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The global drumming e-zine

Brendan benefits from electronics



Ben Todd



NAMM debuts



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--PROFILE--

Brendan benefits from electronics

Los Angeles-based Brendan Buckley is best known as the drummer with Shakira, but he has played with Julio and Enrico Iglesias, DMX, Gloria Estefan and a host of other big names. As he tells **digitalDrummer** editor Allan Leibowitz, he seldom plays without some electronic elements in his kit.

digitalDrummer: Tell us how you got into drumming?

Brendan Buckley: I began drumming in the middle school band. At that time, I had already been studying trumpet and piano. But I became fascinated with the percussion instruments in the back of concert band and also with the drum set that was collecting dust in the corner of the music room. By the age of 14, I purchased a used drum set from a neighbour down the street. And then I began taking formal lessons with Tommy Igoe at the age of 16. When I turned 18, I moved from New Jersey to Florida to study at the University of Miami's School of Music.

dd: And how did you start gigging?

BB: I began gigging in a high school band; parties, cover gigs, etc. And then, down at the University of Miami, it was very common to take classes and practise all day long, and then to gig in local bars and clubs at night. At the time, there were plenty of opportunities to do jazz trios, Top 40 cover bands, original rock projects, salsa groups and so on. All of those playing experiences led to recording sessions and bigger tours. Keep in mind, with each new gig, a person is expanding his/her "musician network". So, that just grew and grew. At a certain point, I felt an urge to relocate to Los Angeles, both for a change of lifestyle and also to play with all of the city's fine musicians.

dd: When did you realise that you could make this your career?

BB: The idea of "drumming as a career" never really entered my mind. I enjoyed the whole world of drumming and I desired to get a little better each day. My biggest concerns were to play well and to play with other great

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musicians. Now that I mention it, that is still my goal today!

dd: Let's talk about your big break: how did you end up behind the throne with Shakira?

BB: I first began working with Shakira in the studio. Back in Miami, I occasionally tracked drums at Gloria Estefan's recording studio called Crescent Moon. Shakira came through Miami to work on her album, *Dónde Están Los Ladrones*, in 1998 and the studio engineer, Sebastian Krys, reached out to me to record the live drums. When that album came out, Shakira's management put together a band to do a few CD release parties and an MTV Unplugged concert. The lead guitarist, keyboardist and I have been in her band ever since.



dd: Turning to gear, when did you first encounter electronic percussion?

BB: My high school drum teacher, Tommy Iggoe, used to stress the importance of technology during our lessons. Not only did we practise with a metronome, but we also used to play with drum machines and program beats in odd time signatures like 5/4 or 7/8. He was the first guy to show me a DrumKAT, MIDI and an Atari sequencer - and drum triggers. Later on, when I was studying at the University of Miami, he called me up and suggested that I buy a used Roland TD-7 drum set, (this was way before the V-Drum kits of today). All of these experiences helped me stay current with the world of electronic drumming.

dd: What equipment have you used and owned over the years, and what have been your favourites?

BB: My first drum machine was a Boss DR-550 Dr. Rhythm (I still have it). But since then, I have owned almost everything under the sun. Multiple DrumKAT's, the ddrum 4 kit, an Alesis D4, a Roland SP-202 sampler, Opcode Studio

Vision, a Roland TD-7, the Akai MPC2000, Roland Octapads, Akai S-5000 samplers, Propellerhead Reason, a few Roland SPD-SXs, MOTU Digital Performer, a Roland TD-30 set, Native Instruments Battery 3, every version of Roland Handsonic, Logic Pro, Pro Tools, Ableton Live, a mountain of guitar stomp boxes, and so on. Oh... I should mention that, along with being a giant fan of drum heroes such as Steve Gadd, Tony Williams, Buddy Rich, Stewart Copeland, John Bonham, I was also a huge fanatic of bands like Depeche Mode, Nine Inch Nails, Massive Attack, which all primarily used electronic drum parts and samples. So, this was already a language and style with which I was familiar.

dd: So, what e-drums do you currently have in your arsenal – and how do you use them?

BB: My current set up with Tegan and Sara is actually quite streamlined (compared to my previous Shakira rig). I use two Roland SPD-SXs with several trigger pads placed around an acoustic kit, and a KD-7 kick trigger under the floor tom. Plus, I have been experimenting with a Roland TM-2 trigger module, also. I use



Brendan's hybrid kit, with two Roland SPD-SXs

a MacBook Pro with the software applications Twisted Wave to edit drum samples and Wave Manager to load them onto my SPD-SXs. A lot of the electronic drum sounds that I use are sampled directly from the artists' albums.

There are a number of different things happening behind the scenes with Tegan and Sara. From my SPD-SXs, I am triggering samples, and firing short one-shot loops. For any longer loops or sequences, I am using a Novation LaunchPad to control a pair of MacBooks off to the side of the stage (in computer world). These MacBooks are running Abelton Live software. And there is a tech (Taylor) watching over the computers to make sure nothing goes wrong.

Also, for the synthesizer sounds, we have a total of five keyboards spread around the stage, and they are all connected to a third MacBook. This computer is running MainStage software.

dD: Your rig looks quite complex. Does that pose any challenges to sound guys?

BB: I try to keep things as simple as possible for sound engineers. A lot of time is spent during rehearsals balancing the volumes of all the various drum sounds. The engineer

shouldn't have to be constantly touching the faders on the mixing console because the snare sample on the Verse is too loud, or the 808 boom on the bridge is too soft. I take care of that on my end. I also split up the outputs of the SPD-SXs in a way that sends the engineer the electronic snares and cymbals on one stereo channel, and the kicks and low-end stuff on a second stereo channel. This gives the engineer better control over the balance in the PA system.

When it comes to adding my acoustic drum kit to this set-up, I try to use tones that blend well with the electronic samples. I keep the kick drum punchy and tight. I go for a chunky, slightly deadened snare drum sound too. The cymbals are thin and decay quickly. And the toms are thuddy.

This tuning style helps the mix when jumping back and forth between electronic and acoustic sounds.

For monitoring, I use in-ear monitors, but I also run the drums and electronics through actual wedges and subs on my drum riser. I want to feel the air moving. So, I spend a bit of time going back and forth between the acoustic kick and the electronic kick, and then the acoustic snare and electronic snares, making sure the volumes are balanced on the drum riser.

dD: What do you think electronic drums can do that acoustics can't?

BB: Well, the number one reason I use electronic drums live is to recreate exact signature drum sounds from the artists' albums. Sometimes, acoustic drums cannot generate the same feel and vibe as the electronic samples. However, in a perfect scenario, I like to have a hybrid set-up that allows me to move from sampled electronic drums to acoustic drums (or a combination of both), depending on the music.

dD: A lot of our readers focus on equipment, but gear alone will not ensure drumming - or musical - success. What is your advice for being a better drummer and a better musician?

BB: Play, play, play. Practise ... a lot. Jam/rehearse with friends whenever possible. Play lots of gigs with other musicians and artists. Record yourself and analyse both the

good and bad things. Work hard, and pay close attention to details. Always be prepared. Keep an open mind, and try to have a good attitude too!



dD: And finally, what are you working on at the moment, and what is next for you?

BB: At the moment, I am on a world tour with the artists Tegan and Sara for their new album *Love You To Death*. But I try to juggle as many projects as possible, so I will be filling in the down time with recording

sessions, drum programming, co-writing, producing, squeezing in one-off concerts with friends, and being a good father/husband. ➡



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