

# RICH MANGICARO



WORDS BY KELLY KING

## CREATING SUCCESS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

Anyone who is a successful musician will tell you that there are many components necessary for getting gigs, but the primary two are ability and compatibility. No one knows this better than Rich Mangicaro. This successful drummer/percussionist has traveled down many of the music industry's professional avenues, from 19 years as head of A&R for Paiste, to percussionist for Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh. Mangicaro is an in-demand player, author, musical consultant and educator. He also had an illustrious career with Paiste as head of Artists Relations for 19 years. He currently directs his own company brand, [ArtistRelationships.com](http://ArtistRelationships.com), where he proudly manages A&R for Gon Bops Percussion and Innovative Percussion. In addition to this, Rich has a Bachelors of Music Performance.

Few people in today's music industry have performed, recorded, represented and written about percussion to the extent that Rich Mangicaro has. It is safe to say that very few drummers understand the industry the way that he does. The man borders on omniscient, and as a player, he knows what is expected. As a businessman he knows what is expected of a musician as well as what that performer requires. As a writer he understands what drummers want to know about both.

Those who know Mangicaro understand why he has been so successful. His warm and positive demeanor, in conjunction with his tasteful playing, make him a pleasure to be around—that and the fact that he always has a great story to tell. Working at the top of the music industry for 20-plus years with a variety of artists and drummers has given Rich a plethora of anecdotes.



## I GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

In the late '70s Rich Mangicaro was pursuing his education on the East Coast. After a two-year stint at a community college, he transferred to Syracuse University for another two years. While at Syracuse he switched to the Music Industry program, which was just becoming part of the curriculum in U.S. universities. Rich left, just shy of completing his degree, to go on the road with a corporate band. School had burnt him out and he was happy to be a working, paid musician. For the next five years Rich toured major U.S. cities playing drums and cultivating his vocal skills, even singing lead in different bands.

He had moved to LA in '82, and although he had been working some, things never quite clicked for him there. In 1985 he moved back to Potsdam and attended the Crane School of Music in hopes of finishing his degree. Mangicaro tells the story of one early relationship and how it changed his life at the time, "I was in LA and Jim Peterscak [teacher of many respected drummers and industry execs including Tony Verderosa, George Barrett, Joe Testa, etc.] was the head of the Percussion Department at Potsdam. Peterscak wanted me to fly back East to audition for the program, but I couldn't afford it. Jim set it up for Sandy Feldstein [teacher, publisher, and musician], formally Crane's Director of Percussion, who was the head of Alfred Publishing at the time, to audition me in his office. I met him. I played, did some conducting, ear training, etc. Those two guys were able to get me back into school, and we've been friends ever since. Sandy was an icon in the industry and sadly, we lost him in 2007. I'm still friends with his family to this day." Mangicaro completed his degree in '86 and then returned to LA.

By 1987 Rich was working at Paiste, as well as playing and recording a little. Initially the job was to supplement his income and allowed him to be a part of a large company that he enjoyed. The first year consisted of sales calls and was admittedly rough. During that same year, the Head of Artists Relations left and Mangicaro made his pitch for the job. Paiste gave him a chance and Rich spent the next 18 years ('88-2006) as the Head of A&R. It was a mutually beneficial relationship. This business relationship would lead to another relationship that resulted in Rich's eventual next step as a player. Mangicaro recalls, "PIT [Percussive Institute of Technology] would have an awards ceremony at their graduation, and I was the Paiste representative that would attend. We made presentations to different honorees. Several companies were involved and all of us got to know each other. One year it was at LA's Wilmet Theater. I was hanging out with John Good [VP of DW], and he asked what

I was doing after the ceremony. After I replied 'nothing' he said he was taking me to see his favorite band called Venice. We went to this place called the Music Machine and I heard two songs...I was blown away! They were great players, great singers and had great songs! Scott Crago was the drummer at that time. I signed Scott to his first Paiste endorsement that night. Scott is amazing! He plays on the back side of the beat and has this amazing feel, much like Russ Kunkel. Scott later saw me playing in the band Clear and through my connection with him, I eventually began working with Venice. If I had to trace it back to when things began changing for me as a player, it goes back to that night and John Good. I owe it all to him."

After that initial meeting Rich became a fan of Venice. For the next couple of years Mangicaro continued to play around LA with bands while working for Paiste. He and Crago became friends. Scott came to see Rich play with the band Clear and was impressed by Mangicaro's creativity and feel. In fact, Crago loved the band so much that he ended up producing their next record. Crago continued to work up the musical ladder with a string of gigs that included Stevie Nicks, Don Henley and eventually the Eagles. All the while Scott was thinking of a spot to include Rich. The opportunity would reveal itself with Glenn Frey's solo band. It's a vivid memory for Rich. He recalls, "Glenn isn't a fan of the long audition process. He had asked Scott if he knew of someone good who would fit into the gig. I was working at the Paiste office that day. Scott called and said, 'Are you sitting down? Do you want to play for Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh?' I thought he was messing with me. I said, 'Of, course!' He said that he would call me back in five minutes. That was probably the longest five minutes of my life! (Laughs.) He called back and said I had the gig. Rehearsal was to start the next week and we'd go to Florida in two weeks. No audition! Needless to say, I spent a lot of time getting to know Glenn's music inside and out. I already knew the songs; they're so popular and well-known, but I wanted to respect the music."

Rich remembers the first rehearsals, "I didn't have all of the equipment I needed so I went out and bought a ton of stuff. We did our first rehearsal at The Power Plant. We played for two hours, rehearsed the next day and got on a plane the following week. I've been on the gig ever since. I was playing very reserved at first, not wanting to step on anyone's toes. I think Glenn had said something to Scott [Crago] like 'Get a shot of tequila in Rich tonight. Tell him to play out a little more.' (Laughs.) That's when I knew it was okay for me to do my thing. Eventually I started singing backup on the gig, but in those early days it was just about playing percussion. For any vocalist, singing backgrounds with an Eagle on all those great







tambourine on the left foot, bass drum on the right foot and then a couple of cymbals. When it's miked up right it sounds just like a drum kit. The sound in some of these old theaters was unbelievable. I don't want to make it sound like we're on the whole rock star trip though; we were schlepping our own gear. (Laughs.) This setup works really well when the band does an acoustic tour. It's very sensitive and yet full at the same time. Of course, playing with great players helps to make you sound even better."

As a member of Venice, Rich became associated with Artists For The Arts. Artists For

The Arts is a foundation based out of Santa Monica, CA, that raises money for school arts programs. Venice and Jackson Browne founded this organization, and they have served as the house band for their benefit concerts. Venice would play a set at these performances and then a special guest would join them for a second set. A list of some of the special guests includes: Jackson Browne, David Crosby, Billy Idol, Dave Mason, Michael McDonald, Christopher Cross, Tommy Shaw and many others. Learning so many great artists music has led to some memorable moments. Rich comments, "Rehearsing with Jackson [Browne] was really special. We were rehearsing in a small studio and it hit me what a great songwriter and artist he really is. He is very focused. It wasn't loose and jammy. He knows exactly what he wants. When you're playing one of his songs you really want to deliver."

My favorite out of all these great musicians was probably Michael McDonald. Not only is he a true gentleman but he really listens. We would be eating dinner and he would point out specific things that he heard, little stuff, but he caught all of it. When you get a compliment from a guy of his stature it feels great. We had both played on Jeff Bridges's first solo album, but had never been in the studio at the same time. It was great to finally meet him and play music together."

One of Mangicaro's favorite gigs ever was playing percussion with The Tubes. It once again proves how any relationship, when appreciated and fostered, can be beneficial to all parties. While working at Paiste, Rich became close with Prairie Prince. Back in the day Paiste had a sound booth at the NAMM show, which would feature live performances. Rich directed the booking of the bands for the booth. Over the years it featured many of the greats, including Jeff Porcaro, Chad Wackerman, Carlos Vega, etc. Rich remembers, "Erik Paiste and I had gone to see The Tubes here in LA. Erik leaned over at one point and said, 'We should get them to perform at NAMM!' Fee [Waybill, original vocalist] wasn't the singer at this point in time. He had left for about six or seven years."



songs is a dream come true...I'm truly honored to be part of his vocal team. I still pinch myself, performing songs like 'Take It Easy' and 'Take It To The Limit.' I'll never forget one time with Joe Walsh, playing a conga solo on 'Funk 49' and Joe flashin' a smile back at me... just surreal."

## IT'S NOT JUST FOR ITALIANS

Venice is the hub from which Rich traces his musical connections. The introduction through John Good and Scott Crago later became an important factor in Mangicaro's career as a serious player in LA. Eventually Rich would end up as a member of Venice. It was primarily Matt Laug [LA session great] who suggested that Rich be hired as the percussionist. The band asked Mangicaro to sit in on two gigs at The Mint and he's been playing with them ever since. Even if you haven't heard of Venice you probably know their other gig, as the background singers for Roger Waters on The Wall tour.

Venice just recently completed a European tour that included two weeks in Holland. The shows in the Dutch area were favorites of Mangicaro's. He recalls, "We did about eight shows in Holland. Two of them were broadcast on the country's top radio station. The tour was all theaters, except for the radio shows. The band is particularly popular in Holland and the fans are great there. I play a hybrid setup with Venice. I have Cuban and flamenco cajons,



About two days into NAMM, Prairie and I were talking, and I asked him if he ever talked with Fee. Prairie said he had just spoken with him. We both agreed that it would be a good idea to invite Fee down to perform with The Tubes. I got to know Fee and all of the guys in The Tubes really well that year. At one point we closed The Hilton down. It was all of us having drinks and singing at the piano, what a crazy night! Shortly after that Fee joined the band lineup again." Not long after this The Tubes did a string of gigs in Southern California and Prairie called Rich to see if he'd like to play percussion on the dates. Mangicaro states, "Soloing with Prairie is one of the highlights of my career!"

One more gig that is near and dear to Rich's heart is the Bisquera Brothers. Formed in 2003, Rich played with the group that included Curt Bisquera (drums), Leon Bisquera (keys), James Harrah (guitar), Reggie Hamilton (bass) and Albert Wing (sax). Mangicaro is intensely proud of it, saying, "It's probably the best band I've ever played in. We played the Montreal Drum Festival, which was a real honor. Curt is an amazing drummer for a percussionist to play with. He has such a deep, soulful groove. He told me once that our job as drummers is to make people dance. I love that perspective. This from a guy who has all the chops in the world."

## THE REAL DEAL

One thing that has allowed Rich to be so successful, other than his talents in percussion, is the fact that he understands the business side of the music industry. His almost 20 years with Paiste gave him an understanding of what both the artists and the companies need and expect at the top level of the music world. It's appropriate to say that Rich has been both the Tin Man as well as the great and powerful Oz. While many musicians consider endorsements to be an open invitation to free gear, Rich understands the true nature of the relationship. He expounds, "There's so much more that's involved with endorsements besides great players. There are a lot of talented musicians out there. It would be great to have everyone promoting your product, but that isn't fiscally realistic. There's a lot of money that goes into the promotion of the artists who are endorsers. These companies have many factors to consider when making the decision about who to sign. When I was signing artists there were four main factors that were essential:

1) Ability-This isn't necessarily what you might think. It's not about being a super-technical kind of player. It's more about bringing something special. It might be feel or musicality or it might be chops. It's that thing that makes your ears perk up when you hear someone play: Individuality.

2) Visibility-It's a matter of fact that you might see a great player at a huge concert hall or in a tiny place in the middle of nowhere. When companies are signing an endorser they have to consider visibility. When an audience sees an artist playing your instruments it's a great experience for everyone involved, but it's also advertising. A company has to believe in the artist, and the artist in turn has to be out there for potential clients to witness. You can be as amazing as someone like Vinnie Colaiuta, but if you're not playing in front of people, you're not going to bring new players and customers to the instrument. It's unfortunate but it is reality.

3) A true love of the instrument. If you're just looking for free gear, it's not going to work out. I've said it before, but the artist and the company have to believe in each other. It's a two-way street. It's a common misconception that endorsers get free gear, money or both. This is almost unheard of, unless you're in one of the biggest bands on the planet. Usually you start by receiving a discount. You don't have to go to a music store anymore. You get to deal directly with the manufacturer and they'll ship the instruments to you, or you can go to the factory to pick them out: That's a privilege.

4) Longevity. This is the hardest one to nail down. It's a sizeable investment to promote an artist with a major ad campaign. There are great players who simply aren't in situations that last. Without mentioning names, I was involved in promoting a popular







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drummer who was in a huge band. For whatever reason, this person left the band. There were some visible years for Paiste with him, but he eventually disappeared. Meanwhile, Paiste had made this huge investment in promotional materials that were no longer useable. That's the price of doing business, but it has to be factored into the whole equation. Since I've been involved in both the playing and A&R side for so many years, it's easy to spot who has their musical and business chops together. The real pros understand that it's a mutually beneficial relationship when handled properly, and they respect that."

## DON'T CALL HIM "JUST A DRUMMER"

Just when you might think this guy has no more tricks up his sleeve, Rich will prove you wrong. It's a safe bet that one of the reasons Mangicaro has done so well is that he makes it a point to strive for excellence. He has been involved in the film industry as a music consultant. He was even a part of a company that attempted to put the majority of money received from downloads back into the hands of the artists (Nova Tunes). Perhaps most notably is

the work that he has garnered as a writer. The experience Rich has had as both a player and working in the music industry make him a hot commodity when it comes to trade magazines. Mangicaro has written for the most popular and widely read drum magazines in the world (including *Drumhead*). His keen insight into drums and percussion, along with the confidence and good will that many artists feel towards him, has made him a substantial contributor to what is happening in the community. He even rubs elbows with some of the most respected authors of our time, working part-time as a publicist's assistant. Rich comments, "I spent 12 hours working with Salmon Rushdie last year. We had a drink, we talked about writing, including both of us being fans of Showtime's 'Dexter'; it was amazing! It's incredible to meet all of these great authors whom I respect. I once worked with Nile Rodgers [legendary musician and producer] as he was giving an interview to *Rolling Stone*. He was saying how important all of the relationships he had over the years meant to him and how thankful he was for all of them. I can completely relate to that." \*



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