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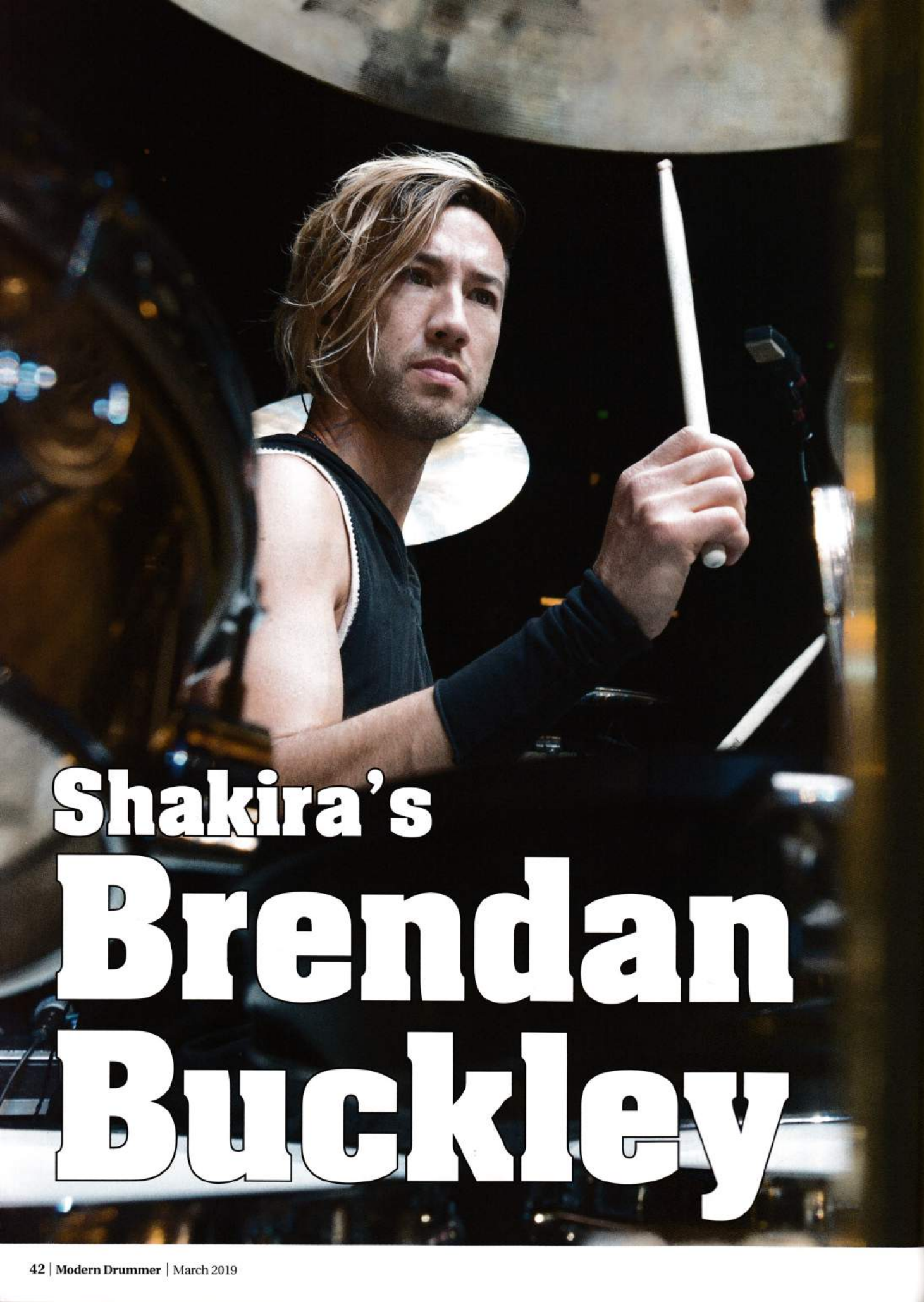
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Shakira's
Brendan
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It's as if a group of the world's biggest pop stars got together and designed the ideal supportive drummer. Easygoing on the bus, serious in the rehearsal room, exciting on the bandstand, and always ready with solutions when the going gets tough offstage, Brendan Buckley has carved out a significant career by doing his homework, taking responsibility, and—oh, yeah—providing absolutely everything the music requires.

It's tough to keep up with Brendan Buckley. One glance at his social media and you're presented with a wide variety of what interests the L.A.-based drummer: idiosyncratic photography of everyday life, random posts about artisan coffees, shots of him training in martial arts. Photos of his family. There's also a slew of video clips of him onstage with the artists he's most associated with. And with a deep pocket and an innate sense of playing just the right thing with perfect time, he's *killing*.

While Buckley's been at it with Latin pop singer Shakira for twenty years, he's also recorded and toured with a number of other rock and pop luminaries, from Miley Cyrus to Melissa Etheridge to BoDeans. In recent years he's been seen backing up huge Asian pop superstars. You can also find him on the road with indie pop duo Tegan and Sara, a gig that allows him to use different artistic muscles but still bring his highly developed sense of groove and thoughtful arrangement.

So what's the secret to staying in it as long as Buckley has? YouTube has countless examples of young, fiery players looking to make their mark on the drumming world. But listening to Buckley's thoughts on touring and session work, it's clear that there's more to being an artist's choice to support their vision than just blazing across a kit, or sporting the latest fashions.

"A bassist friend of mine recently told me that I play drums like a conductor," says Buckley. "At first I had no idea if that was supposed to be a good thing or a bad thing. He elaborated that he never gets lost when he plays with me, and that I tend to keep everyone onstage in the same place. At music school, I took four years of conducting class, so I guess it makes sense that I would approach the drums in a similar way. In music there are a whole lot of breakdowns, tempo changes, angular arrangements, cued endings. Be a leader. Make sure that everyone is in the same ballpark. If they're not, do something visually or musically to help them along. Everything will magically sound better."

Story by Ilya Stemkovsky • Photos by Alex Solca

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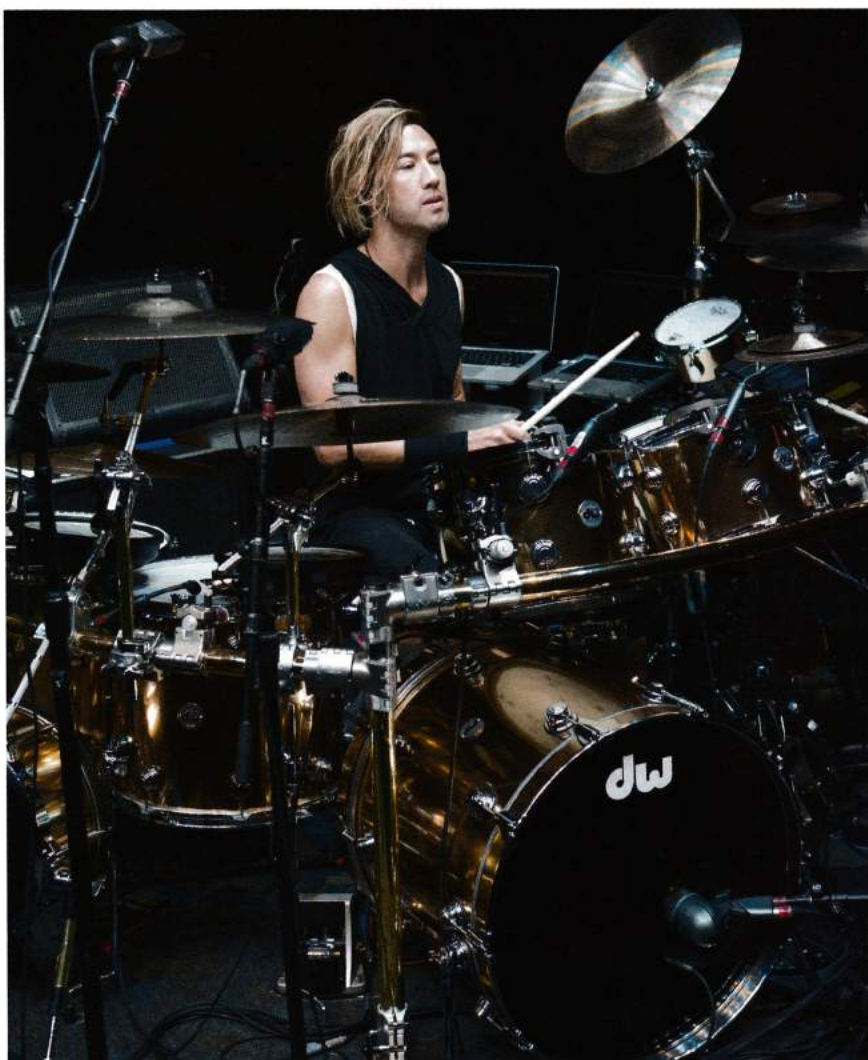
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This bruiser is no stranger to a fracas, a donnybrook, or any other old-timey word for a fight. *But* he also has a tender side that belies his scars and spikes. Imagine if Sid Vicious and Ella Fitzgerald had a child... and then someone pounded that child in the face with a hammer. That's Hamer—a versatile troublemaker who bawls during *Love, Actually* and likes fisticuffs. What a guy!!!

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MD: Let's talk about achieving longevity in this business, and specifically your long-standing gig with Shakira. What's the key?

Brendan: Two things come to mind when you mention the word "longevity." The first idea is "longevity in the career of music." Sustaining an extended career in music, whether it be as a band member, a freelance musician, or an educator, is extremely challenging. As a creative artist, you're basically being given reasons to quit on a daily basis, and you have to constantly muster up the passion and persistence to overcome these hurdles. It's not fair, and it's

not easy, but it is fun. There's an expression in the martial art of jiu-jitsu: "A black belt is a white belt that didn't quit." The most successful people around me are usually the ones that simply did not give up.

The second thought regarding the concept of longevity is my long-lasting relationship with multiple artists and musical directors. I've been in Shakira's band for over twenty years now. But along with her, I've also been working with my friend Elsten Torres for twenty-three years, Minnie Driver for fourteen years, and several musical directors for more than a decade. I

INFLUENCES

The Police Ghost in the Machine (Stewart Copeland) /// **Led Zeppelin II** (John Bonham) /// **The Cure** Disintegration (Boris Williams) /// **Miles Davis** Four and More (Tony Williams) /// **Van Halen** Fair Warning (Alex Van Halen) /// **Fiona Apple** When the Pawn... (Matt Chamberlain, Jim Keltner) /// **Jimi Hendrix** Axis: Bold as Love (Mitch Mitchell) /// **David Bowie** Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps) (Dennis Davis) /// **Soundgarden** Superunknown (Matt Cameron) /// **Michael Landau** Live 2000 (Toss Panos) /// **Bob Marley** Legend (Carlton Barrett) /// **AC/DC** Highway to Hell (Phil Rudd) /// **Pat Metheny** Trio 99>00 (Bill Stewart) /// **Nine Inch Nails** The Fragile (Jerome Dillon, Bill Rieflin) /// **Al Jarreau** Breakin' Away (Steve Gadd, Jeff Porcaro) /// **The Meters** Look-Ka Py Py (Zigaboo Modeliste) /// **Jane's Addiction** Nothing's Shocking (Stephen Perkins) /// **Andrés Calamaro** Alta Suciedad (Steve Jordan) /// **Joshua Redman** Spirit of the Moment (Brian Blade) /// anything with Hal Blaine

tend to maintain friendly, positive working relationships with all of my employers and musical buddies.

Of course, the first order of business for me is to play the drums at the highest level that I can. But on top of that, I try to also be a problem-solver—a person you can count on to fix things. You need a drummer to play beats? I can do that for you. Oh, you also want to hire three percussionists? I know some great people; let me give them a call. You can't remember how fast we play this song? No worries, I have all the BPMs written down here in my phone. You don't remember how we ended this song on our previous tour? It's all good—I have a recording of the old show in my computer. You're unsure about where to come in during the intro? It's

cool: just watch me, and I'll give you a cue. You want to add some electronic elements to this musical segue? Leave it to me; I'll handle it. The more you can offer and the more comfortable you make others feel, the more they'll want you around and appreciate your presence.

MD: Sounds like you're a one-stop shop.

Brendan: So, think about what you offer. Is your time very good, both with a click and without one? Can you lock with sequences seamlessly? Can you interpret songs well? Do you also produce or compose music? Do you have the organizational skills to be a musical director? Can you play any other instruments? Do you understand various styles of popular and folkloric music? Can you perform a song precisely the same way

over and over again? Conversely, can you give dozens of different vibe options for the same song? Are you independent enough to get yourself to and from gigs in almost any country? Do you have good working relationships with drum manufacturers and backline companies to provide gear to venues? So on and so forth.

MD: So being a "fixer" is as important as mastering those rudiments.

Brendan: If you can walk around with the aura that says, "If you have an issue, I will take care of it—no worries," this will help with the psychology of everyone around you. When I think back to my days at the University of Miami's School of Music, besides playing with guitarists and saxophonists and piano players, I spent a lot of time working



Buckley's 2018/19 Shakira El Dorado World Tour Setup

Drums: DW Stainless Steel with Custom Gold Wrap on DW Rack
A. 5.5x14 DW Design Series Black Nickel snare (main)
B. 6x13 PDP Concept Series Black Nickel aux snare (with Canopus Vintage snare wires underneath)
C. 8x12 tom
D. 9x13 tom
E. 14x16 floor tom
F. 16x18 floor tom
G. 18x22 bass drum
H. 8" PDP timbalito
I. SPD-30 sample pad
J. Roland V-Pad PD-128-BC
K. Roland BT-1 Bar Trigger
L. Roland PDX-8 V-Pads
M. 10" PDP timbalito
N. Metal doumbek on stand

Cymbals: Sabian
1. 19" Paragon Chinese
2. 16" HHX Evolution crash/8" B8 Pro splash (inverted) stack
3. 14" HHX Groove Hats with hammered nickel jingles and bells on top (Big Fat Snare Drum)
4. 18" HHX Evolution crash
5. 10" HH splash/8" HH Max Stax splash/8" HH Max Stax China Kang stack
6. 21" HHX Dry ride with 12" HHX Evolution splash on top
7. 19" Vault V-Crash
8. 14" AAX Mini Chinese (inverted) with a nickel six-jingle strip inside/12" AA Mini Hats top/8" AAX splash stack
9. 19" HHX X-Treme crash
10. 19" Paragon Chinese

Other Percussion: LP Patato Black Fiberglass congas (quinto, conga, tumba) on triple stand; LP Black Fiberglass bongos on stand; LP 12.5" Mechanical Grey djembes on stands (2); Bolivian bombo leguero on stand; 20x24 DW Gong Drum in Black Lacquer with Custom Gold Wrap stripes on rolling rack

Other Electronics: MacBook Pro computers with Native Instruments Battery 4 (2); MOTU UltraLite-mk3 interfaces (2); Radial SW8 MK2 switcher; Roland TD-50 used as MIDI interface; Roland V-Kick KD-140-BC; Roland KT-10 Kick Triggers (2); T-30H Acoustic Triggers (on snare drums) (2); RT-30K Acoustic Trigger (on bass drum); Boss DB-90 metronome with FS-50 pedal

Sticks: Vic Firth Brendan Buckley Signature 5A White sticks, Heritage wire brushes, T1 timpani mallets

Heads: Remo, including Controlled Sound Coated Dot batter on 14" snare; Ambassador Coated batter on 13" snare; Emperor Coated tom batters and Ambassador Clear resonants; Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batters and Ambassador Ebony front heads

Accessories: JH Audio in-ear monitors; Reflexx drum pad; Drumdots and gaffer tape; coconut water; Nag Champa incense

Brendan Buckley

with singers. I played on tons of peoples' recitals and school concerts. I think these experiences helped me gain the empathy needed to be a team player and assist others in feeling comfortable and reaching their goals. This has been invaluable for me over the years.

MD: Everyone talks about simply having the right attitude and working the hang right, because so many people can already play. But is it as simple as that?

Brendan: Well, of course it goes without saying that you have to be able to play well. But you also have to be able to play

appropriately. And you have to be able to play consistently.

For a moment, think about the concept of being "hireable." On a planet with thousands and thousands of drummers, what can make you stand out? How can you be considered valuable? What would make someone say, "I want that specific guy in my band," or "I want that specific girl to play on my record," or "I think this person would be a good choice for our upcoming tour"? Put yourself in the employer's shoes for a moment. If you were a singer, or a band leader, or a manager, or a producer, what qualities would you look

for? Good time? Of course. Decent gear? Check. Gets along with others? Yep. Creative? Bingo. Doesn't get arrested? Absolutely. Communicates well without throwing temper tantrums? Sure. Excellent memory skills? Bonus. Precision? Yes. Can play with a click? Done. Knows electronics? Uh-huh. Has a look—any look at all? Cool. Can be a showman if necessary, but won't overdo it? Perfect.

And yes, a good attitude is practically essential, because as studio and touring musicians, we spend countless hours of spare time hanging out with one another, and in dressing rooms, tour buses, airports, hotels, and soundchecks. Funny, easygoing people just make the day better. The squeaky wheel does not always get the grease. More often than not, it gets replaced.

MD: After so many years, and material that's pretty set, how do you keep your playing fresh without resorting to showy stuff to entertain yourself or your bandmates? Is there ever any room for that?

Brendan: Well, I have to admit, soundchecks do get a bit wacky with the alternate versions and the extended jam sessions. But apart from that, I make sure to schedule time to practice, either onstage after soundcheck, or backstage on a drum pad and kick pad, or even on off days at a rental rehearsal space. Plus during the actual show, I focus on concepts like technique, time, subdivisions, vocabulary, posture. It might not seem like it from the outside, but I do play the show slightly differently each night; new fills, added ghost notes, different accents, various grips, improved kick pedal techniques. But I make sure that the people in charge do not notice a difference from their perspective. Yes, you can practice on a gig. Just don't sound like you're practicing on a gig!

MD: You've seen quite a bit of change with gear and the technical side of your kit. How have you navigated that world?

Brendan: I do my best to stay hip to the new innovations in the percussion world, especially from my endorsement companies—DW, Sabian, Remo, Vic Firth, Roland, LP, etc. I like to know what inventions have come out every year, and what each new thing does and does not do. But most of my kit designs actually come from brainstorming sessions with the artists and musical directors. We normally discuss how they want to approach each arrangement for a song. What will be played acoustically? Drumset, or maybe some percussion? What will be sampled and triggered electronically? What loops will be left in the computer sequences? Then we design a stage setup that will be both functional and fun,

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sonically, visually, emotionally. I go through the same process with almost every artist with whom I work.

MD: Can you suggest the use of different sounds, either electronically or acoustically? Do you take Shakira's or someone else's direction regarding alternate sounds?

Brendan: The electronic sounds normally come from one of three sources: the actual Pro Tools sessions from the artist's albums, the musical director's sound libraries, or my own personal collection of sounds and effects. For example, we could start a programming session by sampling and labeling all of the drum sounds from a song on Shakira's new album. I can spread them around accordingly on the various trigger pads of my kit and play the song like so. But then the musical director could say, "I'd like to try a different snare sound for this tune. Let me email you one of my favorite samples during our next break." Then I'd swap that out and see how it sounds.

Next, Shakira could ask for some collage of funky hand claps or noises during a new sing-along section of the tune. I would quickly pull them up from a sound library on my hard drive and throw them on a trigger pad. The good thing nowadays is that I can blend sounds, too. So we could use a little bit of the old and a little bit of the new. And the particular software sampler Battery 4 by Native Instruments has a built-in effects engine, so I can also mangle the sounds in the program. And our front-of-house engineer might give feedback, like, "Hey, guys, that electronic kick drum is cool by itself, but it's just not cutting well while everyone is playing at the same time." So we'll switch it up for something else that has more attack, or try to carve it up a bit using EQ filters. After all, for a live concert, although it's cool for everything to sound and feel good coming through your in-ears, it's actually more crucial that drums sound incredible coming through a giant PA system.

MD: For your Asian pop-star gigs, is it a matter of naturally playing different stuff because the music will not have a Shakira-esque, Latin flavor? Or is your role of timekeeper and bringer of drama pretty much the same no matter who you're playing with?

Brendan: Good question. I feel as though it's not as much a matter of Latin pop music versus Asian pop music. My approach to each gig is going to be relatively similar. I try to play the best, most appropriate grooves possible for their music. However, what differs more is the taste of each artist and musical director. Some people want things to sound exactly like the record. In that case, it's all

RECORDINGS

Michael Miller I Made You Up /// **Pedestrian** Ghostly Life /// **Volumen Cero** I Can See the Brite Spot /// **Shakira** Dónde Están los Ladrones? /// **Miyavi** Fire Bird /// **Shakira** Laundry Service /// **Minnie Driver** Ask Me to Dance /// **Roberto Carlos** Primera Fila /// **Aleks Syntek** Romántico Desliz /// **Elsten Torres** Waiting for Clouds /// **Beto Cuevas** Miedo Escénico /// **Fulano** Individual /// **Alejandro Sanz** Sirope /// **Emmanuel** Acústico en Vivo /// **JJ Lin** Genesis

about precision and execution. Other people want a lot of input and creativity from the drum world. They're bored of their albums, and they want you to reinvent the drum parts. That's fun and challenging in a different way. Draw from all of your sources and influences. Remember, you're an artist, too.

MD: For the Tegan and Sara gig, do you find yourself thinking differently because there are harmonies involved?

Brendan: Ah, that was such a fun gig! In preparation for that tour, we weren't too concerned with the vocal harmonies per se. But we did spend a bit of time talking

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Brendan Buckley

about the stage layout, and specifically the proximity of the drums to the lead vocal mics. The way they designed it, I was basically set up directly behind Tegan. So to avoid interference with her singing, I went with very thin, dark cymbals that had quick decays, and my drums were tuned warm and tubby. The frequencies stayed out of the way of her lead vocals. We also spent quite a bit of time getting a good blend between the acoustic and electronic drums. The acoustic drums were tuned very low and punchy, and that helped a bunch when switching back and forth between real versus sampled kicks and snares. We wanted the hybrid blend to be seamless from the audience's perspective.

MD: In relation to keeping your playing eclectic, is it easy to slip into a rut when you're playing the same set list every night? Do you practice or keep limber in preparation for when you play with friends at home?

Brendan: Oh, yeah! There's a term out there called "tour chops." That's the medical condition in which, as a musician, you can play your fifteen-song set perfectly night after night, but you can't play anything else well. For this reason, I've always made a point to do plenty of local gigs with my friends when I'm home from tour. It helps me both technically and emotionally. You have to stay tapped in to the reason you started playing drums in the first place. For me, it was to jam with friends. To this day I'd be happy playing

music seven nights a week. I wonder if that will ever change.

MD: How has your practice changed over the years? YouTube is filled with young blazers who are impressive to watch, but they don't have the Shakira gig.

Brendan: When I was younger, I spent a lot of time "getting my shit together." I needed to learn countless styles of music: rock, metal, bebop, fusion, classical, Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, odd meters, etc. And I had to get my time together. And my tones. Fast and slow tempos. Dynamics. There was a mountain of stuff to learn just to begin working. I'd sometimes practice thirteen hours a day. And it was great!

But nowadays I hardly have the luxury to shed for that amount of time. So I have to be surgical about my practice time. A tactical assault. I try to calibrate my body to the music that I'll be playing for my next upcoming gig or session. Also, I love practicing the fundamentals. I work on my time, my subdivisions, my swing/shuffle. But I'm still a student of the drums, and I love the chopsy stuff, too. So I'm still finding ways to better my technique, biomechanics, double-kick drumming, soloing, hand/foot combos, and on and on.

Due to the encouragement of a few of my drum students, I've started compiling a curriculum of practice exercises that have personally helped me out over the years. Most of this material actually deals with

the concept of improving your pocket and simply moving your limbs in time. But there are other wacky subdivision things in there, too. I'm currently working on the best way to release this.

MD: Where's the future of the business?

Sure, Shakira isn't selling the records she once did, and streaming is another can of worms in terms of revenue. But the live business seems to be as busy as ever. She and you are relatively young, but is there life after the road?

Brendan: Well, I've witnessed the business of music change over the past couple of decades. YouTube, file sharing, and streaming services have altered the way people consume music. And the masses are just plain different from how they were in the '80s and '90s. We all spend our money differently, and we distract ourselves differently. The monetization of this new wild west of music consumption has thrown everybody for a loop. I'm quite certain that even *Modern Drummer* magazine has to think about these concerns from time to time.

For the most part, my career is divided into live drumming, studio music, and teaching. Maybe it's 50 percent live, 40 percent studio, 10 percent teaching. Up until this point, this business model has worked for me. But who knows what the future will bring. I'll probably have to make a few adjustments over time. Check in with me in a couple of years!



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