

Inspiration and Creativity with Mark Guiliana

By Joe Bergamini

FROM STUDENT TO TEACHER

The release of Mark Guiliana's *Exploring Your Creativity on the Drumset* is obviously special for me. As I wrote in the book's foreword, teaching Mark was a dream come true—the student that every drum teacher dreams of someday having. Watching him develop into the player he is today has been so rewarding, and now he has put his educational philosophy in print with this book. What's especially exciting to me is that Mark spent a long time contemplating a system and a thesis for this project before he ever set pencil to paper to write out an exercise. I must have first brought up the idea of Mark doing a book at least 10 years ago, but, to his credit, he waited until he had developed something that was a new angle on drum education that could be called his own, yet still had a clear topic and method of assisting the user. I'm excited for drummers to see it, and to discuss what you will find with this project. But first, let me talk about Mark.

I am often asked whether I knew that Mark would be an enormously successful drummer when I taught him as a teenager. The answer is more complicated than most people probably realize. Obviously, I knew Mark was special, and I expected he would become an excellent drummer, and maybe even have a chance at going pro. But most people don't realize that as an educator, you need to be really careful about favoring certain students and predicting the future for them. Music is an unforgiving business, and I have seen students who have had a high level of talent fold when the going got tough. In Mark's case, he had the right mix of talent, dedication, intelligence, strong work ethic, and (most importantly) a true joy and passion for making music. I think anyone with this recipe of attributes, mixed with a healthy dose of perseverance, has a great chance at success.

THE D.R.O.P. CONCEPT

Exploring Your Creativity on the Drumset is a book that is designed to give you a greater command of rhythm, expand your voice on the drumset, and make you better improviser. In order to do this, Mark developed a system called D.R.O.P. which divides drumset play into four conceptual areas: dynamics, rate, orchestration and phrasing. Each of these areas is explored in the book and DVD. I'm constantly reminded that all the complexities of playing the drums really relate back to having a solid foundation in the basics, and Mark starts from a fairly basic point in his system. After a brief discussion of dynamics, the first thing that you will work on in the book is a simple rhythmic loop that moves from eighth notes to triplets to sixteenths and back to triplets. This loop becomes a foundation for many of the examples in the book, and it's amazing how this simple idea can lead to the creation of musical phrases that sound difficult and complex.

As you proceed through the book, you will be challenged to leave space in your ideas, change rates in different places, orchestrate your ideas around the kit, and add the bass drum to your phrases in ways that will challenge your coordination and sense of time. Mark presents concepts that would actually take dozens of pages to write out if he presented every possible permutation of the idea, and there are many lesser drum books that do present page upon page of variations, but here we are presented with a cohesive system that leaves it to you to explore the vast numbers of combinations and possibilities with some of these ideas. Things really get interesting for me when Mark explores the seven sound combinations between bass drum, snare drum and hi-hat, and then presents a system to phrase fills across the bar lines and then move the groove so that the whole phrase is moved in relation to the

downbeat. With this system Mark presents a method for developing your ear to hear phrases that may seem at first listen to be modulated, displaced, or polyrhythmic.

MAKING THE DVD

We've had some memorable shoots with many amazing artists for Hudson Music, with some of the ones I remember most vividly being Steve Smith (twice), Keith Carlock, Stanton Moore (at Levon Helm's studio), Neil Peart, Spanky McCurdy, and many others—and Mark's shoots certainly takes its place among those. The shoot is always an exciting day, since it mixes aspects of making a movie with a full-blown recording session. There are a lot of moving parts, and many skilled pros coming together to focus on capturing the footage. We filmed the DVD at The Bunker Studio in Brooklyn, New York, and Mark really impressed everyone with how smoothly and quickly he demonstrated all the material. It's obvious that he practices what he preaches with this stuff! If you are looking for inspiring performances and solos, don't worry, Mark plays several mind-blowing yet musical solos, and there are several song performances featuring Mark along with bassist Tim Lefebrve and keyboardist Jason Lindner. This trio performs in both electric and acoustic settings, and they are on fire! I can't forget to mention one of my favorite parts of the book, where Mark explains and demonstrates how practicing this material led directly to the creation of some of his compositions, notably the title track from the Heernt album *Locked in a Basement*.

I think drummers will find this book and video inspiring and useful, and I'm proud to have worked on it with Mark. I'm looking forward to hearing what drummers think of it; please share your thoughts with us at Hudson Music online and on social media.