs are like old-fashioned drums, like Gretsch. The way you can set them up is very easy, and the hardware is nice and light, but strong—not big and awkward like some drum companies' equipment. And the sound is wonderful—really sweet.

KM: Color is such a big part of what you do. Did it take a while to find the right cymbals?

FL: Yes. I used to have dark crashes and a very dry, dead-sounding ride. My new ride is perfect, and the crashes have a nice ring.

KM: Are there certain songs you look forward to playing every night?

FL: I love "Daffodil Lament." That's the one I play with mallets. That song has so many dynamics and different parts, it's like a journey.

KM: Do you ever have trouble finding a part that works?

FL: I used to play "Dreaming My Dreams" differently. I used the bass drum more to give it a driving feel, but Dolores wasn't happy with it. So I cut it out and now use a tambourine. Around the tambourine I'll color with toms and cymbals. A lot of it is just experimentation.

Some songs can take a lot of work; it varies. "Disappointment" was written about three weeks before it was recorded. We had no chorus, but we just jammed in the studio and it came. Often we'll get things in the studio. When we hear all of the instruments sounding so amazing, it inspires us.

KM: If a song is really good is it easier to find a part?

FL: Yes. The simple songs are the best. That's why I don't like flashy drumming with solos, because it tends to drown out the quality of the song. Some songs sound great with just a hi-hat and snare and nothing else. It's hard for a drummer to lay off on a tune, but sometimes it sounds so much better when you do. The song is the most important thing—not one musician, but the whole band. We're not trying to impress each other, we're trying to play music.



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