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# DRUMMER

Issue 62 December 2008

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# WORLD IN HIS HANDS

words: Owen Hopkin Images: Eckie

**How exactly did Pete Lockett, punk enthusiast, become the UK's foremost percussive authority? *Drummer* pulls up a pew to hear his story**

**P**ete Lockett is sat in his cosy flat in North London. A top floor apartment, it has a stunning view of the city. It's an expanse he's gazed over many a time while pondering the next move in what's been a staggeringly successful career. Inside, a Portsmouth football strip is pinned to the living room wall, a few percussion instruments are dotted about handily and a small laptop set-up rests in one of the corners. The flat has served as a rehearsal room and recording studio for many of his film and music projects, and as a result it's a wonderfully comfortable place to conduct *Drummer's* first interview with one of the UK's greatest percussionists.

Pete, unsurprisingly, is in his element. Seemingly content with his lot and particularly looking forward to a forthcoming trip to India, he's eminently friendly and incredibly chatty. It's fortunate, because we have a lot to catch up on. A cursory glance over his CV sees some enormous names leap off the page. Peter Gabriel, The Verve and Björk immediately draw attention, but the many heavyweight international (and particularly Indian) artists he's worked with signal a player that's as famed for his work here as he is in the many countries whose rhythmic traditions he's diligently studied.

Pete, then, is a true musician. He's been fusing different rhythmic traditions successfully for over 20 years and the props he's received, as well as the work he's bagged, speak volumes. What's remarkable about his story is that it all could have been so, so different. How exactly did a punk-rocker with

very little kit experience become one of Britain's foremost authorities on world percussion? Well, the tale goes a little like this...

## FROM PUNK TO PERCUSSION

You could say that Pete's route into Eastern rhythmic traditions was guided by fate. A move to London to seek fame as a punk rock drummer soon gave way to a life-changing experience. As a result, the career path of a hard 'n' heavy drummer was fundamentally altered...

"I totally got into it by chance. There was a big festival in Alexandra Palace at the time, a free concert, and the music came in through the window on a summer breeze. We were like the Bisto kids! Zakir Hussain, this monster tabla player, just happened to be playing and I went to check it out. It was the early 80s and I'd just moved to London as a punk and rock drummer, but I couldn't help but be amazed by this mind-blowing sound coming from these tiny drums. I thought I'd quite like to know a little more about that to complement my drum set playing."

Pete's focus, initially at least, was still very much on the kit. Things, however, were soon about to change.

"At the time I was a pretty blinkered drum set player, to be honest. I hadn't been playing all that long - I didn't start until I was about 19. A couple of years later I moved to London so I was still in my infancy as a drummer. In a sense, it was good that it came along at that time because it was like 'Wow! There's a whole load more stuff to learn here'. I didn't act on it immediately though. If I ever see anything in a concert, I'll chalk it up and make a mental note of it. Lo and behold, three or four months later I saw an ad for adult education courses that were offering tabla lessons. That was it from there."



# INTERVIEW

Pete Lockett



## NEW LANGUAGE

Learning an entirely new rhythmic language clearly wasn't without its challenges. With the Indian tradition so different to that of the West, Pete found very little common ground with his new discipline.

"Part of the problem in learning such a complicated system as a Westerner is that you're not brought up with it. You haven't had the 20-odd years of blind learning, of seeing people playing it, of knowing a lot about the instruments' culture and the way the sounds are made. You're really starting from zero.

"I think 'developed' is the word for the Eastern rhythmic culture rather than 'complicated'. Technically, it's commonplace in India for everyone to play to the same level as someone like David Weckl. The postman, say, plays like

Dave Weckl and there are gradients up from there. A lot of the rhythmic repertoire and techniques that are involved have been developed over many centuries. It's almost like looking at the Western drum set in 200 years time - there'll be such a greater volume of material to learn that it may also become daunting to someone starting out. Look at the independence stuff that Thomas Lang's currently developing or a player like Steve Smith! That could be seen as intimidating to someone who just wants to learn how to play the kit. That's a little what it was like learning some of the Indian styles of percussion. At least a lot of the Western musical repertoire is accessible!"

## ROUTE TO INDIA

Pete, as he'll explain a little later, frequently tours and works in India, but his percussive schooling was done mainly in the UK. The reason for this, he says, was purely practical.

"A lot of the great teachers come to the UK anyway and it's probably

easier to learn over here because in India the route is slightly slower and less direct than Western teaching methods. Obviously, I always learn when I'm out there - you can't not learn when you're working with people - but when I finally made it out to India I went there as a player so the emphasis was on gigging."

Unsurprisingly, with the wealth of experience and knowledge he's gathered, there was plenty to distill and pass on in his new book *Indian Rhythms For The Drum Set*. It sets out to give Western kit players an insight and a route into Eastern rhythmic traditions and inevitably highlights the mental shifts required to take on such a task.

"That's right, it looks at the building blocks of the Indian tradition which, in a sense, is different to what we're used to. We may see a piece of music as a collection of bars of 3/4, 2/4 etc. Basically speaking, they would divide that up so that two bars of 4/4 would be seen as a pattern of 5+5+3+3. Obviously, that can be extended out so you could have a few bars looking like 5+5+5+3+3+3+5+3 etc. That, essentially, is how they begin to structure the time flow and the framework within which they'll shape their phrasing.

"I really wanted the book to be like a bridge. Yes, the Indian percussive cultures are developed,

## GEAR BOX

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For the full list of instruments and Pete's projects head to: [www.petelockett.com](http://www.petelockett.com)



but anything that's developed can be boiled back down to the building blocks and that's what I've got in the book - the building blocks of rhythm. People can take little chunks of that and apply it to the drum set."

#### HYBRID SOUNDS

This hybrid spirit has characterised Pete's career from day one. For him, it's been all about taking different ideas and working it into his own cultural idiom.

"As a musician, it's all about being true to yourself. I don't want to go off and become an 'Indian musician' or a pseudo-Indian. It's about doing your own thing in that environment and creating new hybrid sounds."

Cross-fertilisation, then, is the name of the game. It's an attitude that's hasn't just paid dividends with the broadening of his own style, it's also helped him gain a mastery of a staggeringly wide range of instruments.

"A lot of the instruments are done to differing degrees. The speciality stuff is really the hand drumming, tabla, darabuka, bongos and stuff like that. Some techniques are a lot easier than others to learn. I don't want to be condescending to any particular instrument, but some are easier than others. It's as simple as that."

His musical vocabulary and skill across a wide range of instruments has seen his CV rack up a severely impressive list of heavyweight names. Perhaps more impressive is the name of international artists that feature. Projects like Taalisan and Repercussion Zone have seen him lock horns musically with Amit

Chatterjee and Bikram Gosh, while Vikku Vinayakram, Selva Ganesh and Ustad Zakir Hussain also feature.

"Because I did all my studying in England, it took a while to finally get out to India. I think it was 2000 when I did my first tour out there. To a certain extent, it's a little like it is over here - you are who you play with and you make your name through that. Think of a musician like Miles Davis and all the incredible players he's brought through - it's a bit like that.

"The reaction has been really good when I've been out there. I get a lot of good press, I've done a couple of TV specials, so it's going really well - I've got four albums coming out there this year alone so there's a lot of stuff happening. I think people are more interested if they see you're doing your own projects and albums. They see you in a slightly different way rather than just a session guy who just turns up. They see someone who's trying to create and put together tours as a positive thing, which is how it should be."

The many rhythmic traditions he's experienced and techniques he's studied has re-enforced one common message. Knowledge is one thing, says Pete, but it doesn't count for much if it isn't used musically.

"Whatever genre or cultural idiom you've got there are people who play musically and people who don't. You could have a tabla player who isn't musical at all and could be all over it like a rash making it sound really horrible. I think knowledge of different traditions is essential, but it has to be used musically - that's what we do at the end of the day." ■

**"I'D JUST  
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DRUMS"**

#### BILL BRUFORD



"Pete and I worked together on tour a few years back as 'Network of Sparks' and produced an album called *One*. The group was a percussion quintet covering many of the disciplines from around the world: Ghanaian, North Indian Dhol tradition, Pete specialising in South Indian tablas, Simon Limbrick on mallet percussions, and myself on electronic and acoustic drums. It was a heavy introduction to the glorious colours available from more sophisticated rhythmic cultures than my own.

Pete, who seems to be from all these cultures but from none of them, has the chameleon-like ability to merge perfectly into any rhythmic terrain. He is one of the few UK musicians to be honoured with invitations to play in India in the highest circles of Indian classical musicians.

Our Jaded Western drumset rhythms would probably have fossilised some years back if it hadn't been for the healthy infusion of the rhythms and colours of Cuba, Latin-America, and Africa, and it seems that visiting with and borrowing from these and other cultures, while approaching their rhythmic depth with proper respect, is what is going to continue to give our popular music vibrancy. Pete is expertly placed in a field of one, here in the UK, to guide us through the riches of other nation's rhythmic heritages, as he has already done on countless gigs, studio dates, James Bond movies, and cross-cultural collaborations. Unfortunately, his energy and output just mean that the rest of us are going to have to run a bit faster to keep up. I just wish I could get him to slow down a bit!"

# INTERVIEW

Pete Lockett

## STEVE SMITH



"Since we met in 2003 Pete Lockett has become a friend, inspiration, teacher and collaborator. As one of a

few musicians who is a virtuoso in both North Indian and South Indian percussion, his abilities on the tabla (from the North Indian Hindustani tradition) and kanjira and konnakol (from South Indian Carnatic music) are world-class. Significantly, Pete is not only acknowledged and appreciated by Westerners, but he has been accepted into the rarified circle of maestros of both North and South Indian percussion, no easy feat! I like the fact that Pete has taken his knowledge of Indian instruments, rhythms and techniques, along with his innate knowledge of Western music and has applied these skills into a unique 'world-view' of percussion. This inclusive approach incorporates rhythms and percussion instruments from around the globe. Pete has the kind of high-level musicianship that is a universal language, crossing all boundaries of style or culture. To me, that is what makes him a valuable contributor in a musical situation and outstanding as a solo artist. Pete and I have played duo concerts together, he is featured on my latest Vital Information recording *Vitalization* and Pete has performed live with my band, contributing a beautiful mix of colours, texture, groove and excitement. I look forward to more collaborations and lessons with Pete!"

## INDIAN RHYTHM WORKSHOP



My new book, *Indian Rhythms For The Drum Set*, covers many aspects of Indian rhythmic systems and their application to western rhythm and in particular, drum set playing. The book, available via Hudson Music, covers the history and background of the North and South Indian systems before delving deep into the building blocks, their development and contemporary applications.

We will look at two simple building blocks in this article and develop some ideas in a similar way to the material in the book.

Let's take two simple building blocks, the 3 and 4 beat units. We first see these in phonetic form. This is a really useful tool for understanding rhythms, especially when things get a little more complicated.

3 beat unit: TA KI TA

4 beat unit: TA KA DI ME

Then we will give them a simple sticking on the drum set. You will see the four beat unit sticking is based on the paradiddle:



Next we will build a framework using the syllables.

To begin with we will have: 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 3 (= 19)

Let's recite this pattern in a cycle whilst clapping quarter notes. The whole pattern will come back on the beat after four repeats. Each syllable is an equal 16th note.

Each quarter note placement is in bold type:

TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKITA  
TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKITA  
TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKITA  
TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKADIME TAKITA

Now let's do this on the drum set with our drum set sticking as below. Play the right hand on the ride and then add quarter notes with the hi-hat foot and remember that after four repeats you will be back on beat one after 19 quarter notes:



This whole cycle is 19 quarter notes in length but, we want it to be in 4/4 for the moment so will modify it thus:

4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 3  
4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 3  
4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 3  
4 + 3... (= 4 x 16 or four bars of 4/4)

Then the whole thing will look like this:



It is a simple way to throw patterns off beat and is one of many interesting applications we can employ with the help of the Indian rhythmic units.