

This version has the correct questions and abridged responses.

Tell me what work is like for you. How often do you tour, and how often are you in the studio? What projects are you working on?

Well, I've got it now to where I'm home about sixty percent of the time and traveling about forty percent of the time. That's working out good. I've been doing a lot of different records and movies and all kinds of different stuff.

When I'm here, I'm either at one of the studios in town, or, I have a studio at my house so a lot of composers and producers that I work for will just come to my place to do drums.

Many of the professional musicians that I've spoken with say that a lot of the session work is drying up and that performance income is becoming increasingly important. Would you agree?

I agree to a point. I think it's changing considerably.

How?

I think that the session thing has definitely changed, I mean you're never going to see any more of those guys that were doing three records a day, six days a week. The industry was changed so dramatically by the advent of low-cost digital recording gear. Now everybody and their brother can pretty much make a record. You just don't need a quarter-million-dollar record deal to make a record anymore.

So you see a lot of people making records and doing jingles and movies and stuff in their home studios and using MIDI gear and not using live guys as much.

Does this trend from major-money recording to low-cost production generate new opportunities for independent, freelance musicians, perhaps working out of their own homes?

Oh, definitely.

There aren't as many opportunities to be doing big, major label records and movies. On the other hand there are a lot of movies and records getting made at budgets that they couldn't get made for before. There's that whole new grass roots level of production that is happening, and somebody's got to play for it. So there is opportunity there.

When you call someone like me to do a session at a studio, you pay my fee, you pay cartage fees for the gear, you have to pay for the studio time, and you have to pay for the engineer, and that ends up being a costly thing to do a record in a big studio. At the house, I just charge my session fee and a small studio fee, so that's an attractive option for producers.

Given this trend, is it wise for a rising musician to spend time building some studio and electronics skills, as opposed to spending all their time becoming a virtuoso on the instrument?

We don't have the luxury of just playing our instrument, like we used to. I do highly recommend being the best player you can, because it's the only insurance of making a living in this business that you have.

If you're a great player and you don't sleep in your closet and hide from the public, you'll end up floating to the top eventually. But I would never recommend to somebody: "Be an acoustic jazz drum set player and you'll do just fine." I know four or five guys on the planet that can do that and they're the biggest names in the business - and they're making a very average living.

I recommend to everybody, be the best player you can be, and be extremely aware of what's going on with electronics, even it's just minimal - like having a sampler and a drum machine and a trigger module, so at least you can do tracks or MIDI sequences for someone.

Every pro that I know has a studio in their house. Everyone I know in this business is doing some percentage of their work at home. So I highly recommend getting those skills.

In your opinion, how important, relatively speaking, are formal schooling, private instruction, and self-instruction for musicians?

First off, no one can ever learn to play an instrument without self-instruction. Eventually, you end up teaching yourself, you end up being your own best teacher.

I do highly recommend private instruction right from the get-go. The reason is that if you don't have proper technique - particularly with a very physical instrument like drums - you're going to get led down a path where it becomes difficult to play certain things once you reach a certain level.

Besides that, you can physically damage yourself if you don't have proper technique. I know bass players that have carpal tunnel [syndrome] and they have to wear a wrist brace right up to the minute that they play, and then they play a two-hour show and it leaves them in pain.

So I do recommend private instruction to get your technique down, and also your reading skills.

The great thing about school is that you get to play music with other players that are at your level or better for the first time in your life. Up to that point you're, you know, trying

to get your garage band together [laughs]. You want to be a rock star. All of a sudden, you start to realize that that's a long, tough road.

You know, there are two ways to be a successful musician. You can be in a band, and the band becomes successful, or you can be a sideman and you market and develop yourself.

Which is more viable?

Well, it depends on what you want. If you're in a band, a rock band for instance, you're going to make no money - at all - until the band gets a record deal, and then, at that point, you'll make no money - at all - until the band sells a considerable amount of records.

The industry is way different than what it used to be. You see these guys on MTV doing videos and driving Bentleys and all this on their first record and it's like, "Man, you might as well just take that back to the rental place - we know you don't own it!" [Laughs] Not on their first record, at least.

If it all pans out and you do really well on your second record, you'll make more money than any sideman has ever dreamed of.

But personally, I think, if you want to be assured of making a living in this business, I highly recommend you work on yourself as the product. If worse comes to worst, you can make a living playing. There are a million guys making a living playing music.

If you can read well, and you have mastery of a lot of different styles, that's an extremely viable career.

In terms of styles and genres, is a musician more in demand as a generalist or as a specialist?

That's a good question. What I recommend is becoming what I call a "convincing" player in as many styles as possible. What I mean by convincing is that you're solid enough at a style - R&B for example - that an R&B band can call you and you can go do it and no one's going to, like, beat you up in the alley after the gig. The same thing for Afro-Cuban. You want to be able to go play with all Cuban players without having them hate you [laughs].

Eventually, certain gigs that you do and certain people and circles that you're in are going to dictate what you do well and specialize in. But if you're trying to make a living, get convincing in as many styles as possible. At the end of the month, the mortgage company never asks me, "Did you pay this by playing slammin' fusion gigs, or did you have to do a few pop records too?"

I tell my students that the first real wall to overcome to do this full-time is getting out of that day job so you can spend all of your time working on playing. Every minute that you spend not thinking about what you're doingÖthere's someone else that is. And that's your competition.

So get to where you only play, or teach, or at least work at a studio or music store, so you're around it and on top of it all the time.

What about the technology behind Napster and the essentially free exchange of recorded music. How is that going to change the business?

Basically it's deleting copyrighted music, the sonic recording of it, anyway. The written copyrighted music has already been deleted pretty much - everybody copies sheet music left and right.

If I were a huge artist - a Toni Braxton or somebody - it would probably hurt a lot more than it does me as the person playing for those people.

And as far as unsigned bands, sure, these unsigned bands can sell records to some guy in Denmark, but you still need that power of marketing that major labels provide.

I see both sides of it. I have products on my own label and also products with Warner Brothers. Because of their marketing power, the Warner Brothers stuff sells maybe twenty times as much. It also ends up promoting my independent stuff.

I'd like to say it's great for guys that are unsigned, but on the other hand, unless they have real marketing dollars like those that a label can provide, they're probably not going to do any real numbers.

Is the technology of the Information Age generating new opportunities for musicians?

Sure. For example, I know some guys that are doing a lot of video game soundtracks, which is almost like scoring a small movie.

Again I highly recommend to everybody that they get a functional understanding of MIDI and digital audio. A lot of the sessions I've been doing are loop sessions. They hire me to come in for two days and I play all these different ideas and they grab sections from them and use them throughout the record.

There are guys out there who don't have any functional knowledge of music composition or theory who are making really big records because they got really happening programming jobs. They know how to manipulate that stuff and make it sound interesting, even if from a musical standpoint it might have, you know, one chord [laughs].

You said that a great player will "float to the top." What about the musician is who is only an average talent, but eager to succeed. How can he set himself apart?

Playing is important but, man, your personality and your approach to business are extremely important. I know incredible musicians that are absolute flakes. Say you have a session at Clear Lake Audio, the studio's \$2200 a day, the engineer's \$1500 a day, your gear cartage is \$300, all this money's involved, and then one of these flakes doesn't show up for three hours. The fact is, reliable workers are going to get the calls.

Especially since - let's be honest - music is one of the few industries that has technically gone downhill in the last 50 years. Look at the ability of players in the Forties. It far surpasses what you see on television and what you hear on radio now.

The technical ability has gone way down as far as what's required to be a successful player.

So if you're a meat and potatoes player - you have your funk down, you have your rock down, you show up on time, you can relate to people in a professional way - then there's a place for you in the business?

Yeah, there's no question about it. You know Steve Smith MAKE REFERENCE told me years ago when I was a kid, he said if you are the most persistent person, pushing forward, with incredible drive, you're going to see all these other people fall by the wayside. Everyone, when they're fifteen years old, wants to be a rock star. Eventually, the guys who are the most persistent create their own success. It's a slow, snowballing process that just builds over years and years. Persistence is the key.

I'd hate for a nineteen year old

Looking back, what do you wish you had known about the art of making music?

I wish I would have known how to play solid time earlier in my career - how to create an effective pulse for the other people to lay their parts on - basically doing what we consider the fundamental role of a drummer.

There are so many drum videos, drum books, private teachers and even colleges that are so incredibly focused on chops or hyper-effective hand technique. That stuff is secondary to playing music. It is important, but the truth is I played better music when I was fifteen years old than when I was twenty-two. In college, I was so focused on facility and technique that when I went to perform I would be thinking about that instead of how to play music effectively. It took me years to get away from that.

If you know how to play music with sensitivity and character - and as a drummer, if you have great time and pulse and feel - you're going to work a lot more than a guy who has, you know, incredible double-bass-drum chops.

What do you wish you had known about the business of making music?

I wish I had spent more time developing my piano skills, so I would have more opportunity to contribute to the writing. The guys who play on the platinum albums don't get one one-hundredth of what the people who wrote them get.

I also recommend focusing on stuff that will bring in royalties. I do books and videos not only to pass on the knowledge, but also to build a source of income that doesn't require me to physically be there.

If you're going from gig to gig, you know, one month you make ten times more money than you need and the next month you make half of what you need. It's important to understand how to budget.

Remaining humble is a big part of it. It's real easy to get egotistical or cocky when you do a big record or a big tour, and then you have a lot of money and you go buy a Mercedes and a three-thousand dollar watch, and [laughs] all of a sudden the phone isn't ringing, and you start hustling and freaking out.

Just remain humble. The house and the cars and the gear - all that stuff will come eventually, but I really recommend staying humble on the way there.