

Transforming one's life from docker to celebrated percussionist is quite a leap. However, that seemingly bizarre story becomes even more interesting when you hear that Pete Lockett took up music at the relatively late age of 19, reports **Archisman Dinda**.

Lord of the Drums

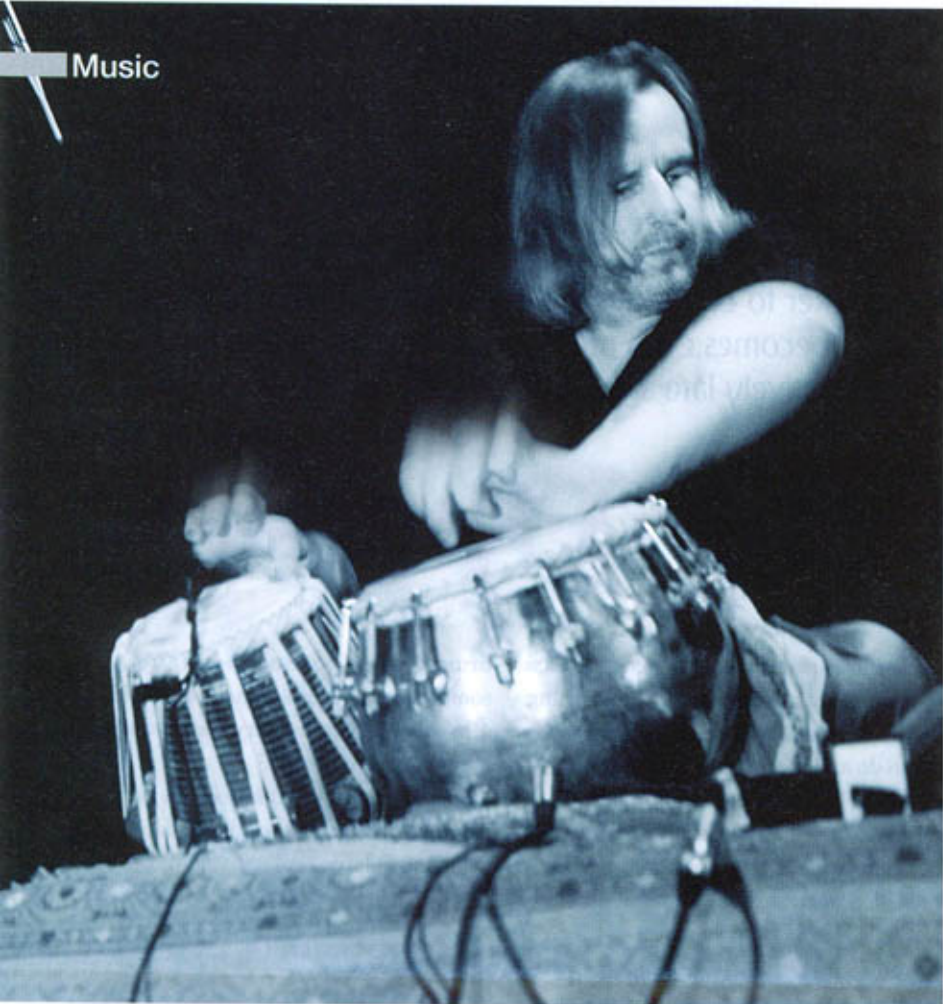
Pete Lockett, a British national by birth, is a man revered by many as a musician who knows almost everything there is to know about the percussive side of world music. He is considered to be one of the most versatile multi-percussionists in the world. "All good things in my life happen by chance. While working as a

docker in Portsmouth, I happened to pass by a drum shop by chance and something in me told me that this is what I should try to do and that was it," said Lockett, sitting in his apartment in Belsize Park, London. "It even sounded like a weird decision to me at that point in time, but I decided to go for it and started taking

drum lessons," he remembered. "Yet, somehow, this decision made a lot of sense to me from the very start – unlike other things in my life."

Soon Lockett found himself in London playing with various bands. Indian music came much later, and once again it was hardly a conscious decision. Similarly, his





decision to transform himself from punk rock drummer to tabla player (Indian drums) was just as sudden. "I was playing in a punk band on the London rock scene when I accidentally stumbled across a concert. It was the first time I heard tabla. When you see and hear tabla for the first time it's the most amazing experience. I had no concept as to what they were doing, but it had a severe impact on me. It was Ustad Zakir Hussain and Ali Akbar Khan playing, and it was a sensational experience. Later, I saw tabla lessons advertised in a local adult education magazine and I was down there like a shot. The actual process of learning to play took several years of dedicated study."

Years later, Lockett performed at the annual concert organised by Ustad Zakir Hussain in memory of his late father. Lockett considers that a "great honour". But before that highlight he studied tabla under the professional supervision of his guru, Yousef Ali-Khan, and then went on to study South Indian drums under the guidance of Karaikudi Krishnamurthy.



Lockett's versatility as a multi-percussionist is evidenced by his unique tonal blend and the ability to deliver powerful cross-cultural rhythms. His session credits include Björk, Kula Shaker, Beth Orton, Ed Thigpen, Doug Wimbish, Will Calhoun, Charlie Watts, Steve Smith, A R Rahman and Transglobal Underground.

Lockett's extensive list of instruments includes North/South Indian percussion such as tabla, mridangam, kanjira and ghatam to name a few. Middle Eastern instruments include the darabuka, req, bendir and frame-drums. Congas, bongos, timbales and berimbau cover

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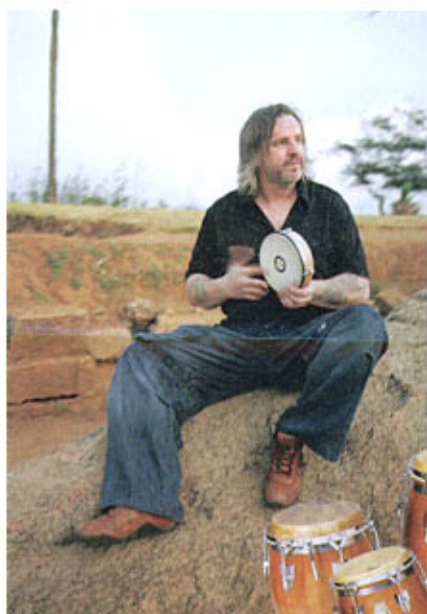


his Latin American percussion skills. The Irish Bodhran, Nigerian Udu, West African djembe, Japanese taiko and many other weird and wonderful percussion effects and self-built instruments round off Lockett's impressive resume.

Lockett also works extensively with electronics and samplers, both live and in the studio, to create densely alternative percussion fabrics.

Indian rhythm sets are very difficult to learn and a considerable amount of riyaz (practice) is required to master them. "It can be very frustrating," Lockett acknowledged. "Indian instruments, like the tabla and the mridangam, are very different from other percussion instruments like udu, congas or bongos. You can immediately make a sound on those, although the technique is very different. But with the tabla it will probably be at least two years before you can make music at all and it just sounds terribly pedestrian at the very beginning. I don't know if I could learn tabla now if I had to start afresh."

One of Lockett's firmest beliefs is that individuality in music is far more important than being bogged down with the technicalities of one's instrument. "Tradition isn't that important to me," he says. "One of the real risks of learning something like Indian drumming where the convention and do's and don'ts run deep is that an individual might get swamped by it, thereby losing all creativity."



Lockett has played with many different formats and considers each one a great learning experience. "Each and every experience is distinctive, unless you are working on an album with a band. In the studio you can go back over your stuff dozens of times, but live it passes by once and that's it, no second chances. The audience is a very exciting component of live gigs for me. The feedback, the interaction and response of the audience is so important to how a performer feels. In truth, I love both live and studio work but I think most performers prefer the live aspect in terms of the immediate feedback and feeling."

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James Bond movies. "It was really an experience to work for the 007 movies. It is great to have that creative input."

However, Lockett prefers working on his albums as he considers them an extension of his personality and musicality. "When you are working on your own albums you have total control, which is always a preferable situation. In a film or other studio session you are trying to find what works for that particular individual. You need to get inside their vision, which at times can be mundane. However, it can also lead to new ideas. Everything has a place," he said.

So what's next for Pete Lockett? "The very joy of living life with music is fulfilling and I am enjoying my place under the sun," he replies with a smile. Talented as he is, there's no need to bang his own drum. ■