is a genuine specialist in electronic percussion and MIDI who is living under an assumed name. The Federal Witness Protection Program refuses to release any additional information.

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Birth Of A New Machine

YOU'VE JUST WALKED IN THE DOOR WITH YOUR newest piece of electronic wizardry. It doesn't matter if you've purchased a drum machine, electronic kit, multi-pad or the latest software tool. Get that box and manual out of the trash and learn how to operate the machine!

First, take the box with all the packing materials out of the trash and store them in some out-of-the-way place where you can find them later if the need arises. While most of today's hardware is mechanically stable, bulletproof and idiot-proof, there may come a time when you need to send the equipment out for repair. If you have the original packing materials, you can rest assured that your valuable equipment will reach its destination safe and sound.

The most important aspect of learning a new piece of gear is to thoroughly go through the owner's manual. where the vast majority of problems or questions can be answered. In the beginning of the MIDI revolution, some of the manuals published by manufacturers were nothing short of terrible (for example: "place card in youngest slot"). The situation is much better now, and while some of the unfamiliar terms may be confusing, you should be all right 99% of the time if you follow the instructions step-by-step.

Whether your new machine is a sophisticated multi-pad or a simple software sequencer, the manual will contain one or more tutorials that walk you through some of the most common features of the device. Be certain to take the time to go through the tutorials — not just once, but several times — item-by-item and part-by-part until you understand the process and have committed the actions to memory. After all, you didn't get comfortable with that guaguanco groove by playing through it only once on your kit.

As you work through the tutorials, jot short notes to yourself concerning the operation of certain common features. For example, if your drum machine allows the naming of patterns and songs, you might make a note of the specific actions required. If your multi-pad lets you fire chords from your sound module by sending four note-on messages at the same time, make a short note that takes you through the proper steps necessary to perform this function.

Once you've completed all the tutorials included in the manual, it's time to go through the remainder of the manual trying out each of the individual features and functions. As before, try performing each action several times, and keep a written log concerning features you plan to use.

If your manual doesn't include an index, you can create your own as you work through the manual. Just include page numbers with your written notes. Once you've gone through each and every feature of the machine, place your notes in a small three-ring binder and rewrite your index page numbers on a single sheet in the back of the binder. With your binder, you have an individualized manual that speaks your language and contains the information you want to have readily available.

The bottom line is this: In order to use these powerful tools to their fullest advantage, you can't be wrestling with the machine's interface and features when you're right in the middle of a creative thunderstorm. It's not enough to simply know that a particular function (such as note-alternate or velocity cross-fading) is possible. It's not enough to know that you can refer to the manual each time you want to change the quantization value.

As you learn your new machine, you're bound to run into a problem or two. Consider each obstacle a challenge, like reaching a new level on a video game. And keep telling yourself: "Really, how hard can it be to learn this machine? I learned how to play drums, didn't I?"

So now that you've got your new machine through the door, sit down and learn that device inside-out. You're going to be more productive and have more confidence in your craft.