

It's hard to imagine our world of contemporary music without the name Laboriel attached to it. This amazing family's story began in 1947 in Mexico City, the birthplace of Abraham Laboriel Sr., father of Abe Jr. and Mateo Laboriel. Abe Sr. is, simply put, one of the greatest bass players in the history of music. Performing on over 4,000 recordings and soundtracks, he has inspired generations of musicians no matter what instrument they play. Anyone who has seen him perform has witnessed pure joy. You can feel it watching him...see it in his face and feel it in your bones. That's the energy Abe Sr. shares with everyone he meets and plays for. With him, the magic of making music is visible and infectious.

In the Laboriel home, sons Abe Jr. and Mateo's destiny was inevitable, practically written before they took their first breath. Both sons had natural abilities on whatever they picked up. Abe Sr. is a true master of time/feel, and can make any music groove and flow, no matter what the style or time signature. Growing up around their father's talent, they couldn't have had a better, more natural teacher. He impressed upon his boys the importance of the feel and flow of music, and how to be musical, regardless of style or tempo, complexity or simplicity. The key: Play for the song. Not surprisingly, both sons have followed in their father's footsteps, and are both respected, well-known artists in their own right.

I first met Abe Jr. during his high school years, at the NAMM show in Anaheim, California. That year, I had booked Jeff Porcaro and his band to play at the Paiste booth, which was an amazing four days, to say the least. On the last set of one of those days, Jeff came to me and said, "Rich, meet Abe Laboriel's son, Abe Jr. He's gonna sit in. Wait till you hear his samba!" That was it. I'll never forget that day: everyone in the room won't. If my memory serves me, I think Gregg Bissonette was there, too. They began playing and the feel and groove that came from this 17-year-old was so deep, something you could feel inside of you; something you could tell was coming from an old soul.

Abe Laboriel, Jr.

A Legacy Endured

Words: Rich Mangicaro • Photos: Rob Shanahan



I knew on that day that the world would know this young man, and that he would carry on the legacy of his father. No one knew then that he would eventually become the drummer behind two other musical legends, Sting and Paul McCartney: both bassists like his father, both globally influential. They both would eventually find symbiotic musical relationships with Abraham Jr., concurrently vying for his talent. Both were to be life-changing gigs, both he still works with.

After that meeting in Anaheim, Abe Jr. left Los Angeles to attend the Berklee College of Music. Knowing that he would need a drum kit, Jeff Porcaro gave Abe one of his kits—his Gretsch. Abe began his college days on Jeff's treasured drums, and, to this day, Abe still has them close to his heart. We recently sat together at Abe's home in the Hollywood Hills and talked about old times, music, life, Barack Obama and the future. His home, a very serene, quiet setting amidst the hustle of Tinsel Town, is reflective of a man who has found his groove, his balance and his peace in the world. Anyone who knows Abe Jr. has experienced his jovial smile, his infectious laugh and his zest for life. Anyone who has seen him play has heard one of the world's most creative, innovative and musical drummers. Abe belongs to an elite group of musicians: a true drummer's drummer.

Rich: I remember that day so well at the NAMM show, when Jeff introduced us. You were just turning 17.

Abe: Yeah, it's amazing; we've known each other for 22 years! You signed me to my Paiste endorsement and you were the first one to take a chance on me...so thank you, man.

RM: I wish Jeff were still with us to see what you've accomplished, but I know he's all around you. You know, I'm sure in all your interviews, you've been asked how it all started...especially growing up with your dad, who's such a legend in music. But, tell me, how do you remember it all starting?

AL: Really, quite literally, with pots and pans, 18 months-old, wooden spoons, with headphones on and just banging away. I got my first drum set when I was four years old, which was a gift from Jamey Haddad.

RM: I didn't know you knew him that long?

AL: Yeah, he and my dad used to play together in Cleveland when we lived there, as my mom was going to medical school. They used to play there with Joe Lovano and some other local guys. Jamey is such a genius; his knowledge of instruments and his sense of time is deep.

RM: Jamey is one of my favorite musicians. I had some wonderful times with him during my time at Paiste. He gave me my first frame drum after I sat in at a class of his at Berklee. He's an amazing frame drum player, along with all his other talents. Are you still in touch with him?

AL: Occasionally, but he and my dad are much more in touch. I had auditioned for Paul Simon, back in 2000 when Steve Gadd left. I had been on the road with k.d. Lang. It was an interesting experience as Paul is very intense and very exact with what he wants, and after 30 years of playing with Gadd he was looking for someone with that heartbeat. Without being a clone, I got pretty close to what Steve played and I learned a lot about how detail oriented Paul is about the balance within the kit. In the end it wasn't a good fit and I didn't get the gig, but amazingly when one door closes another opens. About one month later I got the call to do Paul McCartney's record.

RM: Before we go there, let's continue a bit with your earlier years. Tell me about that, growing up around dad and your other early influences.

AL: My dad plays a little drums and would show me some things to play. He has an amazing feel and would show me a simple beat and stress the pulse and feel. I would play it and he would jam with me. I would also listen to records and try to emulate what I heard. We moved to LA when I was five. By the time I turned ten, I told my dad that I wanted to be a professional musician, seriously. I would go to sessions with him and watch him play with Gadd or Jeff and many others. So then dad asked Alex Acuña whom I should study with, and Alex said, "I'll teach him." So I began studying with Alex. He was perfect and really figured out how to teach me. I wasn't a very structured learner or one to sit down and practice rudiments, even though he showed me some of that. He would show me different beats and then he would have me add an accent somewhere or change the pulse. He really gave me the freedom to explore and learn improvisation.

RM: Was there reading involved?

AL: A little bit. You know, we had the *Syncopation* book, but that wasn't what attracted me to the instrument. I think the freedom that I had to explore with Alex kept me interested. It wasn't until later, when I was 16, that I began studying with Peter Donald, from the Dick Grove

School, and had some theory and reading lessons. I also studied with Mitchell Peters and he really taught me about reading, stick technique and more about rudiments.

RM: How early was it that you began hanging with Jeff Porcaro?

AL: I was about 15 when Jeff would call my dad and ask if he could take me to some sessions. He would come pick me up and I got to watch him record or rehearse. What was great about the hangs with Jeff was that it was not just about the drums, more about the interaction. When I would geek out and ask him how to play a fill, he would say, "Ah, you don't wanna know that." But, he would eventually show me. With Jeff I learned about interacting with others and about having a well-rounded life.

RM: Did you have any interaction with Joe Porcaro?

AL: Not much...maybe a lesson or two. I was working with Alex and his style seemed to better suit me at that time. There was a lot of back and forth and demonstration, rather than reading out of a book, a lot of syncopation work and also a bit of hand percussion, too. He taught me some of the traditional Latin rhythms and patterns on congas, which I then transferred to playing drum set. I could apply the different sounds and parts around the set, which opened my thinking of how to play Latin music.

RM: I think that is invaluable...to have an early sense of the clave, which isn't necessarily common for younger students. That's so great for developing independence.

AL: Absolutely, to be able to see how far you can go while tethered to that central rhythmic theme—just really fun.

RM: What about Carlos Vega?

AL: With Carlos and Vinnie [Colaiuta] and J.R., it was more just hangin' at sessions, coming with my dad. I'd ask them what sticks they used and how they tuned the drums. Vinnie was the first guy that I saw using coated Ambassadors, top and bottom, which, at that time, most guys were using clears on the bottom. That helped me understand that you can break "rules" and use different combinations. Also, I would learn from them how they would interpret a song, either from listening or from a chart.

RM: Your reading skills began more with Peter Donald, right?

AL: Yes, I was in high school during the day, then at night I would go to music school. I changed high schools when I was 16, and went to a music high school, Hamilton High. There I was in the big band and started to understand chart reading.



**“A band works like a clock, it’s all about placement...
how every little thing put together makes a song work.”**



RM: What was Hamilton like?

AL: It was really cool, it was the first year it was open and Mike Elizondo [bass player and producer] was there at the same time. After I graduated, Trevor Lawrence came in, as did Fiona Apple and many of the members of Ozomatli. Mike and I were in the jazz band together. Sid Lasaine was our teacher at the time and he was really great. He would pull out charts that were interesting, and because it was a music magnet school, a lot of local musicians from other schools gravitated there. We won various competitions with the big band and also with a jazz trio I was in, with Mike and pianist Vernell Brown. That's actually how I got my scholarship to Berklee. We played the Downbeat Jazz Festival with the trio, and from that performance, all three of us won full scholarships to Berklee. I wasn't sure what I was going to do after high school, but after that opportunity, I knew. Plus, Jeff encouraged me to go and told me that's one thing he regretted not doing.

RM: Were you giggin' around town at that time?

AL: Not really. My first real gig with my dad wasn't until I was just about to leave LA for Berklee. It was at the Baked Potato with Larry Carlton and Greg Mathieson.

RM: Remember that day at the Paiste booth, when you came and sat in? The band I had hired for that year's show was Jeff Porcaro on drums, Mike Porcaro on bass, David Garfield on keyboards and guitarist Steve Lukather. It was the buzz of NAMM that year. It was also Super Bowl Sunday, I remember this because Jeff kept asking me to mount a TV in the performance room! He was kidding me all weekend about that. Had you ever played with them before that day?

AL: No, Jeff just asked me to sit in and I was foolishly confident enough to do it.

RM: I so fondly recall him taking me aside that day and saying, "Rich, you gotta hear Abe Jr.'s Latin groove!" Blew us all away. Do you remember being nervous?

AL: Not really. Those guys were like family, 'cause I was around them so much in the studio. Watching Jeff work, his understanding of music was so deep. He knew how to cut to the core of a song and knew what the song needed immediately. He really was a producer. Jeff would think of things like adjusting the guitar player's headphone level so that his time would get better, making better sense for the song. . He really understood this, and he understood the importance of relationship in the studio. Jeff was often the diplomat in the room, making sure everyone got along and worked together.

RM: It's so ironic and just so sad that he never really got into producing professionally until the very end, on a Boz Scaggs recording, but he never got to finish it. Jim Keltner and I talked a lot about that, and Jim felt that Jeff would have been the next great producer.

AL: I did get to see the way Jeff worked with everyone in the session and saw his frustrations, too. Because of his musical depth and his ability to communicate, it was at times difficult for him to deal with certain artists who didn't know how to talk to musicians as peers or how to convey their desires properly. Watching them try to cover up their own inabilities with improper ego displays tested his patience.

RM: It's interesting that there's a certain governor from Alaska who's been doing a lot of that lately! (both laugh)

*At the time of this interview, all of us in the States were deep in the throes of a presidential election.

RM: Did your father ever sit with you and teach?

AL: Yes, the two things he would enforce were groove and time. When we would jam together, he would make sure I kept that focus. My dad's understanding of syncopation is heavy. When I'd watch him play with Vinnie, he was the only guy who could understand and keep up with Vinnie! They would be taking it out in a certain tune and play with the time placement to a point where all of us in the audience would be falling off our chairs, just waiting to see where they would land! It was amazing.

The other thing he would work with me on was, when playing jazz, he would make sure I kept the melody in mind while playing time. He would have me play the melody on the drum kit. This was invaluable to me, and when we play together now, we know exactly where we are in the song. There's this unspoken language that we have from our history of jamming so much. My father has taught me practically everything I know.

RM: Did he ever talk to you about the reality of the job and the hardships that you would face as a professional musician?

AL: Yeah, actually that was the first thing he did when I told him I wanted to be a professional

musician. He said, "Ah, no you don't." He said it was a hard life with a lot of pitfalls. For every guy who was working in LA, there were 1,000 guys who were just as good, who weren't working. Dad instilled in me the importance of the hang and getting along with others, which he felt was just as important as getting your chops together. Same thing with my brother Mateo, [though] he didn't make the decision until later on. He's younger than me and watched both dad and me doing it. He went to a regular college and studied anthropology before attending Berklee and pursuing a career in music. He now makes his living as a programmer, producer and composer. We're working together a lot now, which is so fun.

RM: Tell me about your first recording experience?

AL: The first one was a Justo Almaria record with my dad and Alex Acuña on percussion. They actually hired me to play drums on the record!

RM: Were you gaining studio experience at Berklee?

AL: A little bit, but it hadn't quite picked up there yet. I was playing in the big band with a teacher named Phil Wilson, an amazing trombone player and teacher, who also taught my dad. I went through a couple of teachers at Berklee before landing with Ian Froman, the instructor who I really connected with. He was my teacher. He opened my head so much and he is an amazing drummer. Ian would push me to think outside the box and beyond the downbeat, in a more free form way. I learned from him to trust the other players more and know we each have each other's back. Ian's approach was a continuation of what my dad and Alex taught me, but he put it in a different context that resonated with me.

RM: Ian is so great, what a talent. Anyway, getting back to your first session...

AL: Yeah, we recorded at Groove Masters in Santa Monica, which I believe Jackson Browne owns. I wanted to be really prepared, so I brought a drum machine with all the clicks programmed with different sounds and upbeats, so I was able to control what we played to rather than try to communicate that with the engineer. I had my drums tuned just right and hired Ross Garfield to tune to that. It was so much fun and dad was just so proud; we were there three or four days.

RM: What a great thing to have that be your first recording. What followed that?

AL: Next was my dad's first solo record, which I couldn't believe he wanted me to be a part of. He gave me the honor including me along with Keltner, Jeff and Steve Gadd. I was on two songs. Then, I recorded a project with



“I’ve never felt the need to have a bunch of toms or a large kit...”



Diane Reeves, which was really fun to make. Billy Childs was on piano, along with my dad, Diane and me. The first time I played the “Tonight Show With Johnny Carson” was to promote that album.

RM: When you got to Berklee, did your last name have any effect?

AL: Yes, there were expectations, but what was expected was not exactly what I do (laughs). I think they expected me to have this vast knowledge of jazz, but I was always more attracted to songs and melody in a pop format. I could do the jazz thing, but it wasn't where my heart was at the time. I was looking more for interaction with songwriters and wanted to be part of a band.

RM: Is that where you met Jonatha Brooke?

AL: Oddly enough, I didn't meet Jonatha until after I left Boston. I didn't know anything about her band, The Story, and I was more into the alternative rock scene. I was in a band called Letters To Cleo and another band called Stranger Than Pretty. We played a lot of clubs around Boston.

RM: Did you finish school?

AL: Yes, although whilst there, I got an offer to tour with Barry Manilow and I considered it pretty seriously. At first, I wasn't finding my niche at Berklee. Part of the program at that time included classical percussion training, readying students for orchestral work and I wasn't interested in working on mallets or timpani. What I did get into was working with Phil Wilson, the ensemble leader. He really took me under his wing when I first got there and pushed me to improve my reading. I met with him once a week and jammed with him and read charts down. The first time I showed up outside his office I had my kit on my back; I figured out how to carry an entire kit on my back (laughs). When he saw me, he laughed, and I said, “What, am I early?” I then looked in his office and he had the smallest office! He said, “No man, all you need is your snare!”

He really opened my eyes to the fact that I hadn't really explored just one of the pieces of my instrument, let alone all of it. I left the rest of the kit out in the hall and, with Phil, I realized all of the different tones and sounds you can get out of just one instrument. Using sticks, brushes, hands, snares off, hitting the side of the drum, or any combination therein. This was another life-changing experience for me. I think this is why I've never felt the need to have a bunch of toms or a large kit, and to explore as much as you can with a simpler setup.

RM: That's a great compliment to Phil as you're kind of known for creating a large sound with a simpler setup. I remember one time you and I played together with a band called Clear and all you used was a kick, snare, floor tom, hi-hat and a ride: that's it. And that was one of my favorite gigs with that band.

AL: Ah, that was so fun, that was a great band.

RM: So, you did finish Berklee?

AL: I did, but at the time I got the offer to tour with Manilow, I decided to stay, but I changed majors. I felt I had gotten all I could out of the drum department and switched to Music Synthesis. I still studied with Ian, but I wanted to work in a field that would really have merit in the future of recorded music. So I worked a lot with synthesizers, sequencing, programming and some production techniques. Sampling was really at the vanguard then and that really interested me. So, I did that for the last two years of school while still playing in bands around town.

RM: You know, when I saw you the first time with McCartney, and saw you singing background vocals, I thought what an amazing experience to be singing those vocal parts with him! Recently, I saw a video clip of you singing lead for a French artist, what was her name?

AL: Mylene Farmer. Yeah, that was in Paris and we did 13 shows in a row in an arena that held 18,000 plus.

RM: What was that like for you to come out front and sing lead?

AL: Man, that first night I freaked out. I didn't expect the crowd's reaction. It was a famous song that she had recorded with Seal, and the way the stage was set up, the drums were up in back on a 30-foot riser. So, she sang the first part of the song, and then I got up from the drums and walked down, while singing, to meet her in front. The noise level from the crowd was so immense that I almost tripped and I forgot the second line of the lyric! I had played with her before, and also had been playing with Paul, so the crowd knew me, but I just didn't expect that kind of response. Luckily I had 12 more shows to perfect it, and I'm really proud of that opportunity.

RM: How did that gig come about?

AL: I believe it was 1996 and up to this point I had worked with Steve Vai, Seal and also Jonatha Brooke, doing theater gigs, all in the States. I got a call to play with this French pop star; that was Mylene. I had no idea what to expect. I only knew that my dad had recorded on one of her albums. We rehearsed in LA first, and then went to the south of France for production rehearsals. When we got there, we walked into this arena, 20,000 seats, and I had no idea that she was that big. We rehearsed there for two weeks and then, the first night of the tour, I was shocked by the crowd. It was like a Beatles crowd! I had never heard that before: they were so loud and intense. That was my first experience playing to a crowd like that. As I look back, it was such a great way for me to prepare for what was coming with my work with Paul and Sting; it got me used to that kind of energy and the necessity of control under those conditions.

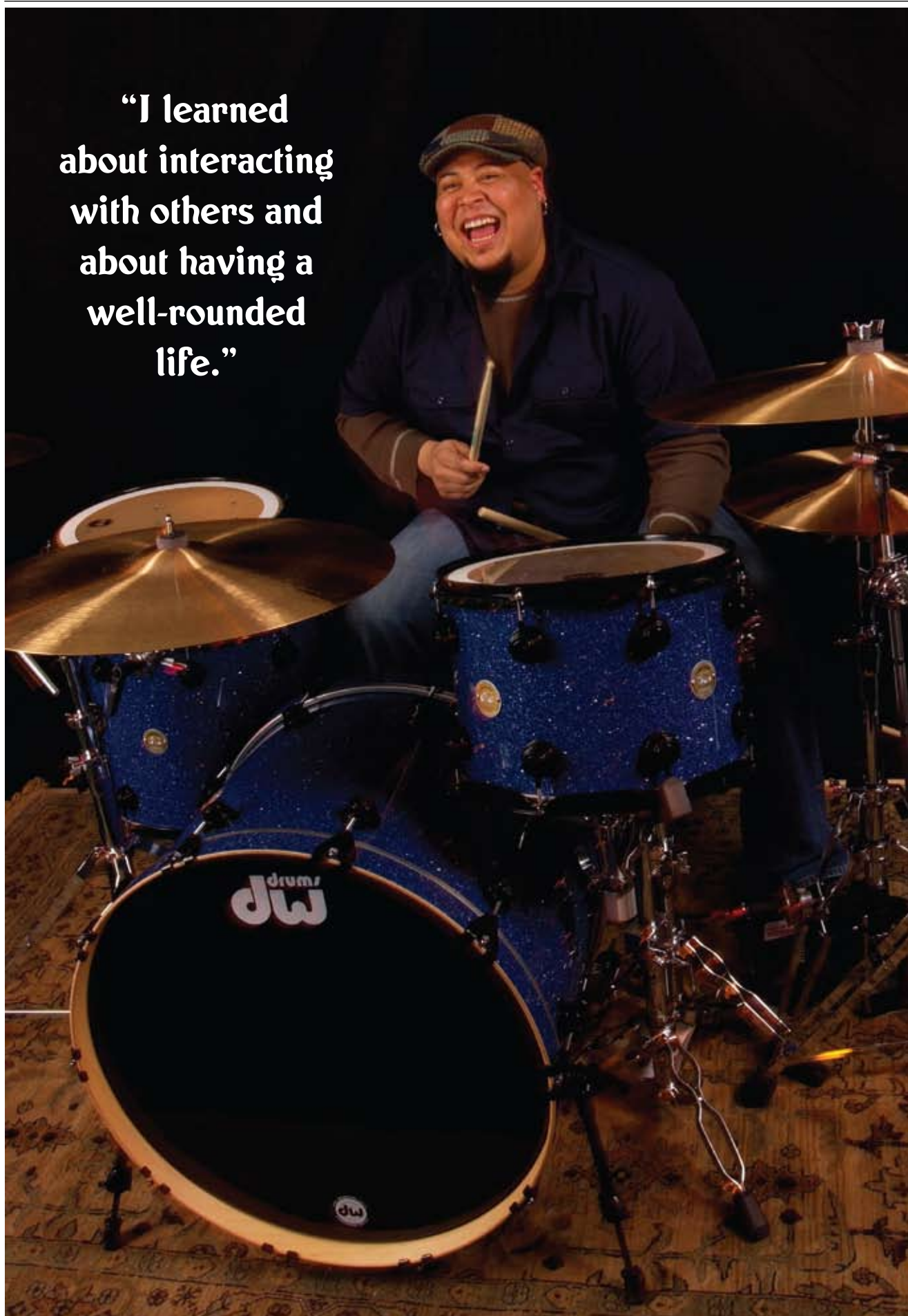
RM: And that spawned a few other French artists, right?

AL: Yeah, I toured with her for about six months of that year, and then worked for about a year with Johnny Hallyday, who is an even bigger star there. He's their equivalent of, say Elvis, but stayed current with the musical trends. My first night with him was in Paris, in front of 85,000 people, and I was again blown away by the intensity of that situation. So, by the time I toured with Sting and Paul, I was comfortable with those types of venues and all that comes with it. Things like heart palpitations, rushing tempos and controlling the excitement: I realized that you have to play it like you're playing in a club, except that you still have to emotionally reach the guy in the back row.

RM: You know, before we talk about Paul and Sting, I'm curious about how you hooked with Jonatha Brooke? She's one of my favorite artists and just such an unsung hero, just so incredibly talented. How did you meet her?

AL: Absolutely. In Boston, one of my few paid gigs had a keyboard player named Alain Mallet, who as it turns out was married to Jonatha. He was producing Jonatha's *Plumb* album and their drummer, who they normally used, wasn't available, so they took a chance with me. She had already had some success with her band, The Story, and was beginning to break out on her own. I was in LA at the time and they flew me out to New York to record with them. Actually, he's another unsung hero, his production of both *Plumb* and her next release, *10 Cent Wings*, are just genius. Her songwriting, combined with the production, the pacing, where she's placed within the songs, the hooks—all of it

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is amazing. Those two albums are absolutely inspiring. Her voice has such a beautiful tone, consistent, in-tune, sexy, and the way she layers harmonies, her background parts, are so unique, really incredible. I had no idea what I was getting into; never heard her before, and I then jump into this situation where all the musicians are genius. That is where I learned how a band works like a clock, it's all about placement, how every little thing put together makes a song work. We lived there, in a house/studio where we tracked and it went pretty quickly. I think I flew back once to do some overdubs, too. Both those records are probably the ones I'm most proud of.

RM: That is great to hear because both those recordings are so incredible. Every time I turn someone onto her that's never heard her before, they're just blown away, ultimately saying, "Where have I been!" It's crazy that she's not more widely well known.

AL: Yes, it just shows that there are so many artists out there who are just so talented and never really get heard.

RM: So how did Paul McCartney find you?

AL: I had been touring with k.d. Lang in support of a record that I co-wrote and played on.

RM: Let's cover that first, talk about a great artist...

AL: Oh man, she's amazing. At the time, I was part of a collective named Chocolate Genius, along with Curt Bisquera, Gregg Arreguin, Jamie Muhoberac and singer, Mark Anthony Thompson. I ended up co-producing most of that record and another guy who produced a couple of songs was a guy named Craig Street. Craig was later hired to produce a record for k.d., and called me to work on k.d.'s *Drag* album. That was a fun, earthy record, and I got to explore some alternative sounds, using darker cymbals, bigger bass drums, open tones and trying stuff like mallets in one hand and brushes in another. I toyed with treated drums like hanging stuff off the drums and placing stuff on the heads while playing.

RM: Is that when the big diameter thing came into play for you?

AL: The big diameter thing is two-fold. I was finding out that I was choking out drums because I hit hard. Unlike the Jonatha or k.d. gigs, with Steve Vai or Seal I was hitting a lot harder, and found that the smaller diameter drums were maxing out from the way I played and not giving me what I wanted. So I went to a 26" bass drum and loved the range. The way I could hit it soft and the note would be a darker tone, but then I could hit hard and it would punch and follow me dynamically. So I asked DW to make me a kit with 12", 15" and 18" toms and the 26" bass drum. Since then I've never gone back to smaller sizes.

RM: I'll never forget seeing you live with k.d., in LA and hanging backstage with you. Jonatha was there, along with Bruce Cockburn and k.d.-all of my favorite artists! It was such a treat and honor that night.

AL: I've been so lucky to work with that caliber of artist: singers who treat their craft with such intensity. k.d. was so consistent every time she opened her mouth, with that technique and her ability to fill a room. Her pitch was so amazing that it would just make you cry. So, I worked with her for a while on that record, and her next record called *Invincible Summer*, writing three songs with her on that album.



RM: Did you write a song and present it to k.d.? Did she approach you? Do you write the music and the lyrics? What motivates you to write—personal experiences, publishing... etc.?

AL: My songwriting collaborations have had very organic, un-intentioned beginnings. I have always been attracted to music beyond drumming and enjoy playing guitar and bass as a hobby. In fact, some of my early hanging with Curt Bisquera was with us sharing and switching between bass and drums in a band called Chocolate Genius. As the recording process for the *Black Music* record blossomed, I wound up co-writing and co-producing most of the record with Marc Anthony Thompson.

With k.d., whilst on tour, we would hang out and share records that inspired us and music that we had made individually. She had mentioned a direction for her next record and I was inspired to write. I would write a song harmonically on guitar and melodically, using the syllable “la”. I would then record complete demos playing drums, guitar, bass and la-la-la-ing the whole way. I gave her four songs and she responded positively to three of them. Luckily she was inspired lyrically as well. I have found, so

far, that it is easier for a singer to relate to lyrics that they have written. So, I think in the end, I tweaked a couple of lines and wrote lyrics to a bridge after she had completed the bulk of the song.

We toured in support of that record [*Invincible Summer*], opening for Sting on 10 shows, and that’s when I first met him. Manu Katché was playing for him at that time, and I can still remember clearly when we were playing Sting would be on the side of the stage, checkin’ us out. At the end of that tour I got called to audition for Paul Simon, and about a month later, got the call to do McCartney’s *Driving Rain* record. That was a random call from a friend named David Kahne, who was a producer and an A&R guy for Warner Brothers. He had produced a couple of records that I loved, one by a guy named Greg Garing, really cool, soulful, haunting voice. He had also produced recordings for Fishbone, Tony Bennett, The Bangles...he just has this varied, eclectic and prolific career. We would run into each other from time to time, and we would talk about music, life and he was way into the electronic side of music, like myself, so we could discuss various things like software and sample libraries. We had never worked together before. But when he got called to produce Paul’s record in LA, Paul asked him to assemble a group of musicians who weren’t jaded or cynical, but rather vibrant and positive. I remember getting the call from David, asking me, “How do you feel about making the next Paul McCartney record?” I almost dropped the phone. The night before I met Paul, I didn’t sleep much. When I got to the studio, within five minutes of shaking Paul’s hand, we were listening to a demo and recording.

RM: Was he familiar with your dad?

AL: No. He did find out though, and of course, was very impressed. It’s interesting that many people might think that being the son of Abraham Laboriel got me a lot of work, but in reality only in experience and not in actual familiarity. Steve Vai, Seal and k.d. weren’t familiar either. Sting was hip to my dad, but my opportunity with him only came from him seeing me with k.d.



RM: I think that's very interesting and it's important for people to know. It's from your hard work and from the groundwork your dad laid down when you were young that brought you to where you are now. Anyway, so back to Paul, you began working immediately...

AL: Yeah, we were at Henson Studios, which used to be A&M. My drums were there; Paul's drums were there. Paul was in the tracking room with us, myself, Rusty Anderson and pianist Gabe Dickson. Paul was very open to our ideas during the creative process.

RM: How long did you record?

AL: We recorded for two weeks, took a break for a couple of months and then came back and recorded for another two weeks. It was just a beautiful experience. He was so open to exploring things with us. I was into a more organic type of programming and rather than getting a computer out, I was using guitar effect pedals and loop pedals and also using the Roland Handsonic, which I love. I would create the loops on the guitar gear, which enabled me to be all about the live feel, then triggering it where I felt it should be. I would then run all these things through flangers, delays and various effect pedals and all through guitar amps, which further gave that organic sound that Paul loved. So, Paul would play us a demo and then turn to us and ask what we thought? He let us glimpse his writing process, and we would look at each other in disbelief and be just blown away. The reality of that, for any musician, of course is huge. We were completely honored and excited. It's such a testament to Paul that he was as open-minded as we were. I remember when he found out that I sing, we went on the mic and sang a background part together on one mic, like he used to do with those 'other guys'! It was such a goose bump moment, to say the least. I had to keep all that stuff in check and remember that I was there to do a job, but I also knew right then and there that I had forged a lifelong friendship.

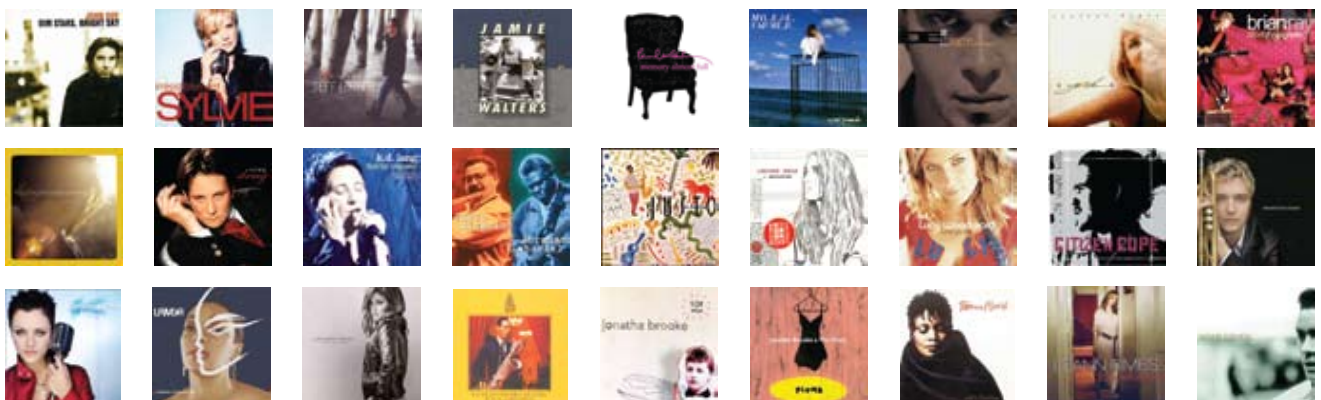
RM: That was 2001?

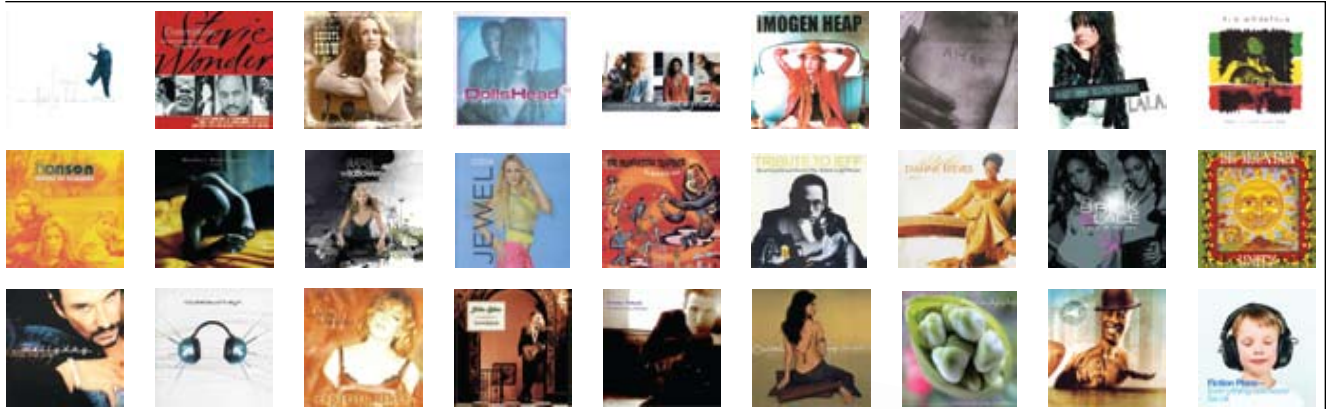
AL: Yeah, we finished the record in June and he was considering touring but had not finalized plans; a few months later, September 11th happened. I was in Colorado at the time with k.d. and we had to find our way home via the ground, which was a trip to say the least. Two weeks later I was in New York, playing Radio City Music Hall with k.d., opening for Tony Bennett. Shortly after that, got the call from Sting. He had some dates to finish from a previous tour and Manu wasn't available. They called me to do that and two days before the rehearsals with Sting were to start, Paul had the Concert For New York, the benefit for the firemen and the police who lost their lives, which was to be my first big show with Paul. During that

weekend, I did that show with Paul and also began rehearsals with Sting. I then did my first show in New York with Sting, in Bryant Park: surreal to say the least. I finished out the dates that Sting had left, but while I was on the road with him I got a call from Paul's camp, letting me know he wanted to begin doing some shows, including a special show for the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. I had to say no, which was one of the scariest things I've ever had to do. I was hoping he would understand that I had a commitment to honor and that I would do the same for him. Luckily, he did and played that show with another drummer, but waited till I was done with Sting to do the actual tour. We actually played at the Super Bowl first, before we began touring.

RM: That's when Brian Ray came into the picture, right?

AL: Yes, he was such the "right call" and joined us for the Super Bowl show. He played guitar and played a little bass. I suggested him for the position because he was able to flex between both axes, depending on what Paul needed. It was such a tough chair to fill because an actual bass player would have tried to impress Paul with his abilities. Brian approaches the gig with humility and respect and wants Paul's lines to be heard. Our keyboard player, Wix, was Paul's player from the U.K. and it was at the Super Bowl gig that we really met as a band for the first time. Ironically, however, I had another gig in New





Orleans that same weekend as the Bowl game with Sting, for the Super Bowl Bash held on the Friday night of Super Bowl weekend. I was going between the sound check for Paul, to the sound check with Sting, to the gig: it was just crazy. I actually had two hotel rooms! (Laughing.)

It was so bizarre. I don't know how this kept on happening, but then Paul decided that he finally wanted to tour and Sting was done by that time, having been on the road for three years for the *Brand New Day* tour. Paul's tour was only supposed to be seven weeks, but ended up lasting roughly seven years! In summer of 2006, there were some shows with Sting, when Josh Freese had some work with Nine Inch Nails, so I rejoined him for about three months. It's certainly been a whirlwind, jumping between heroes.

RM: Tell me about the trip to Russia with Paul. I have the *In Red Square* DVD, which I highly recommend to everyone.

AL: That was just an incredible experience. Paul had never been to Russia, even with The Beatles. Back in the day, popular music from the West was banned there, so that was his first trip, and he was completely moved by the whole thing. I was so honored to have been a part of that.

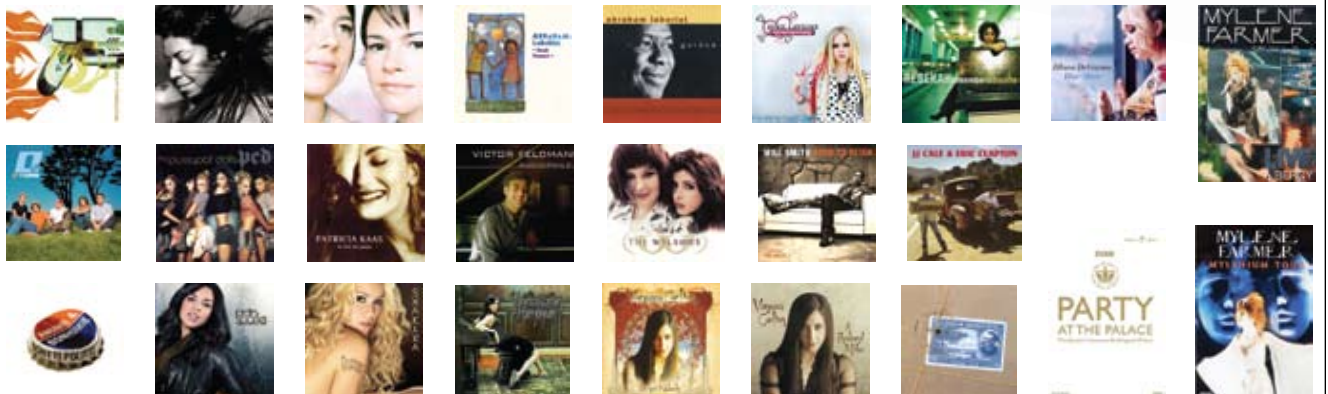
RM: I was blown away by it. All the interviews throughout the film, with Russian poets, philosophers and fans, telling their stories about growing up in such a stifled society.

We don't know what that's like here. The film really did an amazing job showing that.

AL: Yeah, it really affected all of us. What was interesting was how moved the Russian military and political leaders were by Paul, once they met him. The quote from President Putin to Paul was very interesting: "Your music was like an open window to the world." It really shows how much influence The Beatles left on the people there. One of the most amazing parts of that trip though was playing "Back In The U.S.S.R." in Red Square. The crowd just flipped out and everyone was crying, including us. They had waited their entire lives to see a Beatle, so the reality of it was overwhelming. It was amazing to see.

RM: The DVD depicts the emotion and the experience so well, I say to all our readers here to just buy it. To see 100,000 people in Red Square, all moved to tears is incredible. For anyone who is a fan, not only of The Beatles but of popular music in general, it's a must have...just a great film.

AL: I totally agree.





“I brought a drum machine with all the clicks programmed with different sounds and upbeats, so I was able to control what we played to.”



RM: Speaking of British legends, didn't you recently play with Eric Clapton?

AL: Yes, I had played on one of his albums in 2005 called *Back Home*, and then in '06, I played on a J.J. Cale/Eric Clapton record called *Road To Escondido*. Right after that record, Eric wanted me to tour, but it overlapped with some of Paul's gigs, so Steve Jordan went out with Eric. But considering my last six years, it was good to take a break from the road. I was able to buy a house and actually enjoy time in it. This past year, with Paul, we've done a few promo shows and some major events in cities like Kiev and Tel Aviv. Then I've been touring with Eric since this summer.

RM: How is the Clapton experience?

AL: It's a blast, man. He's so musical and just plays and sings from his heart. He is very respectful of how everyone in the band feels and everyone is involved onstage. It's beautiful. Again, here's a superstar, but the truth is he's a working musician. I feel that's what I've been lucky with: Sting-working musician; k.d.-working musician; Paul-working musician, they all haven't forgotten where they came from and don't take for granted what they have. It's just incredible.

RM: Here's a question, have you ever been in a situation, either live or studio, where you've had a run-in with someone and it's gotten heated?

AL: Sure. What has helped me get through those times are the lessons I learned from my dad and from Jeff. What we do as "sidemen" is a job of servitude: to serve not only the music but also the artist who doesn't know about serving the music. We're there to help them achieve the best possible result. Sometimes, however, we just gotta eat it when egos are flyin'.

RM: Have you ever just gotten to the point where you just walked away from a project?

AL: I wanted to. Once I was working on a project and it wasn't in LA. Had it been in LA, I would have found a replacement, but I was afraid that I might not see my gear again. So I had to swallow my pride and deal with it head on. The artist, not to mention any names, was determined to be the producer, with no experience as a producer. The way he viewed producing was to have us play every possible variation of a song, as if we were sequencers. Like he was programming us, he would look at each bar, try every tempo and every key. It was one of the slowest, longest processes I've ever been involved with. To record one song took literally a day and a half of 18-hour days. It was crazy; the songs eventually ended up back where we started instinctually anyway. There was no attempt on the artist's part to gain experience from us. Ironically, it ended up being a huge selling record, so I guess it worked out in the end,

but it was quite grueling for us. But other than this experience, I've been pretty lucky over the years. I learned from my father that it's not about me, but about the song and the artist who hires me. If I ever feel frustrated musically within a project, I know I can always find an outlet with my own music, come home and play live, write, cook, enjoy a nice bottle of wine—there's always a way to channel.

RM: Speaking of home life, you have a block of time these days that you don't normally have. What about your own record?

AL: Yeah, I've been working on some songs and probably have enough for a record, at this point. It's just been about finding the time to record them, and probably, now is the time. I enjoy writing, even just for the sake of exercising that muscle.

RM: When composing, what's your instrument of choice?

AL: Mainly guitar.

RM: Do your song ideas begin more melodically or with a groove concept?

AL: It's melodic with harmony and a lot of leading tone stuff. Eventually the melody forms and lyrics come, hopefully. There's a bunch of songs that I want to record and I'm not sure what I'll do with them yet; maybe I'll set up a website. We'll see, I'm just having fun with the creation process.

RM: What is coming up for you in the near future?

AL: There are some fun things coming up this year. One is a tour with Clapton and Steve Winwood. It is sort of a Blind Faith reunion. It's been great playing tunes like "Presence of the Lord" and "Had to Cry Today." We're also playing some Traffic songs like "Dear Mr. Fantasy" and "Pearly Queen." It is an incredible experience to learn about American-influenced British Rock from the very pioneers of it. I've been approaching this tour with more of a tribal mindset. As a tip of the hat to Ginger Baker I've added some more toms to my kit. My set from left to right is 14", 12", 13" rack toms and 15", 16" floor toms.

Another thing coming up this year is some great shows with McCartney. We will be the first act playing the new Shea stadium, which is now called Citi Field. The Beatles were the first act to play the original Shea stadium so being a part of this legacy is truly special. Work on my solo record is always dependent on time... it obviously takes a backseat to these other events, but I will hopefully finish it soon.

At this point, Abe picked up an acoustic guitar and played a song. It was moody, in a minor key, almost Spanish in flavor—reminded me a bit of Sting. The song's lyrics were about someone realizing a love that's right in front



Photo: Marco Soccoli

“What was expected was not exactly what I do.”



Photo: Marco Soccoli



GEARBOX

Drums

DW

Red Stripe Over Ebony Ivory w/Chrome Big Grain

14" X 10" Rack Vlt W/3-Ply Inners

12" X 8" Rack Vlt W/3-Ply Inners

13" X 9" Rack Vlt W/3-Ply Inners

15" X 15" Floor Vlt W/3-Ply Inners

16" X 16 Floor Vlt W/3-Ply Inners

24" X 22" Kick Vlt W/3-Ply Inners

14" X 7" Snare

Die Cast Hoops On All Drums

Cymbals

Paiste

2002 15" Sound Edge (bottoms only)

24" Giant Beat Ride (crash/ride)

22" Twenty Ride

22" 2002 Crash

Hardware

DW

DW8000 Double Pedal

DW Rack and Stands

Drumheads

Remo

Coated Ambassadors Top and bottom

Sticks

Vic Firth

Abe Laboriel Jr. Signature

of them and the struggle to get out of their own way to appreciate it.

As we wrapped up our two days of hanging, talking and taking photos, Abe and I found ourselves talking about other bands we love and about how fortunate we are to play with the artists we're involved with. We discussed singing background vocals with legends and how that enriches the whole experience. I told him about the first time I saw him with Paul, how I was sitting next to his wife and how we all got tears in our eyes when he came to the front of the stage to sing background vocals with Paul on "Eleanor Rigby." Can you imagine?

The photos for this article were taken in the desert by Rob Shanahan, a dear friend

of ours, and ironically Ringo Starr's personal photographer. The desert idea was Abe's, to represent the endless, vast possibility he feels in his life right now. We talked more about Jeff Porcaro and how if it wasn't for him, we may not have met. That happened a lot when talking about Jeff; he was the catalyst for many introductions. Abe is honored to have the influences he had as a young, up-and-coming player and is thankful every single day. Unlike most of us, he had the amazing fortune not only to have

great studio legends take him under their wing, but also to have a father guide him in a way most of us can only imagine. Together with his inherited talent and natural ability, he learned at a young age the value of hard work, the importance of mutual respect and the invaluable tool of listening. Listening to everything: to the words spoken around him, to the subtle lessons between peers, to every style of music, to his mentors and finally to himself. Abe Jr. was destined to endure a legacy, a legacy that still thrives today. To those reading this who aren't hip to the man who began this legacy, I highly recommend that you become familiar and dig deep into the music of both Abrahams. If you're lucky enough to see them live, you will immediately understand and smile from deep within your soul. You'll feel something rarely felt in live music and undoubtedly laugh right along with them. All I can say is get ready for a ride. What lies ahead for Abraham Laboriel Jr. can only be predicted as grand, and for all of us—we're in for a treat.

He's only just begun. ✨

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