

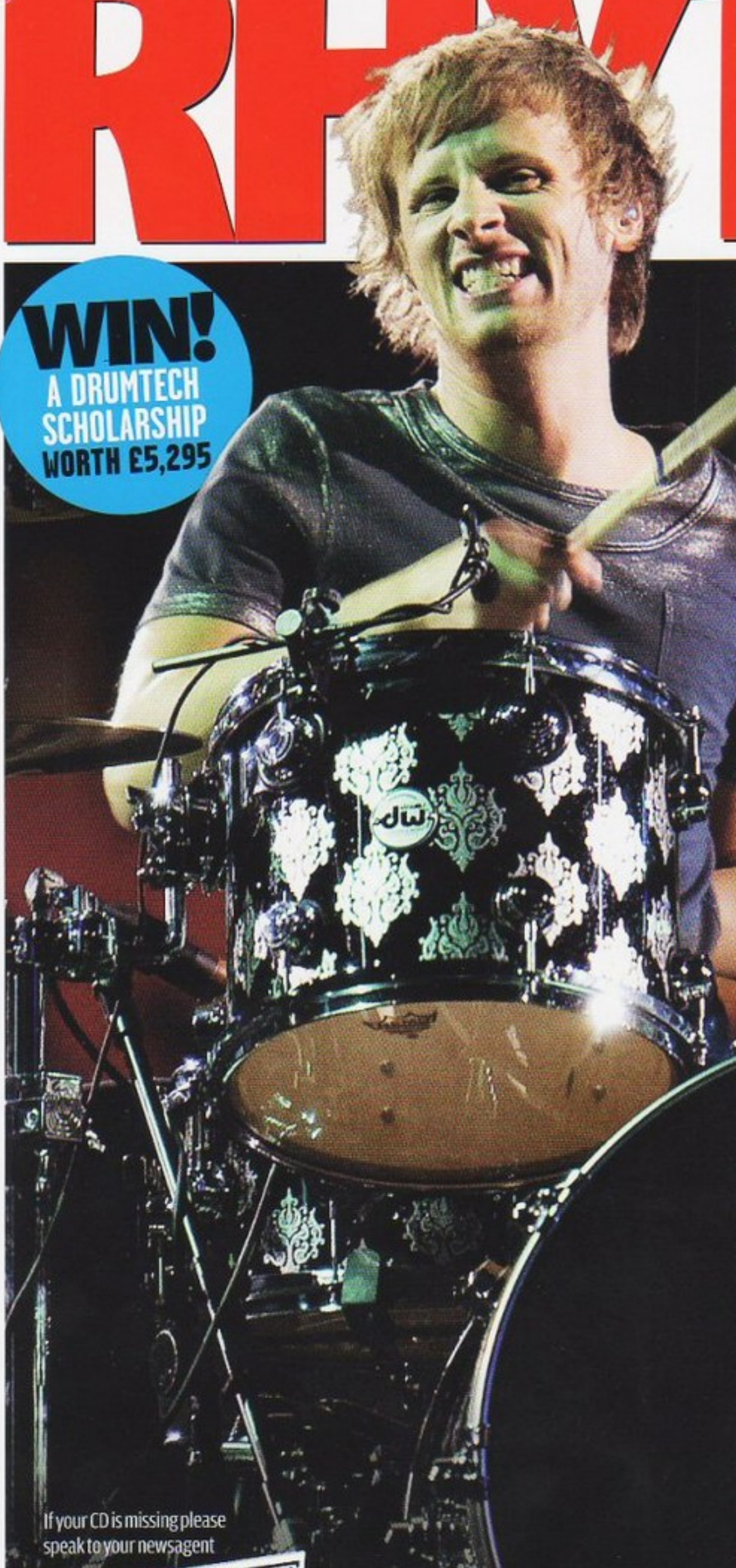
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# THE RHYTHM INTERVIEW

## Pete Lockett

Pete Lockett is a multi-percussionist who challenges preconceptions and traverses both style and culture. Charlie Price chats to this true musical globe-trotter

**W**hether you know Pete from his collaborations with various superstars and drumming royalty or through his command of the music of India, you won't be surprised that this unassuming but hugely powerful musician is on many people's A-list as the first call (do-it-all) solution to all your

rhythmic conundrums. Everyone from Sir Paul McCartney, Björk and Peter Gabriel to Ustad Zakir Hussain and the cream of India's musicians (as well as blockbuster movie soundtracks) keep the Portsmouth boy extremely busy. With a ground-breaking book out dealing with applying Indian Rhythms to the drumset, Pete took time out from a schedule that also includes recording an exciting new album with Airto Moreira and embarking on a trip back to India to rehearse and perform with a folk group from Rajasthan to chat to *Rhythm*.

**At what age were you first exposed to world music?**

"Not till I was 25 or 26, actually, and after I'd moved to London. I came across a free concert by Zakir Hussain - and that was it! A couple of weeks later I saw an advert in the Haringey free newspaper for tabla lessons and started studying. I didn't start drumming till I was 19 when I walked past a drum shop in Portsmouth and saw an advert in the window for drumming lessons. Two weeks later I was in a punk band smashing my drums up on a gig - amazing!"

**Then you got inspired by Indian music and mainly focused on tabla?**

"Yes, that's right, and originally it was just to complement the drums. But in the

beginning it's really hard to work out how you can use any of that stuff on the drumset, you know? The technique of playing the drums, the rhythms... and it probably took me 10 years to see how I could apply it to other percussion and kit."

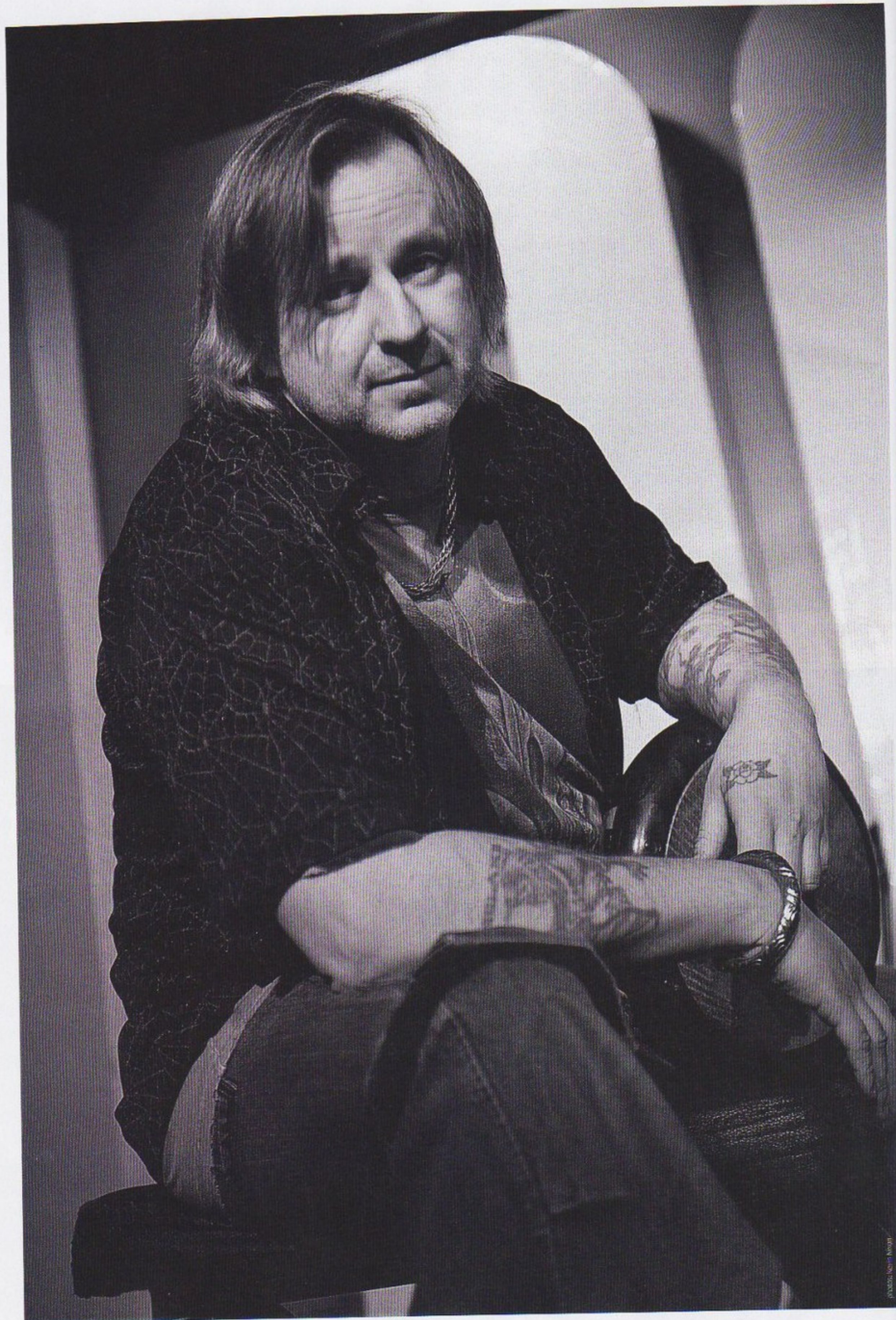
**Who were your earliest influences in world music styles?**

"Well, the thing is, I wouldn't think of myself as a world musician in that sense because I've been involved with so many different genres of music, like starting out listening to punk. The Sex Pistols, The Damned and then The Who. Then you move on, and really for me at that point I took six years out and all I did was learn Indian music. I didn't have any money at the time to buy records and there wasn't much in record libraries or stores but for that period of time I was blinkered, really, in that I was totally focussed on the Indian thing. With classical Indian music a lot of the time it's just two people playing and it took me a while to be able to get back into listening to bands again, as four or five people playing together sounded really busy to me!"

**I notice a lot of your drum and percussion collaborations are often just two people.**

"Well, there are loads of reasons for that. One is the intimacy. As soon as you've got three or four people, the lines of communication become a little bit more strained as it's a slightly different situation. When you're in a duo it's a direct situation and I really like that format. I'm really lucky, I've worked with some amazingly talented drummers from Bill Bruford and Steve Smith to Johnny Rabb, Russ Miller and Nicko McBrain. One of the important things about me and what I do - apart from the fact that it's versatile, is that it's without preconception and ▶

**"I'm not a head-up-your-arse world percussionist. I'll play with dignified Indian musicians and drum'n'bass and heavy metal drummers"**





► I'm not a head-up-your-arse world percussionist. I'll play with dignified classical Indian musicians and drum'n'bass and heavy metal drummers!

**With the vocalising (konnakol), was that something you had to master even before you learned to play tabla?**

"Not really, as the konnakol I do is a mix of north and south Indian vocalising. They're such totally different styles of music, as you get tabla mainly in the north and other instruments in the south. You learn the syllables and the playing at the same time. It just so happened that I spent a lot of time focussing on that and trying to develop it. Even in India there's only a handful of people that do konnakol as an actual instrument."

**Just getting onto your *Indian Rhythms For Drumset* book/CD package for a minute. It's amazing how you managed to translate all those traditional Indian feels and orchestrate them so beautifully. Were you literally thinking, "This is a 'doom' sound so I'm gonna use this drum"?**

"I didn't come up with a literal thing like that but I know there's a guy in America who's come up with an exact translation. Like every time you get a 'Ge' sound then it's this sound on the kit, but for me it was partly with my knowledge of north and south India. If you look at north India and the tabla, then pretty much most of the time specific strokes on the drum mean the same thing. There is ambiguity so some sounds have two syllables depending on the context, but pretty much it's always gonna be fingered in a particular way. Whereas a similar type of phrase on a mridangam could be played with four or five different fingerings depending on the player and the context. So with that in mind it's very open to interpretation in the south with very tight guidelines, so for me that was the policy I adopted, certainly with drumset and have it open with different stickings. Just to say to people, 'Look, these are empty shells, you can put in them what you like'. You kind of need to have that frame of mind so a right-left-right-left-left through a five, for example, might work on a darabouka but it wouldn't work on a bongo, so you'd have to come up with different ideas anyway. It kind of got me out of a specific

mindset of 'a group of five is always played like this' and it was good to free your mind because you're looking at all the components. There was an old jazz drummer in Australia called Graham Morgan who'd got a copy of the book and he was chatting to me. He's like the Joe Morello of Australia, a lovely old guy and what he'd done was take one of the things from the book that I'd played quite fast and he'd slowed it right down almost to half-tempo. He played me this recording of him playing it as a phrase of eights with brushes in the middle of this jazz tune and it just sounded really interesting. It's like 'wow', that's the thing - any application! For me, I just wanted to make the book a doorway into the whole thing."

**"Strip away any thought of trying to prove something or of being better than anyone else. 'Better' doesn't come into it"**

**For me, trying to come to grips with quintuplets, septuplets and odd phrases, just vocalising the 'ta-ka-ta-ki-ta' helped me a lot...**

"It's partly familiarity because in India from the very beginning people are playing in odd time signatures. And part of the reason for that is that even if you're in five or nine or 27 or whatever, they'll be adding units together to build up the different things. Nine-nine-nine-five, for example, is something that I cover in the book, which is 32. It could be nine-seven-nine-seven or nine-seven-seven-nine and similarly nine and seven is 12, and we're very well versed with that. You could have five-five-seven-seven or five-seven-seven, or five-seven-seven-five - lots of different variations and from the very beginning they're thinking about that and putting these different units together. Then within that you get to know a five and a seven really well and it's just there as a little framework behind what you're doing."

**It's such a clear book! I did buy a tabla book years ago that was like a manual for a super-computer and horrific to look at...**

"I'm glad you say that, and that was my objective, as a lot of people make it very impenetrable by using terminology all the time. I've stripped all the terminology out of it so when I talk about five then I'm talking about five. I'm stripping that away and coming back to the basic terminology that we understand here. That's

the difference between craftsmen and artists - a craftsman's got all the skills and the technical ability but an artist is a person that puts the expression in it."

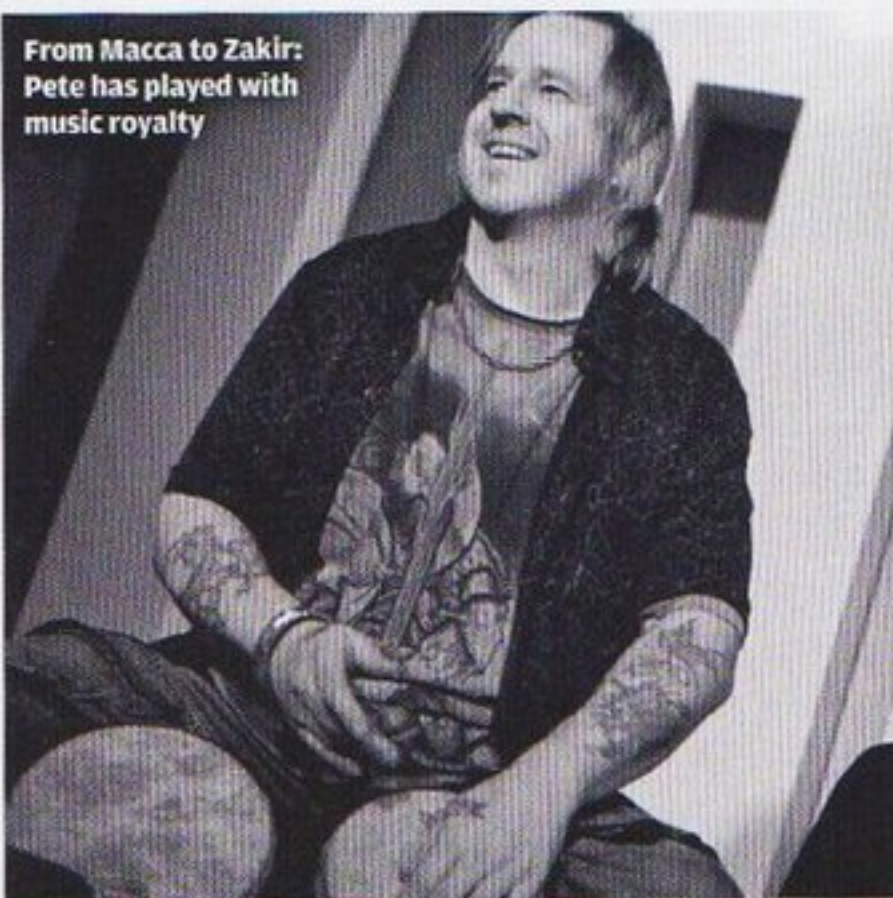
### And the instrument you were playing at NAMM last year, the Remo kanjira?

"That's one of Remo's top sellers and I never thought I'd see the day where drums made by a western company with synthetic heads could even compete with the real thing, particularly with instruments like kanjira, pandeiro and darabouka. But the new Remo stuff is really competing, and I'm not just saying that because I'm endorsed by them! I'd like to give a mention of course to my new 'Voyager' stick by Pro-Mark which is like a 5B rock timbale stick. I like it for all sorts of things such as African drums and of course for timbales, but the reason that I've used that stick so much is that it kind of works on everything. It works on drumset, electronic pads, not to mention bells and metal sounds."

### Obviously you're very close to tabla, but do you have any other favourite instruments that people might be interested to hear about?

"I don't really have a favourite as I tend to think of the whole thing as my instrument. Like kanjira, for example, is amazing in certain places and in other tracks is not going to work at all. It's situation-dependent, really, and finding the right instrument for the right job. I've just got one of these new Korg Wavedrums and I'm doing a lot with the editing of it to get more interesting sounds, but you find the right sound for a particular thing that you're doing. If you're trying to put something on a track you've got to find the right patch and it's the same with instruments, it's context-dependent. I remember doing a session

**From Macca to Zakir: Pete has played with music royalty**



### MY PROUDEST MUSICAL MOMENT

"Well I don't know about proudest, but I remember about five years ago I was invited by Zakir Hussain to play at the commemorative concert for his father. I remember going on stage and he did his solo which was mind blowing, then

he turned to me and it was time for me to do my solo. I had the choice of falling through the stage or coming up with something and I came up with a good solo. The crowd loved it and it was an interesting moment - I can't imagine anything more terrifying than that particular scenario."

with Phil Manzanera from Roxy Music and we did loads of tracks with regular percussion. Then on the final track we were taking the studio apart - the heater came off the wall! He went out and got a dustbin and it sounded amazing. It's just sounds, so put it in front of me and I'll hit it!"

### During solos do you just let it flow, or do you have a roadmap in your head?

"That's a good question and that could be the whole article, to be honest! I think you've got to strip away any thought of trying to prove something or of being better than anyone else, because 'better' doesn't come into it. We never look at other people's handwriting and think, 'That's much better than my handwriting.' Your handwriting is yours and you write paragraphs, words, stories so as to be as lyrical and poetic as your creativity allows, and I look at music in the same way. To try and strip the ego out of it and play music. How do you feel when you're playing? We play because when we started it felt good! And a lot of people forget that and get bogged down with how good they are technically... and what's that got to do with music? Absolutely nothing. I mean who gives a toss about how good someone is technically. Quite often that makes the song sound completely crap!

"The new album I'm recording at the moment is an album of solo percussion tracks. There's a ghatam track and a req track, a darabouka track, sound effects and of course a tabla track. It's something I've never done before, all very intimate and you can really hear all the finger work. By the time this comes out I might have released it digitally on iTunes, like my other recordings, but I'm probably gonna have copy of it out by the summer."

Pete is an endorsee of Remo, Zildjian and Pro-Mark. [www.petelockett.com](http://www.petelockett.com)

## Lockett On Record

### KIT COLLABORATIONS

#### Vital Information

##### Vitalization

(Hudson Music, 2006)



Impressive 12th release by this high velocity Jazz-fusion super-group.

A wonderful album that was recorded in 2006 with Pete's buddy (and fellow devotee of Indian music and konnakol) Steve Smith on kit.

★★★★★

#### Russ Miller

##### Arrival

(RMI/ Hudson Music, 2009)



Pete collaborated on Russ Miller's second solo album, *Arrival*. Pete also features

in live studio performance with Miller and Steve Smith on the DVD of the same name. In addition, the groundbreaking *Language of Drumming* DVD by Benny Greb strongly features Pete's playing too!

★★★★★

### LOCKETT'S POCKET ROCKETS

#### Network Of Sparks

##### One

(MELT 2000, 2009)



Featuring the one and only Bill Bruford of Yes and Earthworks fame. There's

now a bang up-to-date re-release of this and second album, *Two*, from the highly impressive percussive quintet.

★★★★★

#### Bickram Ghosh & Pete Lockett

##### The Kingdom Of Rhythm

(HMV/Saregama, 2009)



The power of two certainly does become one when virtuoso tabla artists

collaborate in an astonishing multi-percussion fiesta. An astonishing duo with Ghosh, who played with Ravi Shankar. Rich in rhythmic forms and boasting a vast percussive arsenal.

★★★★★

#### Taiko To Tabla

##### Live at the Bruges Festival

(Zoku-EMI, 2006)



Featuring Japanese master percussionist Joji Hirota alongside

Pete. Two albums with this almost telepathic world drumming project, and this live album is a great example of two world-class musicians really listening and responding instinctively to each other. Included in the top 55 rhythm albums of all time according to *Songlines* magazine.

★★★★★

#### Pete Lockett, TH Vikku Vinayakram et al

##### Pete Lockett's Journey With The Master Drummers Of India

(Music Today, 2009)



Pete's latest album gave him the chance to collaborate with the likes of TH Vikku Vinayakram, Bickram

Ghosh, U Rajesh and Mahesh Vinayakram. The album combines traditional instrumentation with some very interesting sonic treatments and processing that even includes a Hendrix-sounding mandolin!

★★★★★

### THE GATEWAY TO INDIA

#### A R Rahman

##### Sivaji

(AVM Productions, 2007)



Pete has also tracked studio sessions in the bustling Indian film industry; most recently in Chennai with AR Rahman (*Slumdog Millionaire*) on hugely successful blockbuster *Sivaji*.

★★★★★

#### Pete Lockett & Amit Chatterjee

##### Taalisman

(Indiabeat, 2008) A rich fusion of contemporary and traditional Eastern sounds, global percussive styles, raga melodies, cutting edge harmonies



and electronics, featuring one of South Asia's most renowned musicians, Amit

Chatterjee, guitarist with Trilok Gurtu and the legendary Zawinul Syndicate.

★★★★★

### HOLLYWOOD CALLING

#### David Arnold

##### Quantum Of Solace

(RCA, 2008)



Pete also got his teeth into recording and arranging all the ethnic percussion

on the 2008 Bond flick, *Quantum Of Solace* in addition to the four other most recent Bond movies. Amongst many others, the latest *Incredible Hulk* movie, *Moulin Rouge* and *City Of Angels* also benefited from the Lockett treatment. Thanks in no small part to his versatility, Pete is obviously held in high regard in this most challenging field of work.

★★★★★