

Tony Verderosa

Doing it "Live"

BY NORMAN WEINBERG

Tony (The V-Man) Verderosa is one of the few artists performing live with electronic drums. Several drummers have added electronic drums into their live and/or studio rigs, but only a few have gone "all the way." Verderosa is one of those brave souls who has taken the plunge and moved drumming forward into the technology of the next century.

His first CD release, *Beatnik Rebel Science*, was a huge hit, combining powerful electronic drumming with some outstanding performances by Dave Samuels, Michael and Randy Brecker, and David Mann to name a few. "My performance at PASIC '98 will deal exclusively with material from my new release, *VMAN NYC*," Verderosa says. "I have dramatically changed my approach to drumming and composing since my last solo CD."

While we're used to seeing Verderosa behind a totally electronic kit, he's currently adding a few acoustic instruments to his setup. "My current rig is very compact, portable and powerful," he says. "I base all of my

playing around the Yamaha DTX system using the standard DS12 setup. I have augmented the rig with some new Sabian 'electronic' cymbals that I helped develop, including two Tony V. signature models, and a small Yamaha Club Jordan snare drum. The snare and the cymbals are the only acoustic elements. In terms of sound modules, I get all of my electronic sounds from the internal tone generator on the DTX, an MU100R synth module/Vocoder and a Yamaha A3000 digital sampler."

Verderosa feels that there are special challenges when performing live with electronics. "It is a totally different commitment to perform live on stage," he explains. "The challenge is to stop thinking like a drummer—the exact opposite of most studio situations. I view myself as a record producer who is able to play all of the elements of my recordings in front of a live audience. I have been doing shows in New York city and around the world as a soloist—a one-man ensemble. That is a lot of responsibility and a challenge. You need a very different set of skills to make this work, as opposed to finding the right snare sample for a Taco Bell commercial."

"Lately I have been singing into a microphone that generates MIDI notes sent from my drum pads to the Vocoder. To pull this off, I have to think like an interactive, human synthesizer, singer and drummer. I am sound designing using filters and digital effects, composing original music, assembling, tweaking and mixing the elements so they can be performed live."

Seeing Verderosa perform his compositions is an exciting experience. "I try to bring a visceral, organic feeling to each live electronic performance," he says. "People really respond to the spectacle of a drummer generating all of these sounds with sticks and feet in real time. The audience can't make the connection between elec-

tronic music and the artist if they simply watch a DJ spin a vinyl record, stare at a sequencer or ADAT Machine, or listen to a CD, which is sadly the case with every electronic show I have witnessed to date."

Electronic percussion instruments have been steadily improving both in feel and sound. Verderosa's view on the future of electronic percussion is encouraging. "I have been involved with electronic percussion for almost ten years, and it is nice to see the instrument finally getting its fair share of attention. It seems to have much broader appeal nowadays."

"Electronic percussion instruments are easier to program, more reliable and more affordable than in the past. Since the death of the grunge era and guitar heroes, electronic music is getting a lot more attention. If I hear another 'smooth jazz' station on the radio, I am going to fall asleep behind the wheel and really hurt myself. The FCC should really crack down on these folks. They are doing all of us a great disservice. Creatively speaking, I find the only artists that are truly pushing the envelope and creating new music seem to be in the Drum 'n' Bass/Jungle and Trip-Hop community. There has never been a better time to be an electronic drummer."

Some question the expressive capabilities of electronic percussion. Verderosa responds: "I would ask them to check out one of my shows or videos. I have dedicated my life to expressing myself musically through these instruments precisely because they can take me places I can't possibly go on a strictly acoustic set. I can create the sound and feel of an entire band or orchestra with a pair of sticks. I haven't even scratched the surface yet. I am constantly getting to a place musically where I have never been before. It is very challenging and rewarding."

"Anyone who feels these instruments aren't expressive enough has not been properly exposed to the technology. They are simply misinformed or very closed minded."

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