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About This Book

This book documents my work with Porcupine Tree so far. I've tried to recall as many relevant things as possible about these recordings and the way in which they were made. Including the live touring, this spans eight pretty intense years of my life. Porcupine Tree is a progressive band, and it's easy for me to see the evolution of what we've achieved over this time. Where I can, I've made specific notes about the concepts behind the rhythms I played, the drums I used, and the studios we recorded in.

For those of you who may have seen any of my previous books and DVDs, you'll know that I like to design rhythmic parts from the ground up. Nothing excites me more than finding a unique signature drum part for a song. In fact, the drum part becomes part of the composition. I feel that my job as a drummer is similar to that of an architect or structural engineer; there are many parallels in the way that I construct rhythms for songs. If you were designing a building, for instance, you could just draw a square box, put in some windows, a door, a roof, and call it a building. This would satisfy all the basic requirements of a building, but there's no beauty to it. Great design is to see beauty beyond the functional. A drum part, like a building, can still be functional while having elegance, style and sophistication. But, if you get too fancy, you could tip the balance to the point of it not working as a functional building anymore.

Design is about balance, and it can be a delicate thing. However, it's your sense of taste that will decide when the balance is right. Of course, your sense of taste and character can change over time. The famous lyrics of Tower of Power state: "What is hip today might become passé," so you need to constantly re-examine your definition of "hip." For instance, you might put on a gold chain around your neck and think it looks great. If you put on ten gold chains, does it look ten times better?

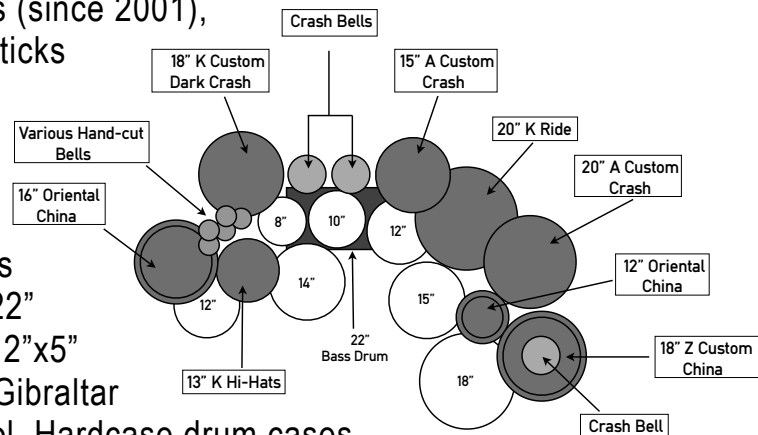
Drumming has changed a lot over the last hundred years thanks to many great innovators. Rather than simply supplying a dull background thud that indicates the tempo, the contemporary drummer has many more interesting ways in which he/she can interact with the other instruments. Drummers can also contribute to the structure of the composition, affecting the overall sound of the band, but one must not forget the focus of the song: the melody. The song (or a certain section of it) might only require a dull background thud. If that's the best part to play, then you just need to recognize it, free of ego. Sometimes the best part is to not play at all. If it enhances the song, then it's a really good drum part.

Equipment



My equipment is constantly evolving, so I can only accurately list a drumset at a given point in time. I could list exactly what I'm playing right now, but by the time you read this, things may have changed a bit.

I have been proudly playing Sonor drums (since 2001), Zildjian cymbals (since 1986), Vic Firth sticks (since the late 1980s), and Remo heads (since 1979). The basic shape of my drumset hasn't changed that much for about 25 years. That is to say: 3 small rack toms (8", 10" 12") and two floor toms (14", 16" and more recently 15", 18"), a 22" bass drum, a 14"x5" snare drum, and a 12"x5" snare drum. At the moment, I'm using a Gibraltar rack, Porter & Davies tactile monitor stool, Hardcase drum cases, as well as Tama Speed Cobra pedals and Cobra clutch.



About Recording

In Absentia

“good feeling” take. This is where recording at home has some nice advantages: you have no time pressure and it’s not costing anything. Some days I feel more or less inspired than others, so if I think it might be better to go out and ride my bike and come back to it tomorrow, I easily can.

Editing the takes immediately after I’ve done them is also a really good idea. Occasionally I will edit the drum takes and still feel like something is missing at some point in the song. Then it’s easy to go over to the drums and work on that part; nothing has changed. The sound of the drums and the tuning haven’t moved and the mics are still all in exactly the same place.

Recording at home is an interesting thing. It’s very comfortable and familiar, of course, but it lacks the interaction with other band members or engineers. I’m completely on my own all day. There’s isn’t a feeling of “going to work,” which I occasionally miss. On the other hand, it’s pressure-free, and possibly some of my best results have come from working at home. It’s hard to say which method I prefer.

There’s also something very nice about recording in interesting locations—they can put you in a certain mood. I remember making a record in Paris and feeling uplifted walking through the streets on my way to the studio. Something about the atmosphere just makes you feel different—it’s exciting.

Feeling that way can make you play differently. I’ve had similar sensations recording in Berlin in 1986 (when the city was still surrounded by the wall), Rome, Milan, LA, and even in my home town of London.

Above all, I’ve learned this lesson many times when approaching performance: Being mentally ready makes a lot more difference than being physically ready.



Blackest Eyes

This was the first song we recorded on the second day of the *In Absentia* sessions. We spent the first day just setting up, sound checking, and conducting our “analog tape experiment.” I would generally get to the studio in the morning before the other guys, and start warming up for 20-30 minutes. When it came to recording, Colin played bass (in the control room) along with me, but I don’t think any of it was kept. I believe he re-did all of the bass tracks after I went home. For my part, I had worked with the demos at home for a week or so before I came to NYC. I would start by listening to my minidisc player (remember those things?) to hear some ideas that I had recorded. I was using two hi-hats for the *In Absentia* recording as well as the following tour. The auxillary hi-hat was set up to the right of my leg, where a floor tom would normally be, but a bit closer to me.

The verses of this song are played on two hi-hats. I’m mostly riding on the right (tightly closed) hi-hat, while the left hand hits the snare drum, and occasionally the left hi-hat. The snare hits on beat “3e” of the verse bars were mostly played on a slightly smaller snare drum that was off to the left of my main hi-hat. It’s quite a subtle sound difference between the two snares, so when we played it live, I didn’t bother with it. I decided to use two hi-hats in my set up because of a song called “The Creator has a Mastertape.” When I rehearsed it at home I couldn’t think of a better way to play that song other than with the extra hi-hat. I don’t think I used an auxillary hi-hat other than on those two songs, so after we stopped playing “The Creator” live, I switched back to my normal single-hi-hat setup.



$\text{♩} = 95$

Blackest Eyes

Steven Wilson

Intro

Musical notation for the Intro section, measures 1-12. The notation is in 4/4 time and features a complex, rhythmic pattern with many accents and dynamic markings. The first measure is marked *ff*. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a 2/4 time signature change.

Verse

Musical notation for the Verse section, measures 13-28. The notation is in 4/4 time and features a complex, rhythmic pattern with many accents and dynamic markings. The first measure is marked *mf*. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a 2/4 time signature change.

Chorus

Musical notation for the Chorus section, measures 29-36. The notation is in 4/4 time and features a complex, rhythmic pattern with many accents and dynamic markings. The first measure is marked *f*. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a 2/4 time signature change.

Blackest Eyes

Musical notation for measures 37-40, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes and various articulations.

Verse

Musical notation for measures 41-44, marked *mf*. The notation includes eighth notes and rests.

Musical notation for measures 45-48, continuing the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and rests.

Chorus

Musical notation for measures 49-52, marked *f*. The notation features eighth notes and rests.

Musical notation for measures 53-56, marked *ff*. The notation includes eighth notes and rests.

Intro

Musical notation for measures 58-61, featuring eighth notes and rests.

Musical notation for measures 62-65, featuring eighth notes and rests.

Musical notation for measures 66-68, featuring eighth notes and rests.

Musical notation for measure 69, consisting of a single eighth note followed by a rest.