

TOM ROADY

## Zen Now

Most artists become inspired to create by some meaningful image or event — a moonlit beach, the sound of a jet engine, or the end of a stormy relationship. But veteran Nashville session percussionist Tom Roady found inspiration for his solo album, *One Tribe*, in a hunk of hardware. “I had already started this project before I got my Zendrum,” he says, “and after I got it, it kind of took over.”

After being introduced to the electronic percussion instrument at the Summer NAMM show, Roady decided to forgo using drum machines or sequencers on *One Tribe*, and instead play everything in real time on the Zendrum. “The music actually came out of this process,” he says. “I would lay down some basic tracks with the Zendrum, and then find other sounds and other parts that would complement each other and create a great feel.”

On “Thumbs Upon the Zen,” the basic track includes kick drum, snare, bass, and a sustained guitar sound — all triggered and recorded at once without any overdubs. His ability to play so many voices and instruments at the same time came directly from the Zendrum’s flexibility. Roady didn’t require a ton of MIDI gear to create these tunes. “The Proteus World module from E-mu Systems accounts for 60 to 70 percent of the sounds on the CD.” Towards the end of the recording process, he also brought in an e-64 sampler.

The last track on the disc, a Latin dance tune called “Rhumba Para Chino,” was included as a way to show other hand drummers some of the possibilities of the Zendrum while still keeping the feel and sounds as authentic as possible. “I put in all of the parts — the clavé, shekere, conga samples, and other sounds — with the Zendrum and in real time.”

With the release of *One Tribe*, Roady has ventured into uncharted digital territories, which just might inspire other drummers and percussionists to experiment more with electronics. “It was an incredible experience,” he says. “I’m especially proud about how the music feels.”

—Norm Weinberg