

VOLUME 13 #1

SPRING 2004

NOT SO MODERN

DRUMMER



CLASSIC ROCK
MY GENERATION'S MUSIC

INTERVIEW WITH A MASTER CRAFTSMAN
JOHNNY CRAVIOTTO

PLUS: PEDAL FILES
THE SWATCH PAGE
PROFILE: REPERCUSSIONS

US \$4.95 OUTSIDE US \$6.95



Ludwig

BY ROB COOK & JOHN ALDRIDGE

CRAVIOTTO

THE LIFE AND TIMES (SO FAR) OF JOHNNY "C"

Header Graphic by David Levine

IN THE CUSTOM SNARE DRUM WORLD, VERY FEW NAMES ARE AS WELL KNOWN OR RESPECTED AS THAT OF JOHNNY CRAVIOTTO. FOR THE PAST 16 YEARS, JOHNNY HAS BUILT A NAME IN THE CUSTOM DRUM WORLD,

BEGINNING WITH SOLID AND SELECT DRUMS, THEN AS AN EXCLUSIVE PROVIDER OF SOLID WOOD SHELLS TO DRUM WORKSHOP, AND NOW ON HIS OWN WITH THE CRAVIOTTO DRUM COMPANY. THIS IS HIS STORY...

JOHNNY "C" CRAVIOTTO

was born in S a n Francisco in November of 1946 to a pair of Italian-born immigrants who were interested in music. Johnny's mom was a concert pianist, and his father played harmonica and spoons at family get-togethers. On little Johnny's 11th birthday, his father finally gave in to the begging and pleading and got him his first drum set, an inexpensive Ludwig kit, duco finish, black with the gold stripes. (Bass, snare, cheap Ludwig ride cymbal with the tom holder in the middle - no tom, no hi-hat.)

Primarily self-taught, Johnny began playing gigs at age 11-1/2, and at the ripe old age of 15 passed his first big audition with an R & B band headed by Cornelius Bumpus. (Bumpus went on to enjoy a long and illustrious career which included long stints with The Doobie Brothers and Steeley Dan before he passed away in February of 2003. For more on Cornelius Bumpus, go to www.Corneliusbumpus.com.)

Although the San Francisco of the late '50s and early '60's was a hotbed of musical evolution, Johnny remained in the R & B groove with Cornelius all through High School. It was a serious band and for seven straight years they rehearsed two nights a week and played three nights. Along the way, Johnny added a hi-hat and ride tom to the old duco kit and used it for his first two years with Corny before his father bought him an Aqua sparkle Slingerland kit with 2 12's, a 14, 20, and 5x14 8-lug metal snare that he still has today.

Johnny had another passion in high school besides his music, and he devoted every spare minute to it; surfing. Santa Cruz is one of the world's top surf meccas, and Johnny became a hard-core surf addict.



Although the Cornelius Bumpus band enjoyed great success in the Bay area, winning many Battle-of-the-Bands, etc., Corny eventually disbanded the group around 1965 as Johnny and a couple other band members were leaving High School. Johnny bounced around a little for the next year or two with some other local bands while Corny moved on into the San Francisco music scene. He eventually got another call from Corny, this time to join him playing the bars in San Francisco's red light district. No longer an R & B show band, the instrumentation



was now just drums, bass, tenor, and guitar. They worked with some incredibly talented musicians and, among other things, Johnny learned to supply the burlesque dancers with drum cues they depended on.

The musical networking continued and before Johnny knew it, they had hooked up with a San Francisco singer by the name of Bobby Freeman.

(He did a song called "Do You Want To

Dance" which was a hit at the time.) That connection led the group to Las Vegas. Soon Johnny found himself working with a core group of talented R & B players working a circuit through San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Reno.

By this time, the music scene was changing and hippies and flower children were the new thing. Some of Johnny's buddies were forming bands that would eventually become legends; one bunch up the street called their group The Frantics, and eventually evolved into Moby Grape. Although Johnny remained centered in the R & B groove, he did experiment a little on the side. One of those "hippie jams" led to the next big career shift. The guitarist from the jam session (where they'd been playing primarily raga-type jams) had been impressed with Johnny and phoned him a month or two later to say he was trying to put together a band to back a talented Canadian female singer in New York.

Johnny agreed to go to New York for the audition, and in December of 1968 was hired to play with Buffy St. Marie. The R & B drummer from SF was now staying at the top rock hotel in NYC, The Chelsea Hotel, along with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and countless others. Shortly thereafter, he was in the Vanguard recording studios, recording the Buffy St Marie album "Illuminations".

St. Marie's live gigs were a whole different scene from what Johnny was used to. He went from from playing bars and night clubs to play-

ing university venues seating 3,000 to 5,000. One of the most memorable gigs of the era was playing the Berkeley Community Theater the week of the People's Park Riot in the 1960s. The group traveled extensively, throughout the U.S. and Europe, even playing the venerable Grand Ole Opry in Nashville when it was still at the Ryman Theater. Because the "Opry" did not allow drums or electric instruments on stage. Johnny had to play out of sight in the orchestra pit.

Johnny's musical contacts continued to develop, of course, with one key player becoming Jack Nicci. Nicci was an old R & B fan who hit it off well with Johnny and eventually told him about a young Santa Monica guitarist he wanted to hook him up with named Ry Cooder. They went into an LA studio and cut a number of tracks with both Marie and Ry Cooder. They used a couple different bass players, one of them being Chris Etheridge from The Flying Burrito Brothers. Another was Rick Oxenstein from Richie Havens' band. Johnny and Ry connected solidly, and Johnny eventually got the call to do Cooder's first tour. He got a new drum kit at this time, a natural maple Ludwig kit. However, he had only one day to prepare before embarking on a tour of huge coffee houses and hip clubs like the Troubadour in LA.

It was about this time (1971) that Johnny first met two drummers who would become lifelong friends, Jim Keltner and Jim Gordon. Keltner at the time was working with Joe Cocker, Gordon was with Delaney and Bonnie. Buffy St Marie disbanded his band, so Johnny remained with Ry Cooder, who also got him a gig backing Arlo Guthrie for whom he did the "Alice's Restaurant" tour. Next was a 60-city Ry Cooder tour opening for a very progressive off-the-wall guy by the name of Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band. Half way through the tour, the drummer got sick and had to go home so Johnny ended up playing every night in the Beefheart band also.

Following the Cooder/Beefheart tour came a stint with Randy Newman. (It was the old Fairfax High School connection; Newman had gone to school there along with producer Nicci, Ry Cooder, and Lennie Waronker, the former head of Warner Brothers Records and father of Joey Waronker, drummer for Beck/REM/etc. Johnny was for a time considered to be a member of the Warner Brothers "stable".

Ry Cooder decided to take a year off and kind of disbanded the group, so Johnny bought some property and moved to Oregon for a year. He was still on this sabbatical when he got a call from a friend who had lived up the street from him in '67 when Johnny was playing the strip clubs, Jerry Miller. Miller asked him to join Moby Grape. That was in 1973; he was with the reformed Moby Grape from '73 to '75. It was during that period that Johnny became interested in old drums. One Saturday in June of '74 he went to a flea market with his wife who encouraged him to pick up an old drum that caught their eye. It turned out to be a vintage Slingerland Radio King snare drum 7.5 x 14 with blue duco and silver paint. The price: \$5.00 all complete. It even had the original calfskin heads and original snare wires. Johnny was intrigued by the drum. After that whenever he went to a flea market or garage sale he'd start looking for old drums. At that time there were drums everywhere.

In 1976, Johnny left Moby Grape. He'd been touring and traveling for over 16 years and wanted to take a break. He was still surfing when he could, and living on the coast. A buddy told him that a friend was looking for someone to help him build a boat and Johnny jumped at the opportunity to spend some time working in the sun. Although he wasn't aware of it at the time, building that boat would become a very significant event in Johnny's life. He bounced around a little with a couple of local bands until one day in 1977 when he was working on the boat and a friend came down to the harbor where he was working. Also getting out of the car was Neil Young, who Johnny recognized from his days in the Warner Studios. Neil explained that he'd heard they were looking for a guitar player, so then and there they formed "The Ducks." The Ducks became a very successful cult band. They played only for that one summer, and only in the Bay area. They never announced where they would be more than a day ahead of time, and never charged more than \$3.00 admission. Johnny looks back at that summer as the most enjoyable summer of his life. For a little more on "The Ducks", go to

☞ CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 ☞

HELP PREVENT PERCUSSION CONCUSSION

WITH THESE SPECIALTY CASES FROM KING KONG KASES



SNARE VAULT

Drummers and percussionists alike know that the most important instrument in their arsenal is the snare drum. Pros insist on that "perfect" snare drum to express themselves. Many drummers own a variety of snare drums to produce different sonic effects. If you own one or more of these precious instruments, King Kong's Custom Snare Vault can help you protect them!

CYM-AC

Transport your favorite instruments safely and conveniently. Cym-Ac is just large enough for a couple of stands, pedals, cymbals, heads and some hand held percussion. The pull-out airport tote style handle and recessed casters will make your journey a breeze, allowing you to save your energy for the gig. Cym-Ac—insurance for success.



SYMPH CADDY

Symph-Caddy is not only a trap case, but a trap table for accessory percussion instruments, sticks, mallets or cymbals. This pro case holds two to three snare drums, stands, hand and effects cymbals, sound effects, mallets, sticks, heads and parts—all safely enclosed in ATA-style, foam-lined wood construction, with a choice of five exterior colors and heavy-duty casters. A lockable interior drawer plus padded compartments protect instruments and valuables.

All King Kong Kases are custom-built using only premium components. Several standard models, available as pictured, are designed specifically for symphonic percussionists, college or high school bands, percussion ensembles, or touring professional drummers. Other models may be custom-configured to fit most any percussion instrument from a triangle to tubular bells. Send us your specifications — we can help.

CALL 804-798-7320 OR FAX 804-798-7323
P.O. BOX 6595 • ASHLAND, VA 23005 • USA

<http://www.bosco.net/human-highway/pages/ducks.html>. When Neil had to leave at the end of the summer to fulfill other obligations, Johnny went to work as a deck hand on a fishing boat. He spent a year on the high seas, taking another sabbatical from the music business. When he came back in 1979 and started to get his drums and stuff out of storage, he ran across the old drums. He decided to run an ad and started going to flea markets regularly, buying up loads of really cheap drums and fixing them up. The business steadily grew with his reputation, and soon Johnny was repairing and customizing drums for schools and drummers throughout the area. His buddy Andy Weiss of Monterey introduced him to Andy Florio of LA, putting him on the ground floor of the vintage drum scene that was beginning to develop. Other early vintage and custom drum influences were Charlie Donnelly and Joe Montineri.

Sometime in 1986 Johnny built a couple of ply shell drums for Bill Gibson, drummer for Huey Lewis and the News. Bill was excited about the drums, and urged him to do more. Remembering how they had bent wood to make the boat, and with his experiences with solid shell vintage snare drums in his mind, Johnny wondered if he could make his own drum shells of solid wood. Again, Bill encouraged him and even offered to line up the financing to start a drum company. The result was the first drum company to make solid-shell drums using Johnny's completely new process for bending dry wood. In the past, solid shell



drums had been made from green (uncured) wood that tended to be unstable so the new process was a major advance. Thus started the Select Snare Drum Company in April of 1986 in Johnny's backyard. The Select team built several prototypes using the new process and even rolled some brass shells to round out their offerings which they presented at the 1987 NAMM show. "Unfortunately, one of the first things we discovered at that show was that our name was already in use by another company so we immediately changed the name to The Solid Snare Drum Company." Johnny made all of the Select shells, and the first of the Solid shells, but he left the company at the end of 1988 for personal reasons. Soon after his departure the company went out of business.

In 1990 Johnny decided to take another stab at making some drum shells, but discovered that the patented shell-making procedure he developed had been sold (along with all the machinery) to another company. With the help of his friends in the boatbuilding business, he began developing a whole new wood-bending process. Together they analyzed the old patent and found a way to make shells with only a fourth of the machinery required using the older method and for half the cost.

In 1993 Johnny bumped into Jim Keltner again. "When I showed him the shells I was making, Keltner just lit up." Jim had already seen some of the shells but did not realize it was his old buddy making them. Keltner told Johnny that he knew a guy named Don

Size Matters.

Enhance the quantity and quality of your sound with Puresound's new **Super30** 30-Strand Custom Snare Wires.



Now available in 12, 13 and 14" models at better drumshops everywhere.
www.puresoundpercussion.com

puresound[®]
MADE IN U.S.A.

Lombardi who was the owner of an up-and-coming drum company called Drum Workshop. Keltner offered to introduce Johnny, called Don and within two weeks they had worked out a deal for Johnny to make and sell his shells to DW.

For the next 10 years, Johnny was the exclusive supplier of solid wood shells for Drum Workshop. As word got around about the new shells, a buzz developed in the drum world. Through DW's extensive sales and marketing efforts, anyone who wasn't already familiar with Johnny C was soon made aware of his ability to consistently make solid wood shells that rivaled the sound of the vintage drums that had inspired him in the first place. Johnny gradually expanded his line from solid maple shells to solid walnut, cherry, and oak, which gave DW a decided edge over other snare drum makers at the time. DW's advantage increased with the addition of Johnny's "Timeless Timber" shells in 1998. Made from 700 year-old wood recovered from the bottom of Lake Superior, the highly-coveted Lake Superior drums were the first to bear the Craviotto brand, even though they were distributed exclusively by DW. While Johnny continued (and continues) to provide solid maple shells to DW, his growing list of achievements in shell making and the success of the Lake Superior drums encouraged him to see just how far he could take his craft.

By the middle of 2003, Johnny along with his closest friends and associates, decided that the time was right for him to develop his own line of drums. So, in addition to providing component shells to other companies, Johnny began developing and building his own drums. At the January 2004 NAMM show in Anaheim, Johnny launched his own drum company, the Craviotto Drum Co. Although his first year's production is limited to only 250 of each of the American Ash, Birdseye Maple, Black Cherry and Mahogany solid snare drum models, rest assured that the master drum builder has a lot more of tricks up his sleeves.

What's next? Who knows! But one thing is for sure, Johnny Craviotto and the Craviotto Drum Co. will definitely be major players in the drum world for the foreseeable future.

Level Your Sound

Introducing the all new **G5007 Throw-Off**

Cam Operated Helical Groove Design

CNC Machined

Rotational On and Off

Solid Machined Metal

"The smoothest, quietest, most durable Throw-Off ever made!"

Patent Pending

TRICK drums Intensify Your Sound!

847.519.9911
www.trickdrums.com
P.O. Box 4901 • Buffalo Grove, IL 60089

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTIBLE
LANG/NSMD
GLADSTONE TRIUMPHAL MODEL

NSMD Co. MATTE FINISHED SHELL
LANG GLADSTONE FITTINGS
ENGRAVED AND BURNISHED PATTERNS
18 KARAT GOLD PLATING OVERALL
PRODUCTION LIMITED TO 30 DRUMS
(10 EACH IN 4", 5" AND 6.5" x 14")
AVAILABLE ONLY FROM STEVE MAXWELL DRUMS.

LANG PERCUSSION INC. **NOT SO MODERN DRUM CO.**
145-B ROEBLING STREET 1302 NORTH BROADWAY AVE.
BROOKLYN NY 11211 SHAWNEE OK 74801
718-624-1825 FAX: 718-624-5004 405-214-4499 FAX: 405-214-9599
EMAIL: MLANG@PRODIGY.NET EMAIL: NSMDJOHN@AOL.COM

NOW AVAILABLE IN
TECHNICOLO

Fibes Drum Company
1107 S. 8th Street
Austin, Texas 78704

PHONE: 512-416-9955
FAX: 512-416-9956
E-MAIL: fibes@bga.com