

the **pete** **lockett** **phenomenon**

Archisman Dinda met up with Pete Lockett – perhaps one of the most versatile multi-percussionists in the world today.

The very thought of starting to learn music at the relatively late age of 19 and then making a career out of it is quite a story. However, that seemingly bizarre story become even more uncanny when I met multi-percussionist Pete Lockett on a sultry summer afternoon in my hometown Kolkata where he was rehearsing tabla at the residence of well known percussionist Bikram Ghosh. A British national by birth, Pete has spent his formative years in Portsmouth England and is revered by many as a man who knows everything that is worth knowing about the percussive side of world music. Pete is a multi-talented drummer and percussionist whose session credits include Björk, Kula Shaker, Beth Orton and Transglobal Underground. In addition as one of Europe's leading percussionists and tabla players, he is an integral member of various percussion duos and groups with other world famous drummers.

Therefore, I start by asking Pete what made him take up music. "All things happen in my life by chance. I was working as a docker in Portsmouth, when one day I happened to pass by a drum shop and something in me ignited a spark that this is what I should try to do and so that was it," reminisces Pete. "It was a bizarre decision; I just decided that I'll have a drum lesson, for no readily explainable reason," he remembered. "I went in and it made sense to me in a way that other things in my life hadn't before, you know, education or anything like that." Soon he found himself moving to London to play in various bands. Indian music came in later, but as always, it was hardly premeditated. Similarly, his decision to transform himself from punk rock kit player to tabla player was much unexpected. "I was playing in a punk band on the London rock scene, and I accidentally stumbled across an Indian gig. It was Ustad Zakir Hussain and Ali Akbar Khan and it was amazing. I

Pete is familiar with different types of percussions from North and South India, Middle East, African, Japanese and Western amongst others.

did not know what they were doing. When you see tabla for the first time, it's the most amazing thing, it's stunning. I had no concept of what he was doing, but that made an impact on me. Later I saw tabla lessons advertised in the local adult education magazine, and I was down there like a shot. Of course, the actual transformation took somewhat longer, several years of dedicated study, in fact, although you'd presume it would have been a fairly enjoyable period of learning," he added. Pete later performed at the annual concert organised by Ustad Zakir Hussain in memory of his father Ustad Allah Rakha, which he considers as an "honour". He studied Tabla under the expert tutelage of Yousef Ali-Khan, and South Indian drums were studied rigorously under Karaikudi Krishnamurthy.

Pete Lockett is one of the most versatile multi-percussionists currently in the world, having immersed himself in percussion and drums from every part of the globe. The wide range of artists he's worked with reflects the diversity of his playing. A basic list of instruments covered by Pete includes the following: North/South Indian percussion: tabla, mridangam, kanjira, ghatam, vocal percussion, dholak, naal, bhangra dhol. Middle Eastern percussion: darabuka, req, bendir, frame-drums. Latin percussion: congas, bongos, timbales, berimbau. Also Irish Bodhran, Nigerian Udu, West African djembe, Japanese taiko, Western drum set and many weird and wonderful percussion effects such as water phones & spring drums, along with many strange percussive objects built and customized by Pete. He also works extensively with electronics & samplers, both live and in the studio, using samplers, effects units and live electronic looping to create densely alternative percussion fabrics. Having worked in virtually every field of music conceivable, both live and in the studio from pop and rock, to free jazz and the classical avant garde, from traditional Carnatic and Hindustani music of North and South India to

traditional Japanese taiko drumming and even straight blues funk and rock drumming to collaborations with classical, folk, ethnic and experimental musicians he is truly a legend in his own field.

How difficult it was to master so many instruments? "Instruments like the tabla and the mridangam are very different to percussion instruments like udu, congas or bongos. You can immediately make a sound on those; there is no problem with that. Of course, to articulate with technique is different, but you can make a sound. With tabla, it's probably eighteen months before you can make a sound at all, it just sounds terribly pedestrian, the articulation of how you play the drums. It is very easy to be dominated by that and just give up. I do not know if I could learn tabla now if I had to start again. It is the same with the kit drumming; when I first played the kit I used to stay up all night practicing." He turns out to be an extremely well read person with enough theories about music to fill several interviews, using keen illustrations and anecdotes to demonstrate his points. For example, one of Pete's firmest beliefs is that individuality in music is far more important than getting bogged down with the technicalities of one's instrument. Talking to Pete, it soon becomes apparent that the notion of sharing music and creating music independently, as opposed to conforming to more orthodox practices, is central to his approach toward his playing. "It is important not to adhere to any tradition too much," he affirms. That is one of the real dangers of learning something like Indian drumming; that the tradition is so strong it can swamp any creativity that might be there. There are so many rules and regulations. At present, Pete is more interested in why he is playing as opposed to how, who believes, many people use stunning technique as a barrier between them and other people.

So why does he need to play with anyone when he can do all by himself? He laughs and says, "Actually the experience that an individual brings in matters the most. I don't do things as to which are fashionable to do. I am actually looking for magic, which cannot be rehearsed or taught but comes instantly." Having worked with so different formats, does he have any preferences? "Each and every experience is different, unless you are doing a live album with a band. In the studio you can go back over your stuff dozens of times if you want whilst live it passes by once and that is it, no second chances. Also, 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 would prefer the live aspect in terms of the immediate feedback and feeling," he explained. Pete has worked for a number of Hollywood films including for a number of James Bond movies. What makes Pete happy, is it recording for movies or working on his album? "When you are working on your own stuff you have 100% control so that would always be a preferable situation. In a film or studio session you are trying to find what works for that individual. You need to get inside their vision and sometimes approach something very differently, than if you were working on your own stuff. This often leads to an embrace of new ideas and your palette becomes enriched. Everything has a place," he believes. As Pete and I strolled along Ghosh's rooftop speaking about the journey from a docker to a celebrated percussionist, his love for all that is Indian became more visible. "I have developed a deep love for Indian cuisine and dal and laccha paratha is something that I immensely enjoy," gushes Pete with a twinkle in his eye. "The very joy of living life with music is fulfilling and therefore through that I am enjoying my place under the sun," he ends with a smile. 📷



Pete used to be a docker in Portsmouth when out of the blue he decided to try his hand at percussions.



Pete Lockett's Discography

Pete Lockett has a number of collaborative projects and has released five albums. With his percussive groups Network of Sparks and Taiko to Tabla currently have been released four albums.

Network of Sparks featuring Bill Bruford was released on MELT2000 in October 1999 coinciding with a Contemporary Music Network tour of England that was supported by the Arts Council of England. The second album, featuring musicians from Pakistan, Ghana and Japan was released on ARC in 2003.

There are two Taiko to Tabla albums with Joji Hirota, Live at the Bruges Festival on Zoku-EMI. label and a studio album also on ARC.