

Pete Lockette - "I am not really a big percussion set up type of a guy"

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Percussionist Pete Lockette

Pic by Deepak Dhuri

Percussionist **Pete Lockette** is one of the biggest names in the world of drumming today, if one talks about the exhaustive (and varied) lists of musicians that he has collaborated or worked with – it may take a few hours by the time we finish.

Suffice to say, it's as diverse as Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin to Pakistani ghazal singer Farida Khanum and of course, the whole list of Indian classical musicians like Ustad Zakir Hussain, Selva Ganesh, Vikku Vinayakram and even A R Rahman.

At 19, Pete was walking past the drum shop when he saw the sign "drum lessons" – that was it. Just two weeks later, he was playing for a punk band. His introduction to Indian music was equally incidental but proved significantly life changing after he heard Ustad Zakir Hussain and Ali Akbar Khan at a concert in London for the first time.

In a freewheeling chat with **Radioandmusic.com's Chirag Sutar**, Pete Lockette speaks about his world of percussions, his recent collaboration with Vikku Vinayakram and much much more...

Excerpts-

Speaking about your recent album, how did you and ghatam player Vikku Vinakram get together?

Actually, this album started about two years ago when Vikku invited me for a commemorative concert of his grandfather, it's similar to the homage for Abbaji concerts that Zakir Hussain does for his father. Vikku had invited me to perform over there so we performed and after the concert we were chatting – he said, "why don't we work on an album together," so the next time when I went to Chennai, we both went to the studio and he recorded everything to the click. Later, I took those track and played over it with a couple of other musicians in London and Kolkata – slowly, the albums started to come together – it was done over the period of a year.

As a musician, what attracts you to India?

The rhythm here is 'number one' in the world. The rhythm being developed here is linear rhythm, it's not independent or multi layered rhythm – linear is way above all. The drum techniques, the intricate techniques on tabla and mridangam, the detailed finger work – you don't get that anywhere else in the world.

Which percussion instrument (of the hundreds that you know!!) you found the most challenging to learn?

They are all challenging in different ways. Going back to the Indian thing, technically, it has to be tabla and mridangam for sure. So many people have come to me, and many of them successful percussionist saying 'I want to learn tabla' ... and I tell them, to be prepared for 10 years of really hard work to just know the basics – because that how you develop the right kind of mentality. The same goes from mridangam – it's really hard because the skin is so thick, its really a hard hard instrument to project on.

I have heard Shivmani (renowned Indian percussion player) has a separate vehicle dedicated just to carry his instruments. What about you?

(Laughs) I don't do that. If I can make good music even with few instruments, I am happy. Even for my solo live concerts, I don't have a big set up at all – it's all individual solo instruments like the darbuka, kanjira, tabla – I am not really a big percussionist type of a guy. I like the focus to be on single instruments – what's the point when you got the tabla and then you have like million things around it? See, Zakir Hussian doesn't need a million drums, and Salvaganesh (starts playing air Kanjira) 'thank you very much' (laughs) you know what I mean?

Let's move to your live gigs – why don't we get to see you perform in India?

There were a couple of tours last year, but in India, the scene largely depends on sponsorships. Over the last year, a number of potential tours fell through for that reason.

OK... moving to the music scene in the west, do you see it changing? In what way?

A lot of people have been obsessed with fame and then you have got people just wanting to produce music that record companies want to listen to – like American Idol, where people are making instant disposable music that is marketed and pumped out. But it's gone six months later and you have someone else coming and doing the same thing – there's no substance to it.

And Bollywood? What do you think about that..

I was watching TV during breakfast this morning for 50 minutes. I was watching some Bollywood music, and though some of that music is great, I didn't hear a single acoustic drum in the whole duration. I said to myself, this is India, the home of the drums, the Holy Grail for percussionists and the most popular medium of music in India at the moment doesn't have an acoustic drum on it!

You have also been working in a play station game, tell us more.

That game would be coming out in the middle of next year. I am arranging and recording all the percussions for it and it has the biggest budget ever on a game. To use one of the 'hooks' from a film's soundtrack, they are willing to spend 1.5 million dollars – they can't do anything else with the 'hook'. They have to use it exactly the way it is, and I feel that's a massive amount of budget for music for a game! Sometimes, the budgets we get in record companies are far lesser!!

How is it working on music for games compared to films?

With games, you hear the music 2000-3000 times. In films, you just hear it at much larger intervals. The important thing with games is not to make it something irritating. When I was writing music for this, the melody and the percussions, the goal was to fairly make something bland 'musically'. It's kind of a weird idea – but that's what the game idea is.

Two of your biggest films, Quantum of Solace and The Incredible Hulk 2 were done sitting at home over the net? Really?

Absolutely!! For both the films, the orchestration was done from LA while I was working on percussions in London – we were working miles apart. But that's just the way – you could be working with anybody in the world just sitting at home.

Send in your comments to: chirag.sutar@indiantelevision.co.in