

by Norman Weinberg

Making Mick Fleetwood: Total Drumming CD-ROM



In theory, it's a pretty straightforward idea: Get a multi-Grammy winning drummer who has the complete history of rock and roll in his veins, put him in a world-class studio and create a new set of drum loops. Preferably, this drummer should have a unique and identifiable style, an individual sound, a solid groove and plenty of power.

Background and Preparation. The goal was to duplicate the platinum-selling feel of Mick Fleetwood's drumming. What is it about his timing, interpretation and style that makes his grooves famous? According to Jonathan Todd, who produced the Fleetwood sound library for Sonic Foundry, "It's a musical contribution that is greater than the drumming itself. There is a musicality about the way Mick strikes the drums. He plays a little bit behind the beat, and his touch is a big part of his sound."

In order to prepare for this session, Fleetwood immersed himself in a number of CDs containing a retrospective of his work, from his early blues-playing and dues-paying days through the multi-million selling *Rumors* era and beyond.

"To revisit that, for me, was a pleasure and a lot of fun," he notes. "Often, when you go back, you hear something that is really quite innocent and has a certain charm to it — maybe something you've forgotten about. The whole process was really interesting and in some ways beneficial. In terms of style, feel and sound, I am now aware of what I do. But back in



Fleetwood gained insights into his own style by recording the Total Drumming CD. What could be next? Total Shaving?

those days, I wasn't aware of anything, to tell you the truth. I was just doing what I was doing and picking it up along the way. I really worked hard at listening to these recordings and took all those sensibilities into the studio for this recording. I think we did a pretty good job of representing where I came from and the journey that I've taken to the present day."

The Session. Todd said that they didn't set out to provide enough of a loop series so that anyone could simply duplicate an entire Fleetwood drum track. In fact, the loops are not note-for-note recordings of the grooves that Fleetwood played on any particular song. It's not a "paint-by-numbers set of loops," according to Todd. "Instead, the idea was to offer bits and

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pieces so people can construct their own music with their soul intertwined with Mick Fleetwood's." Fleetwood agrees: "People can go into their own world and create their own projects and maybe add something that they've never thought of before, because they are playing with a representation of my style."

As you listen to these loops and fills, you hear that the sound of his kit changes from style to style, and sometimes from groove to groove. For this session, Fleetwood raided his storage lockers to find the exact drums, cymbals and heads (getting new ones when necessary) to reproduce the sounds that he used during different phases of his career. "Long ago, I found a really wide set of snares on an old second-hand drum. It was like this mutant thing. I would use those snares and tune the bottom head so tight that it would almost explode.

"A lot of care was taken with the

sound, and we were dealing with people who knew what they were doing. And, in truth, I've got fairly good ears for stuff. Once we got the sound, I had full comfort with what was being done and felt completely free to do whatever I wanted."

The Result. The *Mick Fleetwood: Total Drumming* loop package (\$59.95) is a solid product. The loops, offered as .wav files that can be imported to a variety of software programs, have been "Acidized" with additional meta-information so the tempos can be changed in Sonic Foundry's popular Acid software package, as well as in other software that reads Acidized loop files.

The CD-ROM contains nearly 900 loops, fills and one-shot samples, arranged into five folders: Grooves & Fills, Dry Grooves & Fills, Oneshots, Percussion and Vocal Bites.

The meat and potatoes (or maybe the shepherd's pie) of this CD-ROM is the Grooves & Fills folder. It contains 120 files in the blues category, 33 files of funk, and 433 files of rock. The loop sets

are arranged by number and name (groove or fill). The naming convention is pretty primitive, and trying to find particular grooves outside of the Acid program can be tedious. (In Acid, when you click on a filename, you'll hear the loop, which removes a lot of the confusion.) The fills range from one beat to one bar, and the grooves are typically one or two measures long. Some of the grooves are typical rock and roll, but carry Fleetwood's special flare. Other patterns are truly inspirational and unique — the African-inspired tom grooves are very hip!

The files contained in the Dry folder are not additional fills and grooves, but a selection of materials culled from the processed folder, recorded without any processing. It's worth mentioning that the processed files are done in a very tasty manner. The loops aren't slathered in reverb, chorus or special effects. They sound very natural. The Oneshot files include cowbells, cymbals, kicks, snares and toms. They offer an important complement to the fills and complete loops,

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and are absolutely necessary for interacting with the material that Fleetwood played in the studio. Check out the rimshot tom samples for an example of Fleetwood's power and tone.

The Percussion folder contains 35 talking drum patterns, several gong samples (passionate Fleetwood Mac fans will recognize this instrument), ten percussion mixes with a number of different instruments, wind chime samples and Taos drums. The Vocal Bites folder contains just a few short recordings of Fleetwood talking back to the booth during the recording session. While these are of limited musical value, it's interesting to hear Fleetwood's voice.

The sound and style of these loops and fills is outstanding. The drums and

cymbals have an open quality that makes you feel you're right there in the room listening to Fleetwood play. The drums sound great — particularly the bass drums — and the energy and life force of Fleetwood's playing comes through. Stereo separation is clean, yet not unnatural, and the sonic detail is beautiful.

Insight. When Fleetwood was asked about sharing his playing with anyone who has access to a computer, he exhibited a refreshing attitude: "Being part of a rhythm section, it's necessary to share. The very nature of what I do has to be taken and put with something else, period. My function is to complement other people's work. I feel really strongly about that and it's an important part of the style and emotion of who I am. I need to share my ideas with other musicians."

But why would a drummer want to use someone else's loops? Todd replies:

"If DW came out with a Mick Fleetwood signature tom, people would run out and buy it. With this package and a computer, we're giving drummers hundreds and hundreds of new Mick drums. It's not that you're playing Mick's loops, but rather that you're able to place all of these new sounds in your own set and use them as only a drummer could. The sonic and historical quality is there to be added to anybody's kit." [Ed. Note: Additional steps would be required to play any of the sounds from an electronic pad.]

To try before you buy, you can download a free demo of Acid at Sonic Foundry's website (www.sonicfoundry.com), along with a number of free loops from the CD-ROM. Additional loops are available at www.mickfleetwood.com/loops.htm. Give them a spin! 🖐

MICK'S MIKES

4 Sennheiser MD421s on toms
Shure SM57 and Shure SM81 on snare
Neumann U47FET and AKG D112 on kick
Shure SM81 on hi-hat

AKG C460 on ride cymbal
2 ADK A51Ss as stereo overheads
2 Milab VIP50s as ambient room mikes

