

interview with Jeff Krashin

Norm Weinberg



Weinberg

Jeff Krashin is a musician of many talents. He has held the drum chair for "King Arthur's Tournament" at the Excalibur Hotel in Las Vegas since the

v's opening. In addition to playing mset, Jeff is well versed in composi- electronic percussion, studio record- orchestral percussion, and show nning. In fact, Jeff has to rely on y one of these skills every night.

WEINBERG: What are some of your previous musical experiences?

KRASHIN: When I was about eight or nine years old, I started drum lessons at a local music store with Denis Rogers, who was also connected with the Conservatory at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. Just about that time, the Conservatory started a "Prep" program for about twenty kids. They would pick younger students from around the city and offer them a lesson a week and have them come to percussion ensemble once a week. It was just like a high school or university program.

I did that until I was about sixteen or seventeen. Around that time, I also took rudimental lessons from Bob Koeffler. During high school, I was in Jazz Band and took the music theory classes that were offered in our school.

After high school, I went to the University of Missouri in Columbia. I was a Marketing and Business major for the first three years, but continued to perform in the jazz band, concert band, and the marching band. When Frank Krager became the percussion instructor, I switched my major to Music Education and finished my degree. From Frank, I learned all the "legit" stuff.

From 1979 to 1981, I arranged all the charts for the drumline. This

was during the time that the band was changing from a big "show-band" type of thing to more of a drum corps style.

In 1982, I was awarded a scholarship to Interlochen National Music Camp. That was a major thing for my ears and my awareness—just to see how many talented people were out there. At Interlochen, I was able to take some conducting classes. Each week, they would have guest conductors come and offer master classes. This experience was very influential for me.

After graduation from college, I became Assistant Band Director at Ruskin High School in Kansas City. I taught jazz band and the high school marching band.

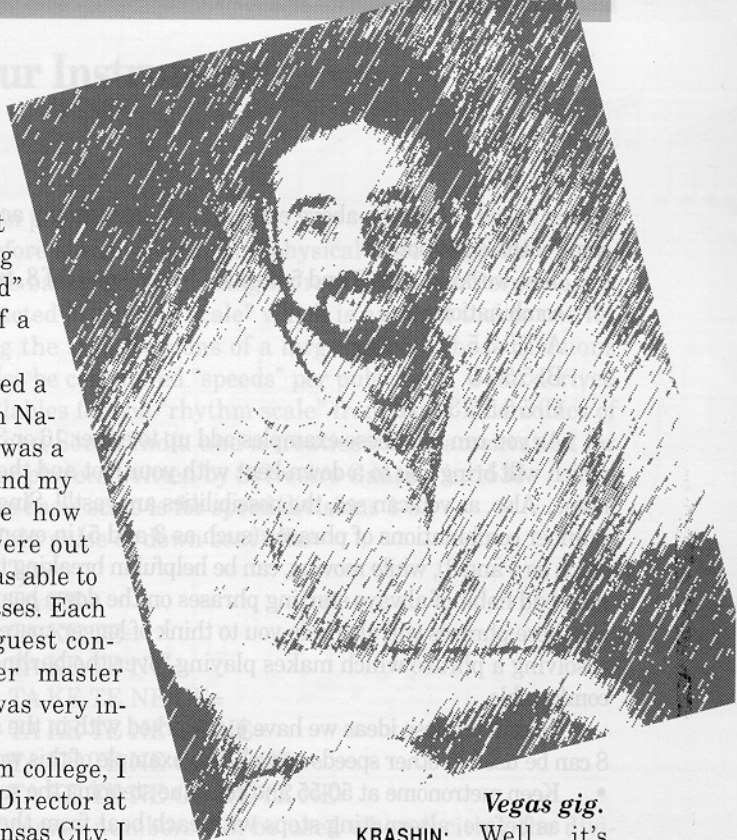
WEINBERG: What brought you out of Kansas City and to Las Vegas?

KRASHIN: I decided to leave teaching for a while and play with a Top-40 band. We started playing on a lounge-circuit that covered the Mid-West five or six nights a week. I did this for four or five years.

One afternoon, when getting out of the shower, I got a call from Tim Cooper. Tim was the musical director for a new show at the Lake of the Ozarks. It involved several Las Vegas performers and they were going to produce a new show with county music, but hip—lots of lasers and lights and a brand new theater. Tim was looking for a drummer and called around to several music stores for recommendations. He said, "We're doing a show, who would be a versatile drummer, but he *has* to read". I guess that my name kept coming up.

Tim called me, I auditioned for fifteen minutes and got the gig. We stayed there until October and after this experience, I was ready to leave the Top-40 circuit. I moved out to Vegas in December.

WEINBERG: Tell us about your first



Vegas gig.

KRASHIN: Well, it's

tough to even *get* an audition for a lounge gig in Vegas. Usually you find out about an audition by word of mouth. My first break was a little different. I knew the singer, the singer introduced me to the drummer, I talked to the drummer, and he was nice enough to let me audition and sit-in with the group for about five tunes. We played in Atlantic City at Harrah's and at Caesar's Palace lounge on the Strip. It was a great gig!

I was in Atlantic City when Tim called me. He had just become the musical director at the Aladdin Hotel for a show called *Abracadabra*. I was just getting into electronics at the time and had a Kawai R-50E and some Casio pads with a Casio MIDI translator. It wasn't very high tech, but it worked. I also bought a Korg DDD-5 to run sequences and fire real-time sounds from pads.

WEINBERG: Did you use your electronic instruments in this show?

KRASHIN: For that show, it was half acoustic and half electronic. There was a lot of "groove" playing for that show too. *Abracadabra* ran for about two and a half years. Tim had done some arrangements for the show and

I was doing all the drum programming. Pretty much, this amounted to doing all the percussion sequencing and then figuring out what to play live behind the sequences.

WEINBERG: *What is the current situation with live drummers in Vegas? Are they getting replaced by electronic instruments?*

KRASHIN: Our producer, Peter Jackson, is into having live musicians, both for the appeal of live music and for the reliability when the technology fails. Most production shows are playing with tape or with sequences. There's only one band in town that plays by itself—no tape. It's just a given now that you're going to be playing with a tape.

Instead of thinking that drummers are the first ones to go, they'll

be about the second to last to lose their jobs. The first musicians to go are bass players. There are some cats here (and everywhere) that can kick some serious bass *and* play. They're grooving with their left hand and doing some wicked solos with their right hand.

Guitar players are sometimes next in line to get axed in a "whittled down" production show. There are some fantastic guitar players here, and many of them are getting into MIDI rigs for their guitar. They can produce a much bigger sound with MIDI, but they aren't as versatile as a keyboard player.

Almost all the situations that have any musicians for the shows have a drummer. In fact, there are a few shows that *only* have a drummer.

It's tape and a drummer. This is due to the specialty acts. Drummers do a lot of catching, and you can fake a lot of people out with a drummer. The audience hears the ring of the cymbals and the crack of the snare drum. You pump a tape recording through a big PA system and half the audience will think that it's totally live! It's easy to fool a lot of people in this town.

WEINBERG: *How did your collaboration with Tim work on the Excalibur show?*

KRASHIN: Tim asked me to do all the percussion for the show. Tim was also responsible for hiring Joe Blaum. Joe was very instrumental in producing the percussion sounds for this show, because of his knowledge in production techniques and his engineering skills.



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Joe engineered all the recording in his studio. He processed all the acoustic drums and the sounds from the R-8 drum machine, as well as doing all the engineering for the sampling. We must have sampled a ton of little acoustic percussion instruments. During the show, there is an arrangement of the Overture to *William Tell* in a Spike Jones kind of style. The whole piece is performed with sampled sounds of my percussion instruments and my drums.

In much of the show, a lot of the tracks are the acoustic drums played live, but the concert bass drum and timpani are R-8 samples that I trigger from my pads. The only thing I couldn't get from the drum machine was a good crash cymbal sound. So, we rented several pairs, went into the vocal booth and sampled them.

WEINBERG: *What samplers are you using?*

KRASHIN: For this show, we're using the Ensoniq EPS for quite a bit of the sampling, but now I'm using a rack-mounted E-Max by E-Mu Systems.

WEINBERG: *Let's talk about the setup that you're using for King Arthur's Tournament.*

KRASHIN: Well, a little three-octave keyboard, the KX-5 that drives the E-Max sits right under my high hat on the left side. While I don't play keyboard parts, I do trigger samples right off the keys. I've got a small but useful arsenal of sounds to get you out of problems and to catch things. I have little sections of drum bits and riffs, timpani rolls, closed and open snare drum rolls, rim shots, and other sounds at the ready in the E-Max. So, I might be holding down a timpani roll for suspension or for fillers, and if someone gets speared or knocked off their horse, I can catch it with the pads or my feet and I can still sustain that roll.

WEINBERG: *Sounds like you're pretty*

busy during the show!

KRASHIN: There isn't a second of silence. It's a very busy show. I've got a Gretsch acoustic kit with an eight inch snare. I've found that the larger snare gives me the best cross-over between using a field drum and a regular snare. I'm using a 24" kick and power toms. Everything is miked. I'm using Sennhauser 421 mikes, a couple Shure mikes and an overhead. The mikes are all run into the mixing board to Joe, along with the R-8, the sampler, and everything else. Then Joe sends a complete show mix to the sound engineer who mixes the music with the dialogue.

On the electronics side, I use the R-8 with the Contemporary Percussion card that has the concert bass drum, timpani and triangle, along with other sounds. I've got a single Roland pad off to the left of the high hat and a Drastik Plastik Quadra-Pad up between the high hat and my first rack tom. I use a PM-16 as my translator and two EP-1 pedals and run everything into a six-channel mixer.

WEINBERG: *Your monitor system is unique, can you*

You know, I never used to be into technology. I'm just into it for what it will do musically for me. The closer that I can get to reality, well, that makes me happy.

describe it for us?

KRASHIN: I have a rig with my own mixing board and my own monitor so that I can EQ both the sequenced tracks and the live music. I'm a firm believer in being in charge of my own mix.

The different channels of the mixer handle the bass drums, snare drums, timpani, cymbal and metal sounds, and drum sounds. This way, I can EQ and set reverb levels on each instrument classification. I use my analog mixer to mix colors and levels. Like "Hey, Jeff, your electronic snare, man, it's killin' me". Instead of going in and messing with the internal volumes of the R-8, I'd rather mix levels analog instead of digital when I'm triggering live. I'm really using the R-8 like a sound box and just controlling the parameters of the sound with the internal electronics.

WEINBERG: *How are you using the new technology to create your unique sound for the show?*

KRASHIN: Mainly, what I did for some of the sounds and effects for the show, were layers that I got from the PM-16. The PM-16 allows you to layer three different sounds. For example, I'll use a "concert bass drum" from the R-8 detuned down to about -600. Then I'll layer that sound with the "verb kick" to give the sound more articulation. I've also messed with the nuance setting. On the R-8, the nuance setting increases or decreases certain frequencies within the sound. So, you can take a familiar sound and make it appear slightly different and uncharacteristic, or slightly exaggerated. So, if you want a puffy sounding kick, instead of an articulated kick with the attack at the beginning, you increase the low end of the bass drum through the nuance setting. This will give you more of a "whoom" instead of a "boom."

Another example of using layering is with my foot triggers. I have a kick drum

and a cymbal, or a kick and a rimshot layered together on a footpad that I use to catch little things while I'm playing. Lots of times, I'm playing foreground music for the main activity, but if a knight gets hit or knocked off his horse, I'll have to catch it, so I'm doing several sound effect catches with my feet.

I also alter some of the bend depth settings to create a variation of pitch on my layers. I've got the "doom tom" with a "power tom" layered together, with the pitch bend set to minus twenty. I use this combination after someone's been struck and they hit the ground. It makes the sound fall off. That's a little trick I've found that works well.

WEINBERG: *How do you keep track of all the sounds you use during the show?*

KRASHIN: I use about 17 patches during the show and I've worked it so that I just move up through the patches on the PM-16. I usually have my banks set up so that I've got time to make any patch changes.

WEINBERG: *Are you using a foot switch to change patches during the show?*

KRASHIN: No, I've got plenty of pedals already! I just reach up with my stick and hit the button.

WEINBERG: *Are you using triggers on your acoustic drums?*

KRASHIN: No, it creates too many variables for the sound man. I like to isolate my sounds. When I'm playing acoustics, I want a nice acoustic sound. If I want effect, then my microphones have the processing on them for the acoustics. Then, when I want to totally change the sound around, I've got the electronics all by themselves. I really think that's the way to go.

In a lounge situation, triggers aren't too bad. You can beef up your snare and just kind of use it as a layer. Triggers can help you get your drums out in front of the audience. It can give your drums some definition in a mushy lounge with a

mushy sound system. But in a show, I've found that my system works well.

You know, I never used to be into technology. I'm just into it for what it will do musically for me. The closer that I can get to reality, well, that makes me happy.

WEINBERG: *What skills do you think helped you get this gig at the Excalibur?*

KRASHIN: I guess the "legit" education, because Tim was going to be writing a symphonic score, but he wanted someone who could also play drumset and could groove. Someone who was hip to all the different styles. In this show, we've got symphonic music, marching band music, there's groove stuff, showy stuff, there's a little percussion bit while the tumblers are doing their thing. It spans a lot, even including medieval dance music. Being able to catch activities like trick riders, sword fights, and gymnastic acts. And, being able to compose the drum tracks for the music.

WEINBERG: *How long have you been playing this show?*

KRASHIN: Two years this month.

WEINBERG: *Is it still fun for you, or do you get bored?*

KRASHIN: It's definitely not boring! I use a little TV monitor because I can't see about a third of the arena from where I'm sitting. A lot of the catching I do, I do from the TV. I also have to look at Tim for musical cut-offs, and I have to watch the arena when the action moves back into my field of vision. It's never dull!

WEINBERG: *Since the show runs seven nights a week, how did you find a sub for such a technically complex performance?*

KRASHIN: It was tough to find a sub for this show. Pat Bowen is my relief and he works once a week and when I go on vacation. Pat is the perfect person to use as my relief because of his musical background and professional reliability. He took the time to learn this whole extravaganza for the drum chair.

I had a lot of guys just look at the show, sit in the booth once and say "Whoa, for once a week?! No way!" Even though we have charts for the show, you almost have to have the entire production memorized. You've got to know which sound on which patch is played by which pad—are you looking at Tim, in the arena, or at the monitor?

WEINBERG: *What about the show are you most proud of?*

KRASHIN: I'm just happy that the whole thing works—the whole experience of merging acoustics with electronics successfully. I guess I'm most proud of the composition of the percussion tracks. Tim would give me sequences of the basic harmonies and melodies that he was going to be using, and I would go from there. I'd ask myself: "What do I hear in this spot? A little tambourine or maybe a mallet part?" It's fun to create the percussion parts from nothing. That's what makes the music come alive.

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Norm Weinberg is Percussive Notes' editor of Focus on Drumset / Studio Percussion and the Electronic Percussion column. Any comments or suggestions for articles should be directed to: Norm Weinberg, Music Department, Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, TX USA 78404.

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