

Drummers On-Line

BY NORMAN WEINBERG

More and more drummers are using a computer as the brain of their electronic music system. Let's face it, nothing quite beats a computer for working with MIDI data. Software sequencers, librarians, editors, and notation programs have enough powerful features to keep you busy in your studio for months. But how about getting out of your studio? How about making contact with other musicians who share similar interests, problems, and esthetic?

Welcome to the world of networking and on-line services. Every computer, from the Commodore 64 to the Macintosh IIci, has the ability to work with a modem. A modem is a piece of hardware that translates data. In a way, it's quite similar to using FSK or SMPTE along with a tape deck. Inside a modem, electronic hardware translates the bits and bytes of your computer's data into audio blips and bleeps that can be transmitted along standard telephone lines. At the receiving end, another modem is listening to these messages and converting them back into their original form to be used on another computer.

The good news about on-line services is that any brand of computer can communicate with any other brand of computer. If you're living in Boston and using an IBM clone, you can send information to your friend in Tulsa who uses a Mac. While modems originally were set up for transmitting text, they now can be used for transmitting all types of information, including music-related data. A short time ago, the MMA (MIDI Manufacturers Association) and the JMSC (Japanese MIDI Standards Committee) passed two extensions to the MIDI specification that made all of this a reality.

First is the "Standard MIDI File." It's now possible to save your sequencer's data as an SMF and send this information over the phone lines to another computer. The SMF was created so people with different types of computers would be able to share MIDI data. The only requirement is that your software sequencer must be able to save its data in this special format and be able to open files created in this format. Most of the software sequencers

released or updated in the past two years have this feature.

The second extension to the MIDI specification is called the "Sample Dump Standard." Similar to the SMF, the SDS is a standardized format used to send sample information between different machines. Using the SDS, a sample created on one sampler can be sent to any other model or brand of sampler. Again, a few requirements are necessary to make use of this technology. You'll need a sample editing program that can request the sample data from your sampler and be able to save and load data in this format.

There are now several networks devoted to music. Perhaps the most popular is the Performing Artists Network. PAN (it has to have an acronym, right?) has over 3,000 members from all over the world. On this network, you'll find special interest groups in home recording, music publishing, and sequencing. You'll also find user groups for just about any brand of synth or sampler on the market. In fact, they have over 150 "hotlines" and user groups directly supported by the manufacturers of music products. Speaking of synths and samplers, you can upload or download patches, samples, and even entire songs. Interested in public domain (free) music software? You'll find it here. PAN also includes an area for electronic mail, telex, and even a full line of FAX services.

But PAN isn't the only music network available. WorldMusic, USA, can be found on the GEnie Network (General Electric Network for Information Exchange). In addition to having a full range of music information such as songs, patches, samples, and bulletin board services, the GEnie Network contains everything from airline reservations and national weather reports, to stock market information, on-line encyclopedias, and up-to-the-minute news reports.

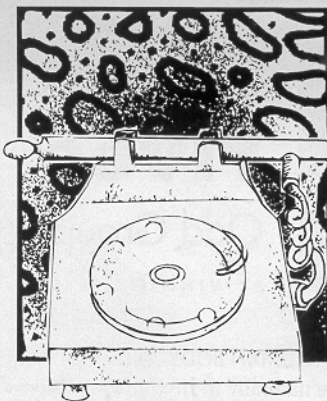
If you're interested in getting on-line, contact one of the music networks listed below for information about their system. Most networks require a modest fee to join. Then, each time you log-on to the network, you are charged for the amount of time that you use. Generally, the on-line charges vary with the network and the time of day.

Once your computer is tapped into the rest of the world, you'll also be able to access networks and bulletin boards that cover a wide range of topics in addition to music. You can find bulletin boards that specialize in computer games, the medical and legal professions, and even hobbies such as raising dogs or collecting stamps. The most exciting aspect of getting on-line is that you will be gaining new information and new ideas from people living all over the world.

There's no doubt that our world is getting smaller. Computers and their accompanying hardware and software are making it easier to access any type of information from anywhere around the planet. Even though you may be

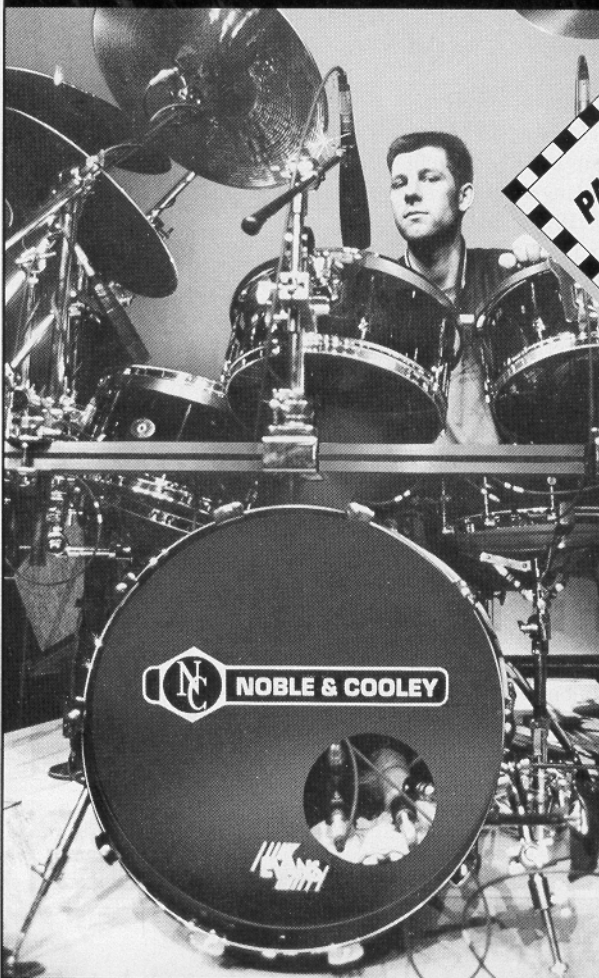
working in your living room or garage, the world is at your fingertips. All you have to do is get on-line.

American MIDI Users Group, 7225 Fair Oaks, Suite 515, Dallas, TX 75261, (214) 272-0963; **CompuServe MIDI/Musicforums**, Box 20212, Columbus, OH 43220, (614) 457-6650; **ESI/IMC Synthnet**, 183 North



Martell Ave., Suite 125, Los Angeles, CA 90036, (213) 937-0347; **MIDI World Network**, 11920 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90064, (213) 826-3777; **MusicNet**, Box 272, Beekman, NY 12570, (914) 724-3668; **Performing Artists Network**, Box 162, Skippak, PA 19474, (215) 584-0300; **WorldMusic USA**, Box 933, Santa Monica, CA 90406, (213) 392-0103. •

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