

11 REASONS TO LOVE

MATT CAMERON

by Patrick Berkery

Funny this story is called "11 Reasons To Love Matt Cameron," because if you've ever tried to replicate Cameron's parts—particularly on tracks from the newly reunited Soundgarden—you might end up with plenty of reasons to *dislike* the drummer. To paraphrase a famous saying, Cameron's style can be imitated, to a degree, but it can't be duplicated. If you've tried, you know.

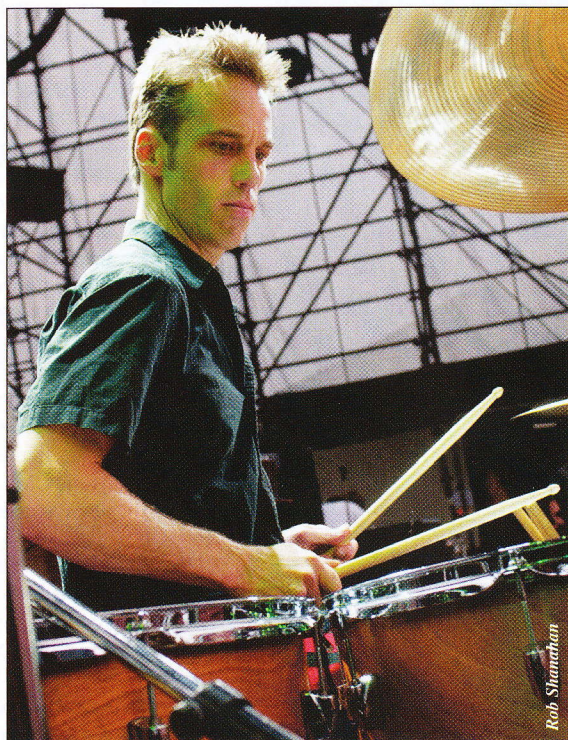
There's usually more going on in Cameron's tracks than initially meets the ear. Take the big-bottom groove of Soundgarden's "Outshined," from 1991's *Badmotorfinger*, and the sprightly backbeat of Pearl Jam's "The Fixer," from 2009's *Backspacer*. Both drum parts are foundational but represent just a fraction of what Cameron brings to these disparate songs.

In "Outshined," Matt's compositional attention to detail—especially in the bridge, when he drops ghost strokes on the snare in just the right spots and builds his part gradually—nicely embellishes the grungy bluster. In "The Fixer" it's his simple yet forceful entrance and the way his kick drum pattern dances with Jeff Ament's bass line that ignite the song's tightly coiled energy.

Informing Cameron's unique drumming style is the fact that Matt is a well-rounded musician. See his numerous songwriting

credits with Soundgarden and Pearl Jam, and listen to the four albums from his excellent psych-rock side band the Wellwater Conspiracy—which features Cameron on lead vocals, guitars, keyboards, and drums—for proof.

Cameron applies his musicianship and boundless creativity to everything he does behind the kit. In his capable hands, straight 4/4 time is completely open to interpretation. (Seek out "Down Undershoe," from the 1993 self-titled debut album by another side project, Hater, for a brilliantly twisted example.) Conversely, Cameron's clever orchestrations can make odd time signatures feel accessible, as on Soundgarden's "My Wave," from 1994's *Superunknown*, and "Switch Opens," from 1996's *Down On The Upside*. And on the rare occasion that he breaks out the brushes with Pearl Jam (like on "All Or None," from 2002's *Riot Act*), it's not just to keep time softly but to bring a fresh texture and mood to the band's sound.

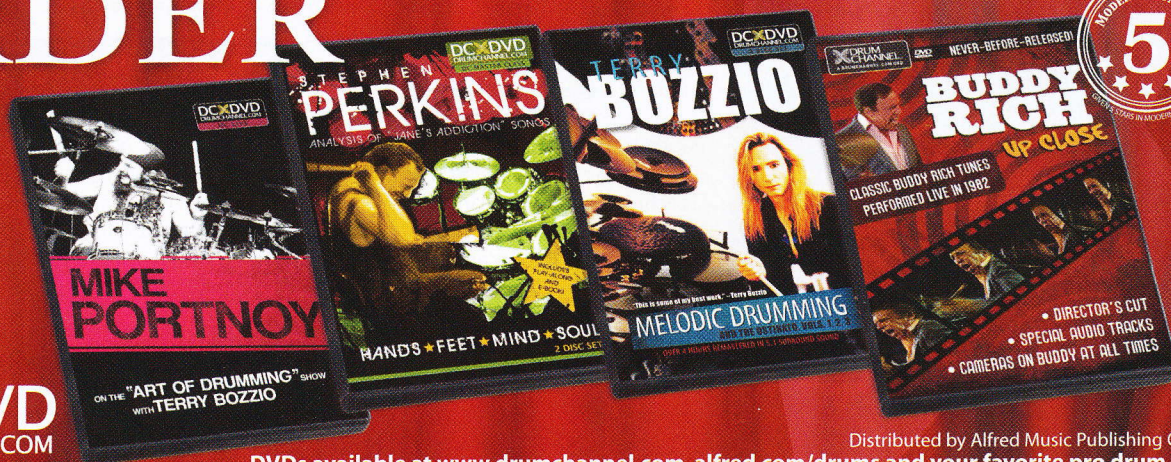


Rob Shtanahan

Of all the rock drummers to emerge over the last twenty-five years, few have been more consistently tasteful and inventive as Cameron. Let's dig further into reasons to love his work.

the TOP of the ORDER

Up first, is **Mike Portnoy** in a candid conversation and amazing performance with Terry Bozzio from Terry's show, "The Art of Drumming"... Up second, **Stephen Perkins**, playing and teaching you 11 Jane's Addiction songs in his newly released DVD, "Hands-Feet-Mind-Soul"... Up third, **Terry Bozzio**, in the re-release of "Melodic Drumming," a performance he looks back on as some of his best work... And coming up fourth is five star winner "Buddy Rich: Up Close," the ultimate **Buddy Rich** DVD.



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MATT CAMERON

SOUNDGARDEN, "HAND OF GOD" (1987)

Soundgarden was a work in progress on its debut EP, *Screaming Life*, but an element solidified from the get-go was Cameron's interplay with Kim Thayil's thick, jagged guitar riffs. With measures of three cycling throughout "Hand Of God," Cameron accents Thayil's intro part creatively and turns things around slightly in the verses. This is an early example of the drummer's ability to make odd meters sound completely natural.

SOUNDGARDEN, "GUN" (1989)

From the Sabbath-gone-math part that bookends the track, to the gradually accelerating verses that sound like the agitated awakening of a sleeping giant, to the mosh-pit-stirring bridge, this song from *Louder Than Love* is way heavier than most metal of the time. And, drum sound aside, it holds up today. Cameron dictates the tempo surge with a sludgy kick/snare/tom pattern that darkens the song's low-end rumble, and his work on the aforementioned intro and end section sounds like a drummer playing in quicksand.

TEMPLE OF THE DOG, "WOODEN JESUS" (1991)

Seattle supergroup Temple Of The Dog is like Bad Company in flannel and Doc Martens. Cameron plays the role of

straight rock timekeeper—with characteristic twists—throughout most of the group's self-titled one-off album. The highlight is "Wooden Jesus," which Matt introduces with a martial snare and kick part that gives the song a woozy feel when set against Chris Cornell's melody and squared-off guitar strums. When the drummer slips into a straight 3/4 beat for the chorus, the transition is seamless. This is a great example of Cameron's bringing unorthodox feels to traditional time signatures.

SOUNDGARDEN, "JESUS CHRIST POSE" (1991)

The mix of old-school heavy rock dynamics and punk rock abandon that Soundgarden had been working toward congealed into something truly spectacular on the band's breakthrough, *Badmotorfinger*. For a testament to Cameron's prowess, this album is Exhibit A, with "Jesus Christ Pose" the centerpiece. Matt locks down the guitar and bass mayhem at the beginning with a busy kick/snare/tom pattern that builds in intensity throughout the track. He applies a variation on that feel when he goes to the ride and hi-hats, pausing only to spray accents and quick licks across the song's midsection. He finally gives in to the chaos and starts flailing around the kit as the song collapses to a finish.

SOUNDGARDEN, "FACE POLLUTION" (1991)

You barely have a chance to catch your breath after "Jesus Christ Pose" when "Face Pollution" comes roaring in at a Ramones-worthy clip. Of course, any similarities with the two-chord, one-tempo punk legends end right there. The twists and turns are many in this 2:24 track. Cameron punctuates the tops of verses with quick fills, dances around the kit to accent a repeating carnival-like melodic break, and ushers in the final chorus with a lightning-quick 32nd-note snare roll.

SOUNDGARDEN, "SPOONMAN" (1994)

At the height of Soundgarden's powers, even the band's singles were wildly adventurous, thanks in large part to Cameron's chops and versatility. Take "Spoonman," for example. On the 7/4 figure that opens the song and forms the basis for the verses, Cameron throttles his toms like Bill Ward backing Bo Diddley. After the band breaks for a call-and-response vocal line, Cameron flips the 7/4 feel into a backbeat that eventually morphs into the funky chorus part. In both the chorus and the breakdown—where Matt puts down a stuttering groove behind Artis the Spoonman's spoons solo—the drummer hammers away on a crash cymbal like it crossed him. It's

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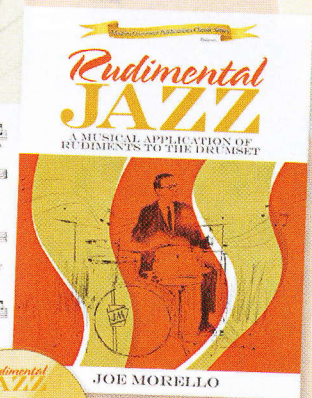
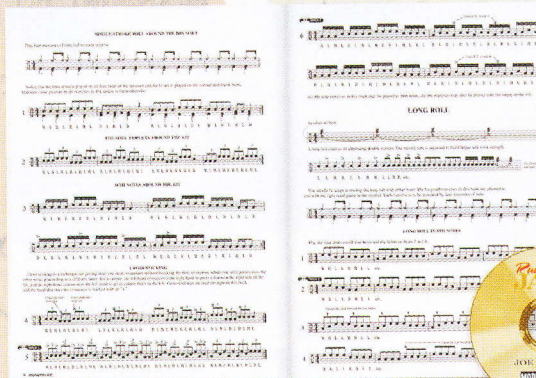
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SOUNDGARDEN, "LET ME DROWN" (1994)

No song better encapsulates the latter half of Soundgarden's first run than the opening track off *Superunknown*. The grinding riff is all dropped-tuning brawn, but there's melody and serious playing within the din. What's so brilliant about Cameron's contribution to this leaden tune is that his feel on the verses is so relaxed. He lets the guitars do the heavy lifting while he lays back in the pocket with a beat that accents all the right points of Thayil's riff. Later he drops some wild fills during the solo and pilots a sharp turn into the bridge. But really, the groove is the thing. Bonham could've laid it down, or it could be a hip-hop sample. It's that classic, timeless, and huge.

PEARL JAM, "GIVEN TO FLY" (1998)

It's as if the guys in Pearl Jam knew Cameron would eventually be their drummer when they included "Given To Fly" on 1998's *Yield*. The song's slow-to-build dynamics were tailor made for Matt, and he proves as much with his performance on this version from *Live On Two Legs*. He mostly stays faithful to Jack Irons' parts, while sneaking in some tasty embellish-

ments (dig the tom fill just before the second verse) and taking things a bit faster. Like Irons does on the original, Cameron transitions the song's lumbering tribal feel into a backbeat with a simple extra snare hit. And when the chorus kicks in, he makes it explode with a heavier touch, adding more drama to an already dynamic song.

WELLWATER CONSPIRACY, "OF DREAMS" (2001)

It's hard to determine what's more impressive about "Of Dreams," from Wellwater Conspiracy's third album, *The Scroll And Its Combinations*—the drumming or the fact that Cameron wrote, sang, and played guitar on this loopy bit of psych-pop, which would've fit nicely on the original *Nuggets* compilation. Let's focus on the trap work, which is marked by a driving double-time beat that anchors the song's float-away feel, plus melodic runs around the toms and trippy little bursts of cymbal filigree to mix things up. As the song progresses, Cameron mashes up the parts, creating serious rhythmic chaos beneath his own wickedly infectious melodies and fuzzed-out guitar. If Keith Moon had his stuff together enough to write tunes regularly, they might have sounded—and been played—like this.

PEARL JAM, "1/2 FULL" (2002)

While Cameron's work with Pearl Jam seems simpler when stacked against his Soundgarden achievements, don't let his relatively straighter playing lull you into thinking he's dialed it back. Matt still does his thing with Pearl Jam. And his thing—like bringing a solidly swinging ease to 3/4 time—makes a beautiful foundation for the blues-rooted feel of this track from *Riot Act*. Like he does on Soundgarden's "Let Me Drown," Cameron plays the groove with restraint, punctuating all the right spots in the guitar riff but mostly laying back in the cut. He shines on "1/2 Full" by not outshining his bandmates.

PEARL JAM, "SUPERSONIC" (2009)

Sometimes a drummer just needs to blow the doors off its hinges, and that's exactly what Cameron does on "Supersonic." This *Backspacer* track is a Foo Fighters-like rush of infectious melody and guitar crunch, and Cameron keeps it moving by putting a simple backbeat to the whirl of action. He breaks that groove down to half time for a Zeppelin-like bridge, playing a halting fill in unison with the guitars and then sending the song into double-time orbit as the final chorus rolls around. Cameron's part is punchy, tasty, and supportive. And that's the perfect rhythmic MO for a band like Pearl Jam.



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