

'The Future of Drumming': for Modern Drummer 2005.

Talk of rock and jazz will be, if it isn't already, effectively meaningless. The debate for the drummer, same as any musician, will be to do with the way in which, and to what extent, the human interacts with electronics, or if he/she chooses to interact at all. Live, or pre-programmed? Electronic drum gear will need to become more user friendly in terms of expressive power, through easily accessible, real-time controller functions such as sustain, portamento, pitch bend etc, and stop pretending it's an acoustic set.

The current phenomenal level of technical ability is being developed in the service of the manufacturers away from the music--any music--in the hothouse atmosphere of drum clinics and extravaganzas, and there is a potential problem here. There will always be a guy who can spin plates faster than the previous guy, but the imaginative leaps necessary to refine, define, and re-define the role and purpose of a drummer in a musical context may be harder to come by, and will only come from *within* the music. The more subtle virtuosity of a Bill Stewart or a Jack de Johnette is rooted in the subsoil of the music from which it came; it's connected to something other than athletics. In that context, some really interesting young players to watch are Mark Guiliana from Avashai Cohen's group in the US, and Martin France and Asaf Sirkis from the UK.

Generally, the cannabilistic and jaded western mass music market will continue to refresh itself from the more vibrant musics from elsewhere, as it has done with great effect already with the music of Cuba, Jamaica, Senegal, Brazil etc. More drummers will need to know more about more music, so if you have experience of the art of other cultures, you'll already have a head start. More djembes and darboukas on stage!

At the beginning end of the scale, the future is very exciting. More people of all ages are starting out with better instruction on continually improving equipment- daily discovering the joys and heartaches of trying to play four decent beats in a row. MD has had a pivotal function in all this; for 30 years it has sign-posted new ideas, techniques, styles, and cultures, and facilitated the coming together of the like-minded across continents. Without being judgmental, it has managed to energise the lazy, encourage the determined, and calm the over-heated. Long may it do so!