

PILVAX

Issue Six Summer 2009

US-born-and-raised **Nathan Johnson** has drummed in several tuneful, guitar-driven rock bands, most notably the Fastbacks and Flop in Seattle, and Fabulon and Stig Roar Husby in Budapest. Before relocating to Hungary in 1997, Johnson worked at a letterpress and bookbinder in New York City, where he collaborated in producing original works by acclaimed poets such as Steven Farmer, Tim Davis, Kim Rosenfield, and Judith Goldman. Currently giving his eardrums a richly deserved rest, Johnson is the editor of *Green Horizon*, a publication of the Regional Environmental Center. This is his debut.

The New Cymbalism

by Nathan Johnson

These poems are the result of exploring amusing threads on the *Modern Drummer* website, scrolling through reader feedback, and then cutting and pasting text as seen fit, more or less in chronological order.

While a literary experiment such as this is hardly an attempt at serious art, there is an extremely high level of truth present here. No matter how the selected texts are arranged, taken out of context, or juxtaposed, their original sincerity is preserved: in other words, the poems are truly a distillation of a particular psychological and phenomenological universe: the mind and milieu of the modern drummer. Thus, in the immortal words of David St. Hubbins, they tread a “fine line between clever and stupid.”

Tiniest Cymbal

I need the smallest possible cymbal
I want a tiny crash

BING

With thimbled fingers
scratch my crashy itch
a six-inch splash
a high-pitched, short-lived crash

What should I look for in a cymbal
if I want a tiny crash?

BING?

Sorry, I Have a Soapbox and a Situation

I don't want to go electronic
and I don't want them stuffing foam
and towels in my kit
Now they're talking about putting things
on my drums
Maybe they have a valid reason

We just have to end up biting our tongues
"I'm sorry I can no longer play drums
because I don't agree with these decisions."

Now I play in a church that was voted
the Number Two place to hear a band
in Salt Lake—
You're in a box, carpeted, veiled
behind a curtain
The pastor gets to buy new gear
and hopefully everyone is happy
You get to play your set (sort of)

I am morally opposed to drum machines

I Suck at Drums

It's true
I tire out really quickly
and then get super-sloppy and frustrated
My timing is all over the place
My feet are anything but consistent
I start having an "I suck" fit
I take my kit apart
I think this screws me up
more than anything else
It's usually due to the height of my throne
I caught my jaw tightening up while playing
I have to constantly readjust myself
Throne issues might be the answer

I suck. You don't
You definitely don't suck
I sit down to play
and it's like I have palsy or something...
Sweating like a pig...
Session ended with me whipping my stick
I sucked real bad last night

I do need to eat better

I've been trying to drink more juice and milk
Drumming requires all the muscles
from your ass outwards

I'm ever so slowly learning to play
Rome wasn't burned in a day

It's ok to suck
Sucking is the natural state of mankind
Just realize that sucking is what people do,
and be ok with that
It has thus been summarized

... ripped my blisters open...
Friction sucks

I Want a Two-Piece Kit

Maybe a Yamaha kick and snare
or maybe Tama or Pearl
such a minimalist kit
the correct answer is
"full cocktail drumset"

Playing like Ringo

I love Ringo's drums
his bizarre little fills
It's hard to play like Ringo

He does his job
and does it well
He keeps the time

I hear Early Ringo as a master
often skewing the beats
to match some bizarro Lennon lyric

More complexity
would have been
inappropriate

Boom, clack, clack!
Boom, clack, boom, clack!
Clack, clack, boom, clackity-clack!

The guy probably got more trim

than any other drummer to date
while on tour

That's the whole ball of wax right there

*More of Nathan Johnson's cymbalist poems can be found in ISSUE 6 of PILVAX,
locally available in Budapest.*