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Brendan Buckley



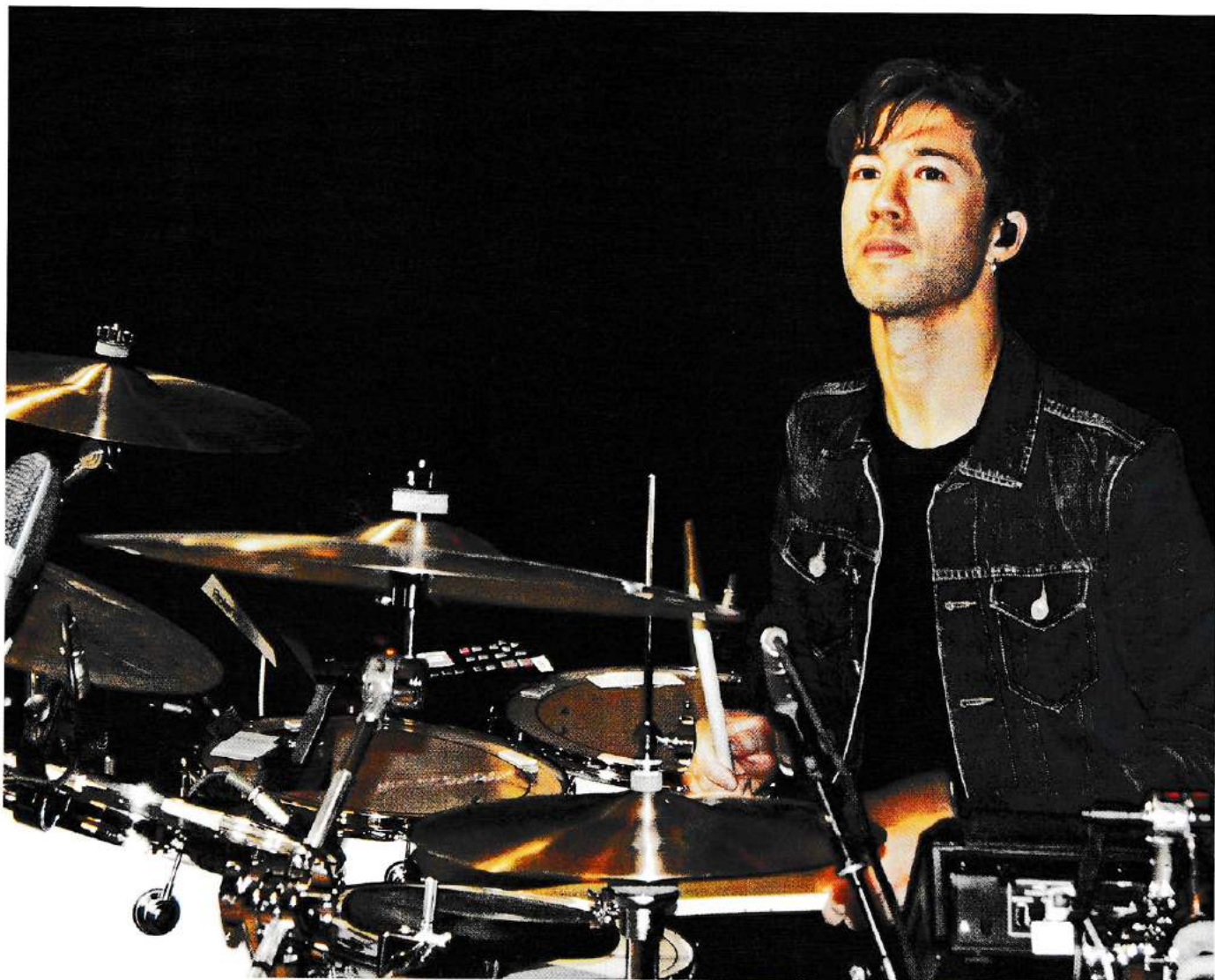
Improving & Improv'ing

Interview & Photos - Mover

Some drummers make it big straight away, ride the wave and then disappear as quickly as they appeared. Other drummers make it big by establishing themselves in a variety of ways and stay in the game for a very long time, making an actual life and career out of playing drums. Brendan Buckley defines the latter category.

From my first time meeting Brendan (via Kelly King bringing him to my attention in *Drumhead* six years ago), to recently catching him with Tegan and Sara,

Brendan has been consistently working—playing on a vast array of recordings and touring with a variety of artists the world over. It may seem simple—hang out around town and keep practicing—but there's a lot more to it, as you will see. Sure he can lay it down— from Latin to pop and everything in between—but above and beyond all that, he's one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet, forever striving to improve, and always has the artist's back. Rest assured he'll be working for a very long time.



JM: What's happening, or not happening, in Shakira's camp that's giving you the time to do this tour with Tegan and Sara?

BB: Well, Shakira—that's been a great gig for me. I started in 1998, did a lot of records and tours with her, and that used to be the gig that just used to wouldn't quit. They would call you up, "Hey, are you free next week for one Shakira show?" "Sure." And then two years later it's still going [laughs]. She used to be a workaholic, more than anyone else I knew; she wanted to do every country, every TV show, everything. I think her life changed a bit since getting

married and having two children. She did one or two seasons on "The Voice" as a judge, which kind of mellowed her out from being constantly on tour, or constantly in the studio—which obviously affected the amount of work I do with her, which is only natural.

I've always managed to freelance in between her gigs. I used to live in Miami before I moved to L.A. and always made sure to stay in touch with all my friends; always doing tours or albums in between her record cycles. She kind of moves in cycles—makes an album, releases it, does the promo, then does a concert tour and

then either takes some time off or goes back in to make another record. You can always count on it being a cycle. I am very grateful I got to do that gig forever, but the last real tour we did was 2011. Ever since then it's been every now and then a one-off. Her manager calls up, "Hey, I have one show here, I have one show there. Can we put the band together for this this one concert?" I've done five other tours since her last one, with different artists. That's what happens. They always call me up and keep me up to date, but it's just her amount of work has decreased 90 percent.

JM: When you get called to do something else, do you at least pick up the phone and ask them, "Am I clear for the next six weeks?"

BB: Oh yeah, I always check in with them. But, in their camp, things are always last minute, I don't know if you've experienced that.

JM: Quite a bit. Ninety percent of my work is last minute, "Our drummer's not cutting it in the studio, get in here asap." "Our drummer hurt his neck, can you start the tour tomorrow, and stay for the next few months?"

BB: Yeah [laughs.] You've even worked with Shakira in the studio. Every session I ever got called in to do with her was, "What are you doing this Saturday? Can you fly to Spain?" or "Can you be in Uruguay by tomorrow?" It's like that. Even shows: "Oh, there's a tentative show next Friday in Morocco, can you do that?" "What? Next

past 18 years. It was a one-song TV show in Las Vegas and I got a friend of mine to fill in. Other than that I think I've managed to work out every conflict.

JM: Where is at right now? On hold with more coming?

BB: Yeah. She's working on her next record, and I think that might be a 2017 workload.

Taking The Lead

JM: How did you hear about and get the call for Tegan & Sara?

BB: Well, I know of them. I have a couple of their albums and my friend Adam Christgau played drums on their previous tour. For this tour, they put together a new group with a new musical director, and it was the musical director that called me up, "I'm working with Tegan and Sara...

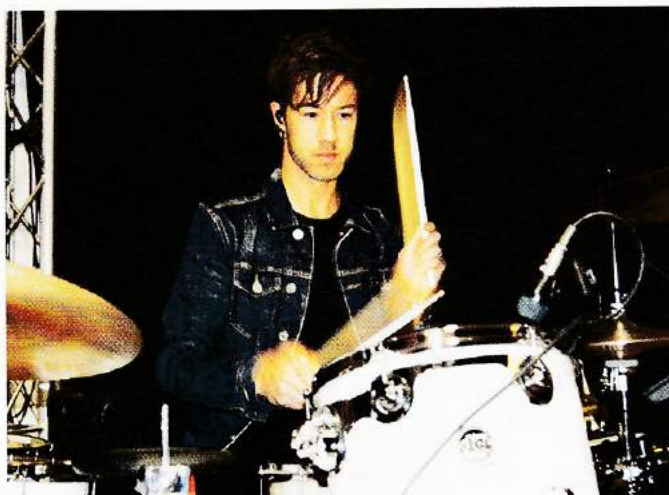
Their approach was: We just want to get qualified people and we want to see if this is the right chemistry for this gang.

JM: How long are you out with them?

BB: The album comes out in June, so this is the promo portion of the tour. Then we go back to rehearsing again to put together a full two-hour show and that will happen all summer and fall. They say it's going to be an 18-month cycle, maybe. I guess if you plan it correctly, you build it. So 'promo' means small shows, TV and things like that, everything around the album release. Then put together a full show and do the US, Canada, some Europe. Then in 2017, they would start to do larger shows and ride that whole wave of festivals and things.

JM: Is it your friend Adam that's on the record?

BB: No, I believe it's a lot of electronics. I don't know how much live drums are on



You can think: to be a good drummer you have to learn how to play the drums, but the next level is you have to learn to put on shows.

Friday! They really put them together very quickly.

JM: When something like that happens, is she the priority?

BB: Usually.

JM: Then you would find a sub if you were already doing something else?

BB: Well, like you said first, I always try to check in with them and say "Listen, I'm working with this artist for the next eight months. Is there anything you can foresee happening in that time period?" They usually say, "No, nothing. We're on complete hiatus on the moment." Four months down the line, "There's this one show..." [laughs]. Fortunately, I think I've only missed one performance over the

putting together a new band, would you be interested?"

JM: Was it an audition or was it: If you want it it's yours?

BB: It wasn't an audition, but it was, "Could you come down? They'd like to meet you in person." When I got there they said, "Listen, we've already heard that you can play the drums so we don't want to watch you play. We just want to meet you in person and see if our personalities gel."

JM: That's a nice position to be in.

BB: I thought that was really mature and next level because a lot of people can play but not every one can get along in a dressing room or in a tour bus or airplane. Personalities start to not jive well on certain tours. I thought it was very smart of them.

the record at this point.

JM: You said before that you're familiar with them and have some of their records. How close do you have to stick to what was done previously or do you have the option to bring in some of your own personality and ideas?

BB: Whenever I approach any gig, I usually sit down with all the songs and write out charts of the songs the exact way they are on the record.

JM: The song arrangement or the actual drum track?

BB: I get nerdy with it and I write where every open hi-hat is. I write a little drum chart and I play along with it.

From there, I see how it feels, "Ah, that's really cool," "That's an interesting drum fill, I would have never had done that but that actually works really well." Or, "That bass drum pattern does not work well with that bass line, I'm going to bring that up during rehearsals, I think it's kind of clashing," or whatever. I make my little notes, but that doesn't mean I'm going to play it like that in a month; that's just how I start learning a song. But then I start thinking things that could be done differently: What if we do this on the chorus instead? What if we change it and make it more like this? I come up with options, then when we get to rehearsals, obviously the artist has input, the music director has input, and we just start throwing things around—maybe this song would work better with 16th notes on a hi-hat to give it some subdivision... or maybe we should simplify that bass-drum pattern, it's just way too boomy. Usually everyone has

and two drum parts and a percussion part and wrote a song on top. The song is great but the rhythm track is a disaster.

JM: It's amazing how often that happens. When people don't zero in on how important or how a rhythm track can make or break something.

BB: Yeah, so I think, "Well, I love the melody, I love the chords, but man, that bass line and drum part just don't make any sense with that song."

JM: And what do you do?

BB: I'll very subconsciously start changing things so no one notices. I have a couple good bass-player friends of mine and we kind look at each other and wink, "We're going to take out that part and see if they notice." You can massage the songs into being a little more realistic.

I can imagine back in the '70s when everyone tracked with live rhythm sections, that wouldn't happen so much because it's

and paste—but they don't know how a drummer thinks; they don't know how a bass player or rhythm section puts things together.

BB: Yeah, so to bring it back to what you asked, the producer on this new Tegan and Sara record is Greg Kirsten, he's a really great producer. I love everything he does, all his other projects; and his drum programming is really cool—it's actually fun to learn those parts and we sampled all the little sounds from the record. I'm triggering them all around the kit, when I think it's appropriate. This really cool 'boom' sound on the bridge or this signature clap sound that happens on beat FOUR; it's fun for me because it's a sonic pallet that I think works well and adds to the drum part. Sometimes I like learning the songs verbatim, and sometimes I like it when an artist says, "Do what you do."

JM: Which is?



I learned a lot by getting gigs, being on the road and saying to myself, "Mental note, remember that for the future!"

ideas and we come up with some new version that relates to the old one but could be considered the live version.

Every artist is different. Sometimes I work with artists who basically want to hear their record performed to them live; exactly like the record. Other people have been listening to their record in the studio for eight months and they don't want to hear their record anymore, they want to hear musicians interpret their songs: "I can't stand that version anymore, let's bring some life into this." I think you have to have the flexibility to go both ways.

JM: Do you have a preference?

BB: My preference is to not playing illogical drum parts. There are a lot of times when a song feels like it was created through drag and drop methods—they pulled a bass line

uncomfortable to play a bass line and drum part along with an acoustic guitar part and a vocal when none of them line up.

JM: Under those circumstances, everyone would know it wasn't happening.

BB: Yeah. "This feels terrible, why?" When you're making music with a mouse, you don't notice as much.

JM: It can definitely keep you removed, so to speak. Also, you have people, in my opinion, making music with mice, that don't know each individual instrument well enough. They might know how to program something or they might know how to drag and drop, like you said—copy

BB: I just play pop music like John Bonham would. That's my go-to! And it's amazing how you can sneak that in a lot.

Plugged In

JM: You mentioned before the new record is all electronics and it's programmed. You have a hybrid kit of acoustic and electric... what made you decide what to bring with regard to the electronics?

BB: The electronic side of drumming is on a gig-to-gig basis. I never want to bring more than is necessary, because with everything you add, there comes another complication. But I always want to provide enough for the artist or the music director

The things I try to achieve and shoot for are to:
be a good worker, be professional and get the job done well.

Born in Africa



Photo: Alex Kluff

to be happy. This was a project, where specifically, right off the bat, they said they wanted to experiment with a lot of electronics: "There are a lot of songs where we want all the kicks and snares from the record."

JM: Do you say, "Okay" and know exactly where to start, or say "Okay" and then pick up the phone and call someone to help get you up to speed?

BB: No, I've been doing that for years. I've been using them on gigs since the beginning.

When I was in high school, I was taking drum lessons from Tommy Igoe. Aside from learning the Buddy Rich Big Band charts and learning marching snare drum parts, he would also bring in his Drum Kat and show me how it worked. He was the first guy that encouraged me to buy a TD-7 drum set, and a Boss DR550 Doctor Rhythm drum machine. We programmed beats and played along with them. Tommy had the foresight to say, "You're probably going to need to know this stuff down the line. As much as you need to know a buzz roll, you're going to need to do this too." I also had the curiosity for it too. I don't stay on the forefront of everything, but I like to know about everything and use things to taste. If we need acoustic drum triggers, I'll use those, and if we need separate pads off to the sides, I'll use those. I'm fine if it's a full electronic setup too; I've used every combination.

Also, sometimes they ask the drummer to play along with tracks or to even run the tracks, so you have to know how to work with sequencers also. I feel like it's been a part of my gig, and I've always likened it to a really great professional keyboardist... they have their Hammond B3, their Wuritzer, their Moog synthesizer or their Profit; and then they have an acoustic piano.

JM: I agree; you have to cover a bit of everything.

BB: For a drummer to say he's only going to play an acoustic 4-piece drum set is like a piano playing saying he'll only play a Steinway. The gig is a dance-funk thing and they say, "Well, I'm going to bring my grand piano." Most keyboardists I know

have everything under control when it comes to different types of keyboards; they move their hands around and switch to taste: "This is a song that could use Rhodes," and that's the way I look at drums. And, I would throw a third thing in there—percussion. So, it's acoustic drum set, electric drum set and percussion. A drummer should be able to add percussion elements into his setup too. Whether it's just a surdo or djembe or a full-on salsa rhythm section...he should know enough to add and take away those elements. Sometimes just playing a maraca or a shaker in your right hand while playing the kit is enough to combine the two. I feel like I've always had that combination, that hybrid thing going on before it was a term—hybrid drumming.'

Dead Or Live

JM: I noticed the other day when checking out your kit, how dead the tuning is for this gig, as opposed to what you're probably used to playing with Shakira—Latin funk and pop—which is brighter and much more tonal. The difference in feel and comfort aside, is there a reason why you've gone with this type of tuning and if you're reasoning is to make it sound more like it's electronic, why not just go with an all electronic kit?

BB: Well, it was actually already considered that we might do all electronics. I added in the acoustic elements one by one, with the help of the musical director saying, "You know, this song might be cool if you go to an acoustic kick on the chorus," or "this one might be cool if we do real tom fills."

For me, the first thing that gets added is the cymbals; people notice a real hi-hat and real crashes usually sound better live—you get more nuances out of them. We started adding elements back in, but I wanted it to match where we were going with this, as far as the electro-dance-pop sound. So I tuned the drums where they would work in that environment, which is a controlled, chunky snare, same with the toms and the kick. It's

more trying to get sounds that I think would be appropriate to the music. I listened to their previous records, plus they gave me the drum stems from their album so I could listen to the drum tracks exactly—the tuning of the snare, the toms, and I know, "I can either sample those or I can get those live." So, if they want to go back and forth—electronic on the verse, real drums on the chorus—no one's going to turn around and say, "What happened?" It's going to blend seamlessly. It wasn't like I was trying to make the sounds 'dead,' as in lifeless; I just wanted to go for a sound that I thought fit their music.

JM: The few times that I've done a mixture of electric and acoustic, the only problem that I used to have was how it would come back to me through a monitor. The electronics were these tiny sounds, so it didn't feel or sound the same when mixed in. Only when I was on a gig where the monitor engineer knew what I needed and it was balanced and adjusted well, and not just a quick in-and-out where they didn't know what was going on, was it much better for me.

Do you have any type of control of what's coming back and how it feels and sounds for you or are you leaving it all to the engineer?

BB: This is a really good point, because this is something I had dealt with. I played a lot of electronics over the years with Shakira too and it's one of the things I noticed, the same thing you said. There would be some songs where I was playing an electric kick and an acoustic snare, which really throws the groove around on stage if people aren't feeling it balanced. So, on the drum riser we put a big woofer and a wedge behind me and without my in-ears in, just acoustically, I would go back and forth so everything was the right volume. If I had an acoustic and electric kick, I go back and forth playing double bass so they were the same velocity and power, and I do the real snare and the e-snare—playing buzz rolls or doubles back and forth so they felt like that were the exact same volume. Then go around the kit. That way, even without the in-ears, just on



BB: Yeah [laughs]. And, I don't think people

At Your Service

BB: That's something I ask myself all the time because you know, I live in a town—Los Angeles—that's filled with fantastic drummers that I admire. So I always think exactly that: What do I bring to the table? I don't know. Maybe I'm too humble or self-effacing to answer this question correctly, but I would say, the things I try to achieve and to shoot for are to: be a good worker, be professional and get the job done well. I don't ever claim to be the greatest drummer to hit the planet, but I

BB: [Laughs] And off stage. That empathy with artists is a very intangible thing that I've learned over the years; having a

Drums	19" HHX Legacy Crash	T1 Timpani Mallets
DW Performance Series White Ice finish)	Heads	Steve Gadd Wire Brushes
22" X 18" Kick	Remo	Electronics
13" X 10" Rack	Snare - Coated Ambassador	Roland
16" X 14" Floor	Rack & Floors - Clr Pinstripes/ Clr Amb	SPD-sx sampling pads, KT-10 kick trigger pedal, PD-8 dual trigger pads, PDX-100 v-pad.
18" X 16" Floor	Kick - Clear Powerstroke 3	Apple Macbook Pro
14" X 6.5" Snare	Hardware	Percussion
Cymbals	DW	LP
Sabian	5002 double pedal, 9000 series hardware	Shaker, Tambourine
14" HHX Groove Hats	Sticks	Misc.
18" HHX Legacy Crash	Vic Firth	Canopus Vintage Chrome Snare Wires
22" AA Apollo Ride	5AW	



connection with every artist you work with so they feel stress-free and able to perform the way they want to perform. A lot of those types of things I've worked on over the years, along with playing to a click and learning how to tune your drums. All that other stuff: invisible communication amongst all the other people in the organization. If you do big tours, there are a hundred people sometimes on tour with you and having that connection with everyone from the drum tech to the monitor engineer to the production manager is important. It's all a big team, we're all trying to accomplish the same thing, and I approach that whether it's a quartet or one hundred thirty people on tour.

JM: When you first showed up to do the gig, were you completely on point, were there things you had to change around and modify by your own doing and fruition, or did somebody ask you to do something?
BB: I like to think that I was on point for almost everything, but mainly because I had a couple of really good conversations with the manager and the musical director before I showed up.

JM: Care to elaborate?

BB: I asked, "How are we going to approach these two weeks?" "How would you like me to show up on day one?" I designed the kit before anyone showed up, because I knew they were going to ask me to give them options: "Let's try that just on the electronics," "Let's try that just on the acoustics," I knew they were going to ask for that. And they were going to ask for a plethora of sounds—sounds that were on the record, plus other sounds, "Can you give me some [Roland] 808s and some 909s and see what that sounds like." I was ready for that.

And also, talking about the business ahead of time with the manager, so I knew what to expect—all the details involved with how to do the gig were laid out on the table before I said yes; rehearsals were very smooth because of that, and nothing really threw me for a curve. My past experience with other pop acts and the conversations I had with everyone had me prepared for day one, so it was just a matter of rehearsing and putting it together.

JM: You mentioned that this first run is a promo tour. My experience of promo tours is: different city every day, different kit every night. If that's the case here, what are you bringing from gig to gig?

BB: Just the electronics and the pads go with me; renting backline in every city. So I also had to have that in mind: How do I come up with a drum set that is unique enough for their gig, but generic enough where we can get one in every city? That's another thing people have to keep in mind when you're dealing with the production side of things—how difficult it is to put together a show in Toronto one night and Singapore one night later. You have to help them, "This is how we're doing it. I'm going to travel with just a USB key, my sticks and a passport, and we can do this show..." and production managers really appreciate that you're taking it all into account. "Next week we're doing two shows in one night, in two different locations... how are we going to pull that off?" I say, "Easy," and explain how we're going to do it.

JM: Have electronics, will travel.

BB: [Laughs] Exactly! It's all the stuff that they don't teach you in music school.

JM: Foreseeing the problems that could arise and being a head of the game.

BB: You can think: to be a good drummer you have to learn how to play the drums, but the next level is you have to learn to put on shows. You have to help out in every aspect of putting on a show, and that's a bit of the production side too.

JM: That's what the YouTube generation doesn't get... anyone can sit in their room and play double-bass at 300 beats per minute and post a video and get a zillion hits, but can that person actually record a drum track in the studio, or can that person drive a band in front of 100 or 10,000 people? Can that person save a band when there's a train wreck on stage? All of the elements and aspects that go into being a professional and all of the things that you're talking about that you do very well.

BB: It's very on-the-job training.

JM: Your first time in the deep end, you sink or swim.

BB: I learned a lot by getting gigs, being on the road and saying to myself, "Mental note, remember that for the future!" "Don't do that," or "Make sure I do that more..." That's the experience that I try to share with other people and a lot of my professional drummer friends all have that same knowledge base. We share those kinds of stories, like what do you do when you're in New Deli and you don't make your connection? [Laughs] What do you

do? These things that are part of your gig.

JM: I know, those things really do happen.

BB: Yeah, exactly—all that behind-the-scenes stuff that no one knows about.

JM: But it keeps it fun and interesting; I love those situations. There's nothing better than a smooth gig where everyone's on top of the world, but when shit goes down and you save the day or you get somebody through it, and an artist turns around and knows that they're comfortable in front of you, that they can rely on you for playing and for saving; that's a great feeling.

BB: People ask me if I prefer doing a gig that's note-for-note rehearsed or completely improvised. They're two totally different things. The one where you get together with a group and you rehearse for a month and you work out everything—the tempos, the lengths, even the fills, that's fun in its own way because your job is to execute. It's like doing a really great recording session for two hours straight every night and you're thinking how you can perform this take without messing up? I appreciate that. But then the improvisatory thing is great too. I've done tours where they don't want to hear it the same way every time... "Just watch me!" "Follow me!" That's fun, because you're flying by the seat of your pants and you're relying on your musicality.

JM: Which is also execution.

BB: Yep, true. I think what we were talking about before is also when you're in a recording session, or on tour, or doing anything, and things go haywire, it's a bit of improv too. For example, what do you do when you get to the venue and 'this' happens? You're improv'ing in a different way. The show will still go on, let's just do it this way instead; touring can be like that.

Sometimes people ask me what's the most embarrassing experience on stage, or what's the worst things that ever happened and I can't think of many because even the worst things are funny to me. They make it more memorable for me and I enjoy it more because I have that heightened improvisatory look at it. "Okay, shit just hit the fan, so what are we going to do about it?" And everyone really digs down deep and really pulls through. Those become even more exciting to me than the other 80 shows that were identical. It's the one where things went wrong that are really exciting and fun for me. ✨

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