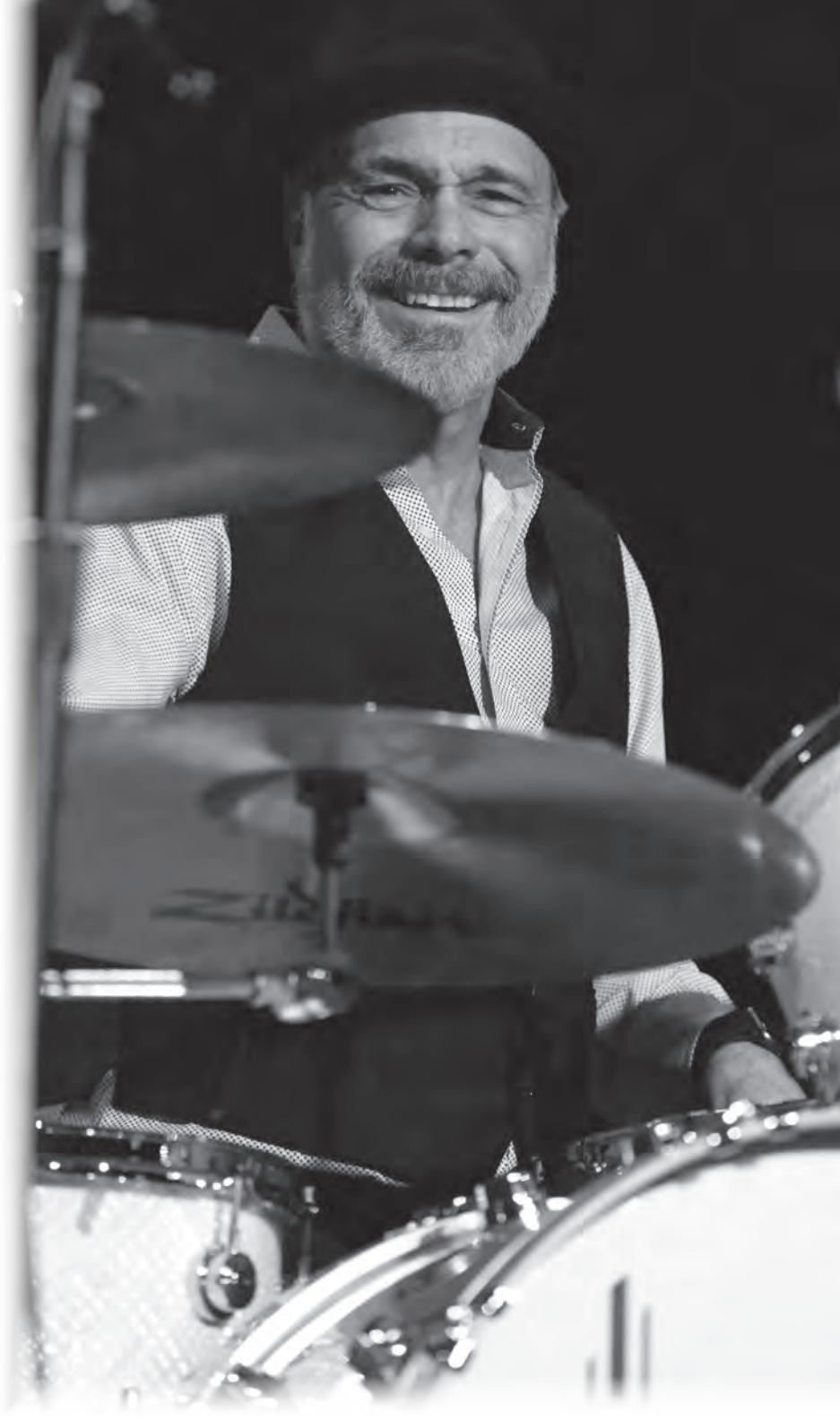


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## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Danny Seraphine is a great drummer, an inspiration, and I'm proud to say, a friend.

I remember hearing Danny's drumming on vinyl LPs—and then 8-tracks (!)—with Chicago in the '70s, fusing jazz and rock in a way I had never heard done so masterfully. I had the privilege of seeing Danny perform live with Chicago several times, and every time was a lesson in musicality, taste, and chops. I was inspired to hear a rock drummer bring such finesse and creative fills to each song, while always driving the band hard. His identifiable sound—and his commitment to always serving the music perfectly with his drumming—is one of the reasons Chicago ascended to the forefront of pop/rock.

Here we are, decades later, and Danny's drumming is still in top form. In fact, I heard him play live recently, and his playing is better than ever. For all that he has brought to the art of drumming—and music in general—Danny has reached the status of legend. I'm very excited for you to experience the pages ahead in Danny Seraphine LEGENDS.

**David Frangioni**

*CEO/Publisher of Modern Drummer Publications, Inc.*

# - INTRODUCTION -

Whether you choose to call Chicago's music rock, jazz, jazz-rock, rock-jazz, or fusion, it is music that is vitally important to the evolution of American music and rock and roll. And although he left the band in 1990, it was Danny Seraphine's musical vision that set the original version of the band CTA (now known as Chicago) on track to change the path of rock and roll. With the inclusion of a horn section, and the assimilation of everything from Varese' to Don Ellis's Big Band to The Rascals, Chicago altered the course of rock and roll. And at the center of it all was drumming LEGEND Danny Seraphine.

His drumming fused the swinging big band influences of Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich, with the elasticity and intensity of Tony Williams and Elvin Jones. He had the swing and swagger of Papa Jo Jones and Joe Dukes, and the musicality of Grady Tate and Shelly Manne. On the rock side of things Danny combined the rock drumming perfection of Hal Blaine and Earl Palmer, the perfectly crafted parts of Ringo, and the rock and roll swagger of Dino Danelli. If this sounds like an inordinate amount of musical influence to be found in just one drummer, listen to the music and read through the drumming transcriptions. It's all there! Then read Danny's brand new and extensive LEGENDS interview and all of his past features in this book. He details his musical evolution, the story of Chicago, and exactly what made Chicago's music so special.

For many drummers of a certain age, the love affair with the drums and rock and roll started with The Beatles and Ringo Starr on The Ed Sullivan Show. But for a slightly later generation of musicians, it was the intrigue and the audacity of the band Chicago. Was it jazz? Was it rock? What time signature is that? What are those horn players doing on stage with a rock band? (The band) Chicago puzzled, inspired, and excited musicians, all at the same time. But there was nothing puzzling about the music.

It all started with those highly crafted songs: "Saturday In the Park," "25 or 6 to 4," and "Make Me Smile" (and yes) "Introduction." The many different singers in the band gave us something to sing along with. The blazing guitars and soulful vocals of Terry Kath made us scream and howl. The rhythm section of Robert Lamm, Peter

Cetera, and Danny Seraphine showed us where to tap our feet, and the horn section of James Pankow, Walt Parazaider, and Lee Loughlane blew us away with intricate parts that were more than just the horn stabs of traditional R&B.

Neither the band, nor Danny was an overnight success. Before forming Chicago, Seraphine slugged it out on the club scene. Eventually his hard work, dedication, and creativity was recognized, and success and fame came calling. But music always remained at the forefront of his mind. While he was enjoying the overwhelming success of a chart-topping band, Seraphine (and James William Guercio) guided the business from behind the scenes. All the while, Seraphine continued to study drums and music with some of the best teachers and musicians that music had to offer.

Like us all, his life and drumming career has had its ups and downs. But in a business that doesn't reward loyalty, Danny has remained loyal to the music he created. But that music has gone through changes as well. Seraphine's musical debut happened in the craziness of the 60's. He played on some magnificent music in the 70's (when less creative musical styles became popular.) He had BIG hits in the Big 80's, and enjoyed success into the 90's. The 2000's gave him the chance to revisit his roots and plant new seeds. Today, the drummers that he has inspired are some of the music industry's most respected and revered musicians.

Danny brings the wisdom of a well-deserved member of The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and a veteran of the music business. We can all learn from a musician that has truly been there and done that. Many of his drumming peers like John Bonham and Mitch Mitchell have passed on, but the music that Seraphine creates today with his new band California Transit Authority, is as important as ever. Danny Seraphine has matured and maybe even mellowed a bit. He lives a comfortably relaxed life and is very happy. However, Danny is still pushing the boundaries of rock drumming. He continues to infuse a sense of jazz musicianship and swing with his signature style of drumming, into the style of music that he helped create. Whatever you want to call it...



# Danny Seraphine:

## Musical Original, Drumming Pioneer, Hall of Famer

By Mark Griffith

When we talk about the beginning of fusion or jazz-rock music, we often talk about Miles Davis and bands like The Tony Williams Lifetime, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return To Forever, Weather Report, and Herbie Hancock's Headhunters. A deeper dive will yield bands like the Free Spirits, The Brecker Brothers, Eleventh House, and Dreams. On the rock side, musicians such as Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Jeff Beck, even The Allman Brothers deserve to get strong mentions in contributing strongly towards the birth of jazz-rock music.

The drummers who first combined the jazz and rock approaches are all drumming royalty such as Tony Williams, Mitch Mitchell, Billy Cobham, Mike Clarke, and Lenny White. A deeper dive into fusion drumming gives us legendary drummers like Eric Gravatt, Narada Michael Walden, Bob Moses, Alphonse Mouzon, and Ndugu Chancler.

But for some reason Chicago (or as they were originally called, Chicago Transit Authority) doesn't get mentioned in the pantheon of jazz-rock's legendary bands, let alone given credit for their role in creating the approach. Nor does their co-founder and trail-blazing drummer Danny Seraphine. But Chicago and Seraphine, are jazz-rock royalty.

In 1967, Danny Seraphine's drumming was under the strong spell of Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich. However, he was playing around Chicago in R&B/Rock bands like Jimmy Ford and the Executives and The Missing Links. After being introduced to Bob Tilles (the head of percussion at DePaul University and renowned educator,) Seraphine, a largely self-taught drummer, began studying privately with Tilles at DePaul. That was when Seraphine approached guitarist Terry Kath and saxophonist Walt Parazaider with an idea.

Seraphine, Parazaider and Kath had the idea to put together an "all star" horn band of the best players in town and create a unique mix of rock and jazz. But this would not "just" be a rock band with a horn section like The Electric Flag had been doing. Seraphine's interest had been piqued by another band that used horns on their records called The Buckingham's; but he knew they (Seraphine, Parazaider and Kath) could put together a

band that could do it even better than either The Electric Flag or The Buckingham's. Their goal was to assemble a rockin' horn band featuring intricate arrangements and magnificent songs being sung by world-class vocalists. Seraphine was confident that his unique fusion of jazz and rock drumming could drive a band like this and it's music into the stratosphere.

Seraphine, Kath, and Parazaider recruited organist Robert Lamm, trumpet player Lee Loughnane,

trombonist James Pankow, and the six musicians became the band "The Big Thing." As they assembled the band, the musical influences would come from across the musical map. The band members all had very different musical interests: Don Ellis' Jazz Orchestra, Edgar Varese, jazz organist Jimmy Smith, Frank Zappa, Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, and the jazz drumming of Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa.

The Big Thing developed a reputation around town by playing original arrangements of cover song's, similar to what Vanilla Fudge was doing.

The Big Thing hadn't yet started performing their own compositions when they shattered the musical mold by adding bassist and singer Peter

Cetera. Everything had fallen into place. Cetera, Lamm, and Kath all sang very well, Kath was a phenomenal rock guitarist, Lamm was already a budding composer, Kath, Lamm, Cetera and Seraphine were a formidable and flexible rhythm section that could do anything, an the horn section was gelling perfectly while playing Pankow's expert arrangements. The bands' musical vision was blossoming.

In 1968, The Big Thing drew the attention of musical visionary, manager, producer James William Guercio. He changed their name to Chicago Transit Authority, and the band moved to California. In California they opened for Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa, Janis Joplin and others. They soon became (simply) Chicago, and the world's most popular jazz rock band set a course of top 10 hits and platinum selling records that would land them in The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2016.

Along the way there were tragedy's (guitarist Terry Kath died tragically,) musical disagreements, squabbles, and various personal issues involving just about every

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(DRUMS)

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member of the band. Simply put, the brotherhood of Chicago went through the typical ups and downs that go on within most families. However, in 1990, Seraphine was inexplicably fired from his own band. To read the entire story of Danny Seraphine and the evolution of Chicago, I highly recommend reading his book, *Street Player: My Chicago Story*. And while it's a fantastic book, there is a good deal of stuff that he just didn't have enough pages to cover. That's where we focused our interview.

**MD:** I'm sure writing the book was very therapeutic, what was it like to write a book about your life in music?

**Danny:** What I liked (and didn't like) about the process of writing the book was that it made me take a hard look at myself. I was brutally honest about myself more so than I was about anyone else. It was a very cathartic look at my life, and while I didn't want to do any character assassination, I was honest and transparent about what happened with my fracture from the band.

Life is a learning process, and anyone who thinks that they have it all figured out is going to get knocked on their ass. The strange thing is that some of our mistakes are actually what people like about us. Your character flaws are part of your persona, and some people might really like your flaws. Those flaws become part of what drives you, and as you get older you learn how to recognize, manipulate, and regulate your flaws, and not let them manipulate you. I never had a drug problem, but I detail some other problems that I did (or do) have in the book.

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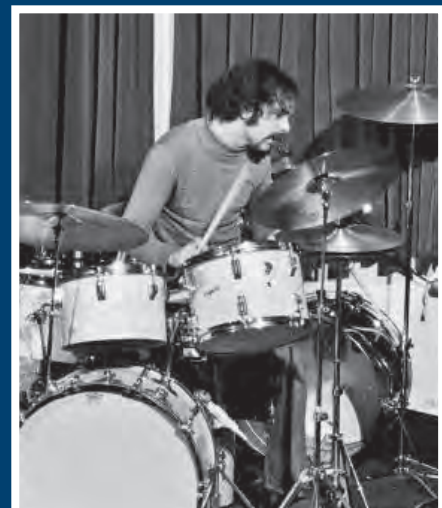
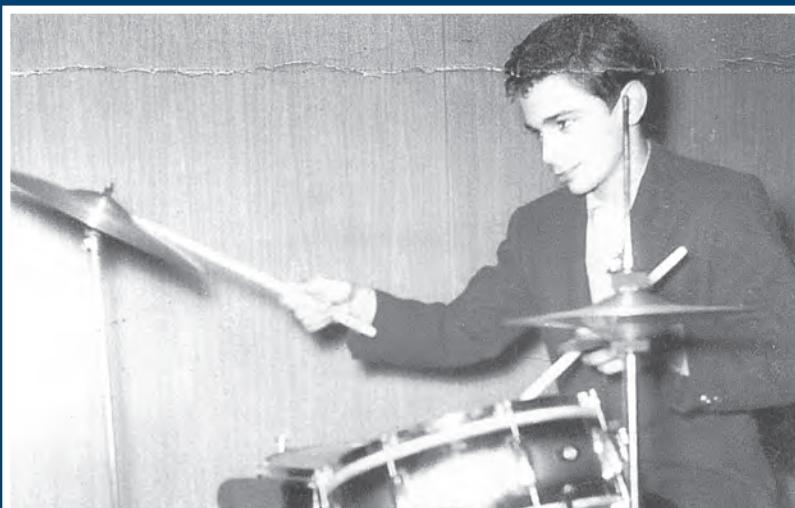
### Band: The Missing Links

recorded in stereo, and my fills would literally cascade across the speakers as I played. I believe the first CTA album was one of the first records recorded that way. Like I said, I was very lucky. Most importantly, we all supported each other in any musical experimentation that we wanted to do.

**MD:** In your opinion, what is the difference between a rock band with horns, and a horn band like Chicago, Tower of Power, Earth, Wind & Fire and Blood Sweat and Tears?

**Danny:** In a "rock band with horns," the horns don't play lead or melodic lines, they play stabs and punches, and there's nothing wrong with that. But Chicago was horn band! There was a Canadian horn band called Lighthouse who were quite good, then there was The Buckingham's, and of course Blood Sweat and Tears. But I don't think any of those horn bands had the depth that we had. I think we had better songwriting, we had three great vocalists, James Pankow's groundbreaking

really just like to let it fly. I was very lucky, because on those first few records there was a lot of space where I could just go for it. I was constantly trying to integrate all of the jazz stuff that I was hearing from Buddy Rich, Papa Jo Jones, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, and Gene Krupa into the band's music, and everybody supported that. As the band's music grew, my playing grew. I was naturally a pretty busy drummer, but I never planned on being THAT busy. We had a visionary producer in James William Guercio that encouraged me to play a lot. When we recorded "Beginnings" he was in the booth signaling me to play more fills, and (of course) I tried not to step on anyone, but he kept telling me to play even more and more fills. He had me do this because the drums were



horn arrangements, and we also had an otherworldly guitarist in Terry Kath.

**MD:** If you look at the way jazz-rock and fusion developed. Chicago began in 1967. Miles Davis' "Filles De Killamajaro" came out in 1968, "In A Silent Way" came out in 1969, and Bitches Brew wasn't until 1970. The first Tony Williams Lifetime record was released in 1969. Those are recognized as the first jazz-rock recordings, and Chicago predated all them all. Not to take anything away from all of those musical geniuses, but you were actually fusing jazz and rock before any of those legendary recordings and bands. What made you think of first trying to fuse rock and jazz?

**Danny:** I started playing drums in horn bands around Chicago in 1963, when I met Walt and Terry, they were in a rock band with horns called Jimmy Ford and the Executives. The three of us developed a strong loyalty to each other, and ironically were all fired when The Executives merged with another horn band called The Mob. Then we formed The Missing Links; but there was really nothing unique about that band. So when The Missing Links ran its course and were breaking up, Terry and Walt were about to go off on their own different lives and musical ways. I panicked, and approached Walt and said I don't want to stop playing with you guys, so let's give it one more shot. Let's put together an all-star band, we will get all the best cats in the city. At the time Terry was playing bass with both the Executives and The Missing Links, but he was a closet guitarist. Walt and I both knew he was a great guitarist, so we asked him to play guitar in our new all-star band.

**MD:** Was there anything musically that you were hearing at the time, that was pushing you in the direction of fusing rock and jazz?

**Danny:** I do remember hearing the Beatles record "Got To Get

You Into My Life" and thinking, "Cool, the Beatles are using brass just like us!" That was a cool confirmation that we were on the right musical track. But that wasn't jazz-rock. Maybe more importantly, and no one ever really mentions this. Buddy Rich's band was playing some rock oriented music at that time and I really liked that, he actually had a nice rock feel. I really dug the way Buddy pushed his band, the musicality that he kicked those rock-ish tunes with, was amazing. Of course there was Buddy's soloing and the chops thing, but he never gets credit for how fantastic his feel was.

**MD:** I have always thought that Buddy's strong sense of groove gets overlooked.



**Danny:** I noticed this. The rock guys that tried to play jazz weren't playing it right. And the jazz guys who tried to play rock weren't doing it right. That isn't a criticism, it's a reality. I figured out that the pulse in rock was the quarter note, and the pulse in jazz is the swung eighth note. So instead of going back and forth between the two time feels, I tried to play them at the same time. By doing that, the two feels became seamless. I was consciously trying to fuse jazz and rock, it wasn't an accident, it was a conscious thought, that is what I was trying to do.

But in CTA/Chicago, I was in the perfect storm of music. Our rock stuff really had to rock hard, and our jazz stuff really had to swing. Then when we started to write in odd times, I really tried to make all the odd times feel like we

were playing in four. I wanted to make them groove.

**MD:** When I used to play along with a lot of your tunes, the odd times were so smooth, and they went so perfectly with the melodic lines, that I didn't even realize they were odd times.

**Danny:** Cool, that's what I was going for. I was always looking for the spots to drop in a backbeat, because I'm a



**We had a lot of talent in Chicago, and we were listening to everything. We had one of the greatest rock guitar players in Terry Kath, two of the greatest singers in Peter Cetera and Terry Kath, a great songwriter in Robert Lamm (who also sang really well.) James Pankow wrote and arranged fantastic horn lines. And because Peter is such a great singer, no one ever talks about Peter's amazing bass playing, but he really is a great bassist.**

backbeat drummer. So whatever time signature we played in, I managed to put a backbeat in there. You have different patterns that you learn for each of the odd times, and if those patterns really flow, you can stop counting. But you still have to pay attention; you can never lose where one is! I don't like it when drummers have patterns worked out that make it hard to find the "one." I never did that; it seems really self-defeating. If someone couldn't find "one" when I was playing, they either weren't paying attention, or they were too involved in something else to even be able to find "two," "three," or "four."

**MD:** Did the odd time influence come from the Don Ellis band? They are another band that time has sort of forgotten.

**Danny:** Absolutely! When Terry wrote "Introduction" that was definitely Don Ellis influenced with the 19/8 sections. That is one of my favorite tunes. Don Ellis' band had a tune in 19/8 that we listened to a lot, and then Terry wrote "Introduction." Nobody played different time signatures like the guys in Don's band. The drummer's that Don had (Ralph Humphrey and Steve Bohannon) were amazing. Hearing them play really helped me play in those weird time signatures. There was a tune called "Thunder and Lightning" that had a horn ensemble section in 5/4, and I played it like I was playing in four, just laying down the backbeats. But in every other bar the backbeat turns around.

**MD:** Vinnie Colaiuta and Simon Phillips use that approach a lot today on odd time tunes. Are there any Chicago tunes that are specific favorites of yours?

**Danny:** I have always loved "Poem For The People," it's got all of me in there. It has some classical stuff, some jazz, some rock, it's not a tune with a lot of soloing, it's just a nice tasteful tune. I like "Call on Me" because it has some nice rock-latin samba stuff in there. "Goodbye" is a tune that successfully merged real swing with a 7/4 Bossa Nova. I always liked playing the press roll and accenting the brass hits in "A Hit

by Varese." Like I said before "Beginnings" is probably my landmark track because of how Guercio was exhorting me to play more fills, and how the drums were recorded. I also like what the band and I did dynamically on that tune.

We had a lot of talent in Chicago, and we were listening to everything. We had one of the greatest rock guitar players in Terry Kath, two of the greatest singers in Peter Cetera and Terry Kath, a great songwriter in Robert Lamm (who also sang really well.) James Pankow wrote and arranged fantastic horn lines. And because Peter is such a great singer, no one ever talks about Peter's amazing bass playing, but he really is a great bassist. You listen to the bass lines on our first

record, and listen to what he's singing. That record stretched him to the max, and he really delivered!

That was a time of truly excellent bands. You had Santana, Led Zeppelin, Blood Sweat & Tears, Crosby, Stills, and Nash; those were all terrific bands. I think that's one of the things that is missing today, great BANDS! There is a culture that develops in a band, sure there's fighting, I can't tell you how many times we would go in to record, and I would be pissed at Terry or Peter, and that would fuel my playing. But that friction inspires a creative culture that develops in a band, and that can't be replaced.

**MD:** When you first put the band together Robert was playing organ, which included playing bass lines on the pedals. You didn't have a bassist. Tony Williams did the same thing in Lifetime. Did you do that out of necessity, or was that a jazz influence?

**Danny:** That was a jazz Jimmy Smith influence for sure. But once we got Peter playing bass and singing, everything really took off.

**MD:** Tony did the same thing by adding Jack Bruce to Lifetime.

**Danny:** I hadn't thought about that.

**MD:** Can you tell me about the role of James William Guercio with the band? Was he a manager or was he a producer?

**Danny:** James Guercio was a visionary. He signed us to our first recording contract, he gave us our first name (CTA,) then he suggested that we change it to Chicago. He had the band start what was called a money purchase plan, which was essentially a pension plan. That meant that we all had something at the end of the day, and after 30 years or so, that equated to millions of dollars that we never would have had if not for his great idea.

Guercio was also musician, he was a very good bassist, and he played guitar. So he could make musical suggestions too. He was super intelligent and creative cat. When we were recording our first record, he had them mic my drums in true stereo. When I played a fill across my toms they went across the stereo spectrum. The entire drum set was panned as it was set up, ride slightly to one side, crash slightly to the other. James was a great producer. At the time when we started working together he had already produced The Buckingham, and he did a great job producing that second Blood, Sweat, and Tears record.

That caused quite a stir within the band at the time, because BS&T were our New York competition, and James was producing them. But I'll tell you something, Bobby Colomby was an amazing drummer, they had an awesome horn section as well as a great singer in David Clayton Thomas and Dick Halligan wrote wonderful arrangements. Bobby's drumming, especially on that second album, is wonderful and just conceptually perfect. I didn't want to admit it at the time, which was just stupid. But you gotta give credit where credit is due, I really believe that. I know he's not playing much anymore, but Bobby's a great drummer.

That stupid youthful stuff also got between Bonham and me. We played some shows with Zeppelin, and he and I would just sort of sit backstage and look across the room at each other like a couple of gunslingers. It's a shame we did that, because in hindsight I think we really would have gotten along well, and really hit it off. I got along very well with all of the Brits.

**MD:** He and you each had strong jazz influences, and you have already mentioned some of your jazz influences, but let's go a little deeper.

**Danny:** I was all about Krupa and Buddy, they were front and center with me. If you listen to "I'm a Man" that is me stealing Krupa licks all over the place.

**MD:** Did you get to know Gene?

**Danny:** I don't have many regrets in life, but that's one of them. I never got a chance to hang with or get to know Krupa.

**MD:** Throughout the years you have mentioned the influence of Grady Tate a lot. You even call him a mentor, tell me about his influence?

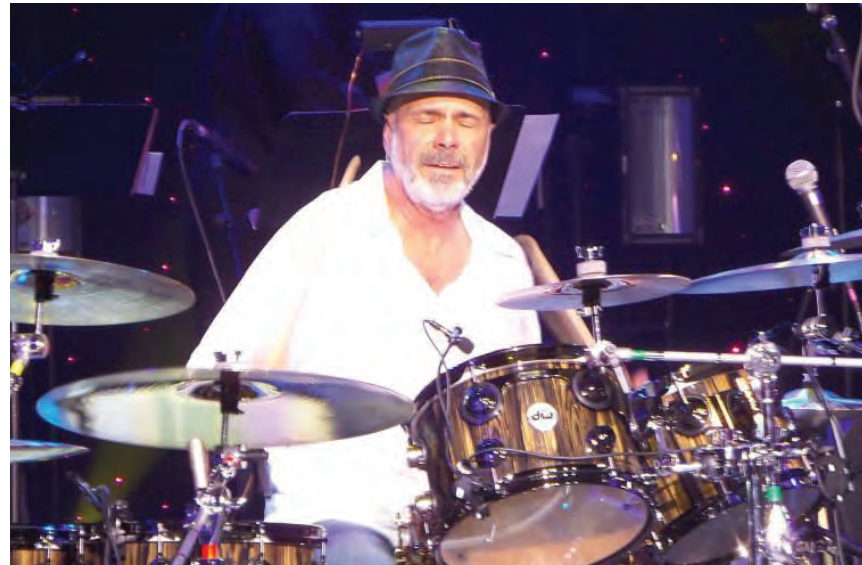
**Danny:** Thanks for asking me about him, he was a special cat,

and a fantastic drummer. My friend John Mulvey (who owned the Chicago Drum Shop) was very good friends with Grady. He told me that Grady really liked Chicago's first record, so John and his wife came to a gig of ours in New York and they brought Grady. I was honored.

I love Grady's playing on Jimmy Smith's record The Dynamic Duo; everything he played was just perfect. He is (to me) the ultimate musical drummer, and his time was incredible. Eventually we did a clinic together, and we did an ad for Remo together. He really pushed me to keep on doing what I was doing, and gave me a lot of cool musical and personal advice. Grady Tate was very important to me, both as a musician and a person. We often talked about how black and white people had to learn to live together and end the scourge of racism. We really celebrated the fact that blacks and whites had to find a way to get along, and wanted to show people how it should be done. I haven't forgotten our conversations about the need for racial harmony to this day. Grady was quite bit older than me and from the South, I could tell that there was a deep sadness in his heart regarding those issues. With me coming from Chicago, I knew what prejudice looked like too, but Grady and I were just trying to make the world a better place.

**MD:** Was Elvin a strong influence on your drumming?

**Danny:** Like so many cats, I went through an Elvin phase.



I just liked how he could float on top of everything. In my "Devil's Suite" solo I think you can hear some of his influence on me. Elvin could be really funky, I liked that. But Elvin was just a fun guy. He came to a Chicago show at Madison Square Garden, and I had him sitting side stage, and he was just amazed at the amount of people at the gig. He mentioned a few times that he wanted his band to open up for us. After our gig we went uptown together to see Buddy's big band play. Imagine that, hanging out with two of the greatest drummers of all time for an evening! It's was night I'll never forget.

**MD:** How about Tony?

**Danny:** Tony was more of a state of mind, intensity. I listened