

PLAYING FOR THE SONG

3:59 *Get Good* PRACTICE MAKES BETTER *Get Good* KNOW WHEN TO HOLD BACK *Get Good*

CHARLIE WATTS ASIN# PHIL RUDD *Slick Licks* 3:59 *PERFECTION* 3:59 *Chad Smith* 3:59 *STAN LYNCH* 3:59 *SPACE* 3:59

It doesn't always require the best chops to play what is best **FOUNDATION** 3:59 PLAY A VARIETY OF STYLES Step outside of your comfort zone *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good*

140 BPM *Get Good* SICK GROOVE LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN LET YOUR CREATIVITY THRIVE **4/4** LEAD STRONG OR GET OUT *Get Good*

STEADY-N-TRUE *Confident and Precise* Matt Flynn *GET A GRIP* NED BROWER 140 BPM *Get Good* Creativity 140 BPM ARTICULATING THE MOOD THROUGH STYLE James Gadson

ROCK SOLID TIMING 140 BPM *Awesome* 140 BPM **MOMENTS RESTRAINT** *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good*

2:42 100% Dedication to your craft LEAD THE SONG TRUE CONFIDENCE Hold the Groove KNOW YOUR ROLE *Get Good*

Wise Drumming Works ASIN# B00005ABK8 2:42 *COOL-N-RIGHT* AL JACKSON JR. 2:42 ASIN# B000002WYT *Powerful* Dave Grohl 2:42 *Philosophies* 2:42 *ACTIVE LISTENER* Rigid vs. fluid

SOPHISTICATED SENSIBILITY **MOVING GROOVES** 2:42 Support the Song AT ALL COSTS *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good* *Get Good*

120 BPM POLYRHYTHMIC prowess RINGO STARR KEEP THE FLOW VIBING TOGETHER STRAIGHT SWING LATIN or ROCK *Get Good*

MEG WHITE *Big Beats* 4 ON the floor 120 BPM *100% GREAT TOUCH* *STYLE TEMPO Serve The Song Overplay?* *Economical* 120 BPM *COMPLEMENTARY DRUMMING* Melodic **HOOK** 120 BPM *PUSH AND PULL* *Spare-Skills* 120 BPM PERFORMANCE or STUDIO *EMBRACE SPACE AND ROOM TO BREATHE* ASIN# JIM KELTNER **3 over 4 FINESSE DYNAMICS** 120 BPM

"Play for the song, man." Every drummer has heard those words at some point. While some might struggle to grasp just what they mean, or to articulate what's required on a particular track, everyone knows what playing for the song sounds like when they hear it.

Think simple, solid, timeless drum parts, like those on "Honky Tonk Women," "Give It Away," "Let's Stay Together," and "Land Of 1,000 Dances." The latter is a dance-floor classic with a groove so perfect it prompts session legend James Gadson to comment, "If you don't know how to Pony or do whatever dance Wilson Pickett's singing about, that beat will have you up there trying to do it."

As the above examples illustrate, playing for the song doesn't necessarily require Neil Peart's chops, Dave Lombardo's velocity, or Carter Beauford's polyrhythmic prowess—which is not to say that just any clubber can

hammer out a basic 4/4 groove and claim to be playing for the song. The concept requires the drummer to supply a sturdy, supportive foundation, to embrace space and give a song's melody and hook room to breathe, to know when to push and when to pull back. It requires finesse, dynamics, and the ability to play with and play off other musicians. And it can take years of practice, failure, and success and a wholesale change in philosophy to truly understand what it is to play for the song.

To help explain this subtle art, we sought the insight of five drummers who collectively possess a staggering amount of experience in playing for the song: Daughtry's Robin Diaz, Mike Malinin of the Goo Goo Dolls, Maroon 5's Matt Flynn, Ned Brower of Rooney, and the aforementioned James Gadson. This handful of seasoned drummers has played for all sorts of songs. Gadson laid down the instantly recognizable rimclick/

kick/hi-hat groove to Bill Withers' "Use Me" and the four-on-the-floor pulse to countless disco hits. Turn on your local rock radio station and you'll probably hear one of Diaz's big beats blasting behind a Theory Of A Deadman or Hinder song. Slide over to the Top 40 station and you're sure to encounter Flynn's smooth touch on a dance-y Maroon 5 track like "Misery" or Malinin's economical approach to pacing one of the Goos' many hits. And flip on an alternative or AAA station and you'll hear Brower giving Rooney's hook-heavy guitar pop a swift kick that's totally complementary to the band's melodic sense.

While these drummers' styles differ, there is a common denominator in their approach: Above all else, they're playing to serve the song. Their words are wise, and the experience, knowledge, and opinions they share are invaluable. Process it all, and then put it to use the next time you're asked to play for the song.

GETTING PHILOSOPHICAL

Ask a hundred different drummers for their philosophy on playing for the song, and you're likely to receive a hundred different answers. Unsurprisingly, we got five unique perspectives from our five experts.

Mike Malinin's outlook calls to mind the old baseball adage about how if you don't notice the umpire, that means he's doing a good job. "For the most part, drummers are there to support the song, not to be seen—and not even really to be heard, in a sense," Malinin says. "I've always taken it as a compliment when other musicians tell me they don't even notice I'm there. It doesn't mean my parts are boring. It means everything I'm doing is probably complementing the song."

Robin Diaz feels playing for the song isn't just about what you play, but also how you play it. "You have to play with confidence," he says. "The song *has* to have that. It comes through the speakers. Whenever the song and the click starts, if there's any kind of shakiness from the get-go, [producers and musicians] will know right away. You have to lead the song, and they have to *feel* that you're leading the song."

Ned Brower's philosophy centers on knowing your role in the band. "My style is pretty simple and straightforward, so I can serve our songs well," he explains. "I'm in a band that has a really good lead guitar player and keyboard player. So the rhythm section is more like a Fleetwood Mac or Heartbreakers arrangement: We keep it pretty solid and let the lead instruments and the vocals take over. When I listen to music, I listen to the drums, but I'm much more fascinated by the words and melody, which are the essence of the song. As a drummer I've always tried to play around that."

Matt Flynn sees playing for the song as a concept that differs from band to band, but for Maroon 5 he says the objective "is basically to play really simply. That's what I love. I hate it when a drum fill takes me out of a song, when something sticks out like a sore thumb. It's got to flow. Your job as the drummer is to set up everybody else and set up everything in the song. That's *really* important."

As for James Gadson's philosophy, it's probably just what you'd expect from the drummer who brought the funk to "Use Me." "I don't do a lot of technical things," Gadson says. "My thing is groove and feel. You have to make the song come alive. The younger people would say [the musicians] are vibing together when we're all playing for the song. Everybody's feeling one another. And if you're playing live, the audience feels that. If you're recording, it's apparent in the studio. A lot of times you can be technically right and it works. But on a lot of the great classic records that we like, the drumming is not that technical. It's simply supporting the song."

THE TAPE DOESN'T LIE

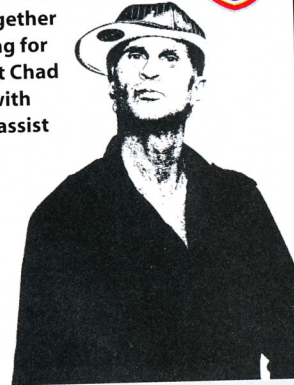
So now that you've absorbed different perspectives on what playing for the song means, you probably want to sit down at your drums and put that knowledge to use. But how will you know when it's working? The musicians, producers, and/or engineers you're collaborating with will surely have opinions. But in order to truly wrap your head around the concept of playing for the song, you need to listen to yourself playing to hear what it is that you are—and, just as important, *aren't*—doing. This is an exercise that can be beneficial for newbies and seasoned pros alike.

"From way back, when I've been in bands, we'd record *every* rehearsal and jam," Flynn says. "And I'd go back and listen. Back then I was into more of the Jane's Addiction heavy groove stuff. And I started realizing that the parts where I played straight—boom-bap, boom-boom-bap—were typically the best parts. That's where the *song* really came out. That changed my whole philosophy, from overplaying to playing for the song."

CHAD SMITH ARRIVING AT THAT MAGIC TAKE



As we were putting together this feature on playing for the song, MD Pro Panelist Chad Smith was in the studio with singer Anthony Kiedis, bassist Flea, and guitarist Josh Klinghoffer, recording the next Red Hot Chili Peppers album. We thought it was a good time to ask Chad to riff on the process of presenting a song in its best light.



TRUST YOUR GUT FOR THE GROOVE. I try not to think too much. Eighty percent of the time, the first thing I come up with ends up being the thing, which is pretty cool, because it's pure—it taps into what got you excited in the first place when you were jamming on ideas.

FIND YOUR PARTS IN THE VOCALS. As you arrange the song, you want to come up with something that inspires the singer, something he can work with. The way Anthony sings is very rhythmic. Even if he doesn't have the words yet, he's a good scatter, and his dynamics and rhythm—and how he changes them during the verses or the chorus—will affect what I play. Sometimes I'll mimic it, sometimes I'll support it, sometimes I'll downplay it, sometimes I'll ignore it.

LISTEN TO AN OBJECTIVE OPINION. After we've got the songs basically written, we'll do preproduction with Rick Rubin. He's objective and detached, not married to the song emotionally. We trust him, which is important. He really focuses us on what works within a song format, which is good because we tend to meander and do things a little too long, which is what musicians do. And there are a lot of people who listen to music out there who aren't musicians. [laughs] It really helps me that he thinks like that.

DON'T IMPRESS YOURSELF WITH EXTRA TOUCHES. I try to produce myself a little. I don't need to do fancy stuff to impress myself. It might be cool, but if it doesn't add to the song.... I used to butt heads with Rick about that, thinking he was sometimes taking the personality out of the track. But he'd be, "No, it's still *you*. It's your feel, it's your chemistry with the group. That's so important; don't discount that." Our essence doesn't get lost, and Rick is very careful about that. He doesn't try to homogenize it. It's more of an arrangement thing, making it so it's something the listener will enjoy.

GO FOR THE MAGIC. Live is one thing. With a recording, it's there *forever*. It has to have some magic in it. You might actually play it "better" at other times, but the keeper has to have something really special about it for you to say, "That's the one we want on our record, that's the one we want to be proud to play for our kids." And...uh...sometimes that can mess with you. [laughs] I'm in the process of that now. There's a universe of ways that people connect at any given moment. And when the magic comes, you have to bottle it, which is kinda hard. But when it does happen, you're like, "Man, we're so lucky we got it!"

GET GOOD: PLAYING FOR THE SONG

"When I record, even if it's just a simple fill or shift of a groove, I'll listen back to make sure it's working with the song before I decide whether to stick with it," Malinin says. "That's a key thing: So many drummers *don't* listen back. I'll hear songs all the time—obviously it sticks out to drummers more—when I'll just start laughing because the drum part is so tacky. You go, 'What was the drummer thinking?'"

LISTEN TO PHIL RUDD AND STAN LYNCH

You want to learn how to melt faces and blow minds on the kit? Listen to players like Joey Jordison and Thomas Pridgen. You want to learn how to serve the song with an unobtrusive style that's simple yet sophisticated? Several of the drummers we spoke with suggest studying the work of AC/DC's Phil Rudd and former Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers drummer Stan Lynch (with honorable mentions to Jim Keltner, Al Jackson, Bun E. Carlos, Ringo Starr, and Dave Grohl,

among others).

Our experts look to these timekeepers with good reason. Rudd's pocket is among the deepest in all of hard rock, whether he's playing a hyper boogie ("Whole Lotta Rosie"), a slow blues ("The Jack"), or a sexy mid-tempo groove ("Back In Black"). And Lynch's work with Petty is *Playing For The Song* 101. Think of the slinky pulse of "Breakdown," the classy fills that usher in the choruses of songs like "The Waiting" and "Here Comes My Girl," and the swamp-funk groove of "Mary Jane's Last Dance."

"Phil Rudd and Stan Lynch are big guys for me," Malinin says. "Those are two of the kings of playing for the song. When I was eleven, twelve years old and first heard 'Back In Black' and 'Highway To Hell,' I didn't get it. I didn't get why this guy was playing so simple. I was super into Yes and Rush at the time, and I was like, 'This is heavy metal—why isn't this guy rocking out?' Of course, years later I realized he was one of the greatest rock

drummers of all time. And he was playing for the song."

"Stan Lynch is about the best there is at playing for the song," Brower adds. "Everything about the way his parts lock in with the bass and rhythm guitar and how his fills are so classic...his playing has been a *big* influence on me."

THE STUDIO VS. THE STAGE

Say you played some busy lick on a recording that ended up working as a great transition between a bridge and a chorus. But you go to play the same part live and the change just falls apart. Or you laid down a track at what feels like the absolute perfect tempo, but when you go to play it at a show, the song feels like it's dragging. Welcome to the reality that what works well in the studio doesn't always work live. In some cases you need to make alterations for the stage, to better serve the song and the performer.

"If I were to do some 32nd-note roll in a big room, you wouldn't hear it,"

CHAD SZELIGA

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GET GOOD: PLAYING FOR THE SONG

Flynn says. "What's effective in the venues we play are loud flams and basic things that accent what's going on. I hammer the 2 and the 4 on the snare and use the cymbals for accents, crashes. That works for our songs. Live, the busy stuff works with very few bands."

"For the artist [on stage], it's show time," Gadson explains. "There are certain rhythm patterns you might've played in the studio that you have to keep. But most of the time, especially with an R&B thing, you might play it a little faster live. They're doing a show. And rehearsing for a live show can be difficult when what you played on the record—or what someone else played—doesn't work for a song live. So you have to rethink things."

KEEP IT SIMPLE

If you haven't already noticed, keeping it simple is a cardinal rule when it comes to playing for the song. That doesn't mean you can't get your licks in. But if you insist on trying to crowd-bar fancy parts into songs and you're

continually stepping all over the hooks, you might have a hard time finding work.

"Hit hard, hit direct," Diaz says. "Make sure the intro is up, bring the verses down dynamically, and in the choruses bring it back up. That will keep you working. It doesn't have to

be rocket science."

When all else fails, there's always that boom-bap, boom-boom-bap beat. "In the right hands, there just isn't a better beat than that," Flynn says. "Remember, your main job is to make it swing. And played correctly, that's what that beat does."

Our Contributors



Since 1994, **Mike Malinin** has been the drummer in the Goo Goo Dolls, a group that has scored seventeen top-ten singles and sold nearly 9 million albums in the United States alone. The band's latest recording, *Something For The Rest Of Us*, was released this past August. Malinin appeared on the cover of *Modern Drummer* in August 2002.



Matt Flynn began playing live with Maroon 5 in 2004, when a shoulder injury forced drummer Ryan Dusick off the road. He officially joined the band during the recording of its second album, *It Won't Be Soon Before Long*, released in 2007. Maroon 5's third full-length, *Hands All Over*, was released this past September. Flynn played previously with the B-52s and Gavin DeGraw.



Ned Brower is a founding member of the pop-rock band Rooney, which has released three full-length albums and one EP since 2003. In addition to his

work with Rooney, Brower performs around Los Angeles with other acts, and he recently self-released his first solo album, *Great To Say Hello*, which is available at nedbrower.com.



Robin Diaz is an in-demand session and live drummer who has played with Theory Of A Deadman, Kelly Clarkson, Avril Lavigne, Hinder, Kiss, Nickelback's Chad Kroeger, Chris Cornell, O.A.R., and others over the last decade. He began playing with Daughtry midway through the band's most recent U.S. tour.



James Gadson is a veteran session drummer who has recorded with Paul McCartney, Barbra Streisand, Marvin Gaye, Beck, and many others. His drumming can be heard on Peaches & Herb's "Reunited," the Jackson 5's "Dancing Machine," and Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." He has played recently with Jamie Lidell and Amos Lee.



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