



## TINTED WINDOWS' **BUN E. CARLOS** POWER POP PERFECTION

**B**efore the term *power pop* had even been coined, the Who's Keith Moon was establishing guidelines for the genre's future drummers with his spastic manner of serving Pete Townshend's songs. He wasn't bashful about getting his licks in, or about hammering away at the cymbals like they'd spoken rudely of his mum.

Then, just over a decade later, Bun E. Carlos comes along and hones Moon's template with his performance on Cheap Trick's 1978 single "Surrender." On the rock radio classic, Carlos supports singer Robin Zander's soaring melodies with a rock-solid backbeat, and when the third verse modulates he underscores the surge by riding on the crash cymbal with extra gusto. Bun gets his licks in too. Who could forget those two-measure snare fills he plays throughout the song?

For over thirty years, Carlos has been infusing Cheap Trick's songs with a style best classified as simplicity with a twist. Think about his playing on the shape-shifting "Dream Police," his shuffle-to-straight time transitions in "Southern Girls," and the '50s-style flair he adds to "California Man"—it's not your run-of-the-mill power pop timekeeping.

Even when Carlos plays it a little straighter, like on the self-titled debut from the supergroup Tinted Windows, there's not a wasted accent or fill to be found. Straight or with a twist, Bun E. Carlos has perfected the art of power pop drumming.

**MD:** Your parts on "Surrender" sound very well thought-out. Did you spend a lot of time refining the performance?

**Bun:** We cut an early instrumental track of "Surrender" with Jack Douglas, and I was doing a lot of ghost notes on the verses—boom, bap, boom-boom, bap. He'd say, "You don't need that."

Then [*Heaven Tonight* producer] Tom Werman, he would want more licks. We'd sit there and argue: "I'm not doing a lick there!" "You need to do a lick there!" He finally convinced me to do a lick going into the chorus. There was probably more thought put into those fills than some of the stuff I do these days.

**MD:** And you still play them faithfully. Does it ever become tedious?

**Bun:** Nah. I recognize that's what works best—that's why it's there. You can't change [the fills] too much. You can sit there and go, "This is boring. I've been doing it for thirty years." But you can also say, "This is why I'm famous. It's what's on the record; this is what people want to hear."

**MD:** Before Cheap Trick was signed, you cut your musical teeth in bars, when bands played four forty-five-minute sets a night.

**Bun:** In the old days, you'd play for a few years before you got a deal. People don't have that luxury anymore. When we started Cheap Trick it was all bars and dance floors. Our first big rule was, "Let's not clear any dance floors." And Rick [Nielsen] was writing really good pop-oriented songs, so I started approaching them like, What really needs to be in here? I noticed the more licks I played, the more speeding up I did. So I was suddenly playing no licks.

We had also backed up a few of those old rock 'n' roll guys. I got instant lessons from Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley on what to do and definitely what *not* to do. Chuck Berry wanted boom, bap, boom-boom all night. He said, "Don't play no drum licks." That stuff worked so good it became our de facto feel. We just got in that pocket. Our original songs started to come along, and a lot ended up like that.

**MD:** That old-school approach has shown up in

the way you often bash out half notes on the cymbals and how you'll double an 8th-note hi-hat pattern by dragging along on the snare.

**Bun:** The cymbal wash would fill in all the holes for a three-piece. I noticed that with Keith Moon. The riding on the snare drum I got from the Dave Clark Five, things like "Glad All Over" and "Bits And Pieces." He was playing the hi-hat and the snare about the same, and it sounded great. That became my style, and people used to come up to Rick all the time in clubs and say, "Your drummer's no good. He doesn't play any licks. I'm a drummer—I should be in your band." We'd go, "Sure, get up and play some songs." Most of the time they'd die the death.

**MD:** You mention Keith Moon and Dave Clark. Who are some of your other favorite drummers?

**Bun:** Terry Williams [Rockpile, Dire Straits] was fantastic. I remember when I met him in '78; it was great to meet a kindred spirit. Mick Fleetwood was a big influence because he had a big, fat beat and he didn't have to do dopey drum licks every verse.

**MD:** Your time has always seemed so solid. Did you usually track with a click?

**Bun:** We used one on "On The Radio," but I remember it was really annoying. We probably didn't use one again until "If You Want My Love." Maybe three songs on the first six albums had a click. A couple of years ago I put together a disc of all the songs we play nowadays from those records. The tempos get faster every year, so I wanted to play along and find my original motivation. And some of these songs that I thought were really steady, like "Big Eyes" or "Oh, Candy," they're speeding up and slowing down. [laughs] They're not that steady.

**Patrick Berkery**