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- INTRODUCTION -

This issue of **LEGENDS** has been 25 years in the making. About 25 years ago, when I was first writing for *Modern Drummer*, Steve Smith called me (out of the blue) to ask me to write the liner notes for his upcoming record *Buddy's Buddies*. I was pretty excited. I did some research, went to the recording sessions, interviewed the guys in the band, and wrote the liner notes for that record. I guess I did a pretty good job because since then, Steve and I have worked on many projects together. He asked me to write the books that accompany his Hudson videos *The Sound of Brushes*, and *Jazz Legacy: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants*. I wrote the liner notes for a few more records, and we co-wrote some articles together. But most importantly, Steve and I have become good friends.

Our friendship has fostered hundreds of conversations, emails, and late-night talks. Along the way, (needless to say) I have learned *a lot*. Steve even *claims* that he has learned from me as well. But amazingly, I never "formally" interviewed Steve for *Modern Drummer* (we did do two interviews for *Percussive Notes*.) So, when it was confirmed that there would be a Steve Smith **LEGENDS** book, I knew it would be special! (Truthfully, I want **every** **LEGENDS** book to be very special!)

I think we have succeeded. For starters, I can't ever remember Steve being so candid and thorough when talking about his career. For anyone planning a career in music, there is some priceless advice here. Would you like to know how Steve creates grooves and writes tunes? Keep reading... And try to find another musician that references AC/DC's "Problem Child," Ahmad Jamal's "Poincianna," and The Mahavishnu Orchestra all in one interview. Lastly, listen to the included download of the solos from Steve's drum solo project "The Fabric of Rhythm." Just when we all thought that he had done *everything*, Steve has started to create and record a new repertoire of drum solo compositions. Check out his explanations of how he created these solos.

In preparing to interview Steve, I thought back on 25 years of our conversations. Believe it or not, there were actually some interesting subjects that we had never

really gotten around to talking about. *Those should be a part of this interview.* Then I tried to recount the conversations that we had in which I have learned the most about: being a drummer, a professional musician, the history of jazz and fusion drumming, the music business, and being a student of the drums. *Those would have to be a big part of our interview.* I also remembered all of Steve's amazing gigs that I had seen that hadn't been "officially" documented or recorded, and there were some really good ones. *That is where we should start.*

Sure, I saw some amazing Vital Information gigs, and Steve's playing was always just ridiculous, but when you're a touring bandleader sometimes your mind is split in many pieces (travel, lodging, bandmembers needs, promotional stuff, dealing with clubs and agents, etc...) It was always great to hear him with Steps Ahead because he was in super-relaxed sideman mode. I even saw some Journey gigs early on, and in the last four years. He always played his ass off with Journey, but to me, Steve never seemed comfortable in the "rock star" setting.

It was the freelance gigs that Steve did as a sideman with Mike Stern, Hiromi, the many editions of the band Electric Miles, or the tribute gigs playing The Music of Coltrane or The Music of Ornette Coleman that were always the ones that excited me the most. I witnessed many of them. That is where Steve's role of the student of music, the over-prepared sidemen, and the fantastic drummer, all merged. Talking about, and watching Steve prepare for those gigs is when I learned the most from him. And I knew the readers would too.

This was not your typical interview. This was two friends having a long conversation about the past, present, and the future, and you are a fly on the wall. There are a lot of surprises in this **LEGENDS**, and there is a mountain of useful information. Steve and I had a lot of fun talking to each other, and hopefully you will have even more fun "eavesdropping" on us. We each learned a lot, and I'm *sure* you will too.

—Mark Griffith





A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



I remember the first time that I saw Steve Smith play, it was with Journey on the Escape tour. I had seen videos of Steve's playing, and had heard him on records, but seeing him live took it to another level. He was so precise, creative, and powerful, and had unbelievable chops. I followed his work closely from Journey to Vital Information and on his many other projects including awe-inspiring clinics, drum festivals, and his educational materials. I have seen Steve play many times and always learn something new from watching and listening to his drumming.

Years later, I had the privilege of working closely with Steve on two different projects. One was a 5.1 DTS surround sound remix of his Vital Information *Global Beat* album. The other was a drum loop library called *Rhythmic Journey*. On both of these projects, I heard Steve's playing at the most detailed and intimate level and it just got better every time! Seeing his work ethic, attention to detail and hands-on approach only solidified what we hear every time Steve plays: HE IS ON!

Here we are decades after my first Steve Smith live show, and you are holding a true work of drumming art: **Steve Smith Legends**. The word Legend is a rare classification for someone to earn in their respective field. You already know that Steve has (*more than*) earned it, he has lived it, and he continues to inspire us every day. Enjoy Steve Smith Legends!

David Frangioni

CEO/Publisher of Modern Drummer Publications, Inc.



Steve Smith:

Understanding, Following and Developing the Opportunities

By Mark Griffith

In looking back through all of the interviews that Steve Smith has done with *Modern Drummer*, most have been based around Vital Information or Journey. While those groups are both excellent examples to study Steve as a musician, his musical scope is far greater.

A passing comment on Steve's versatility would be an understatement. For example: There was a time from January to April 2016 where Steve Smith recorded a solo drum set album (*Fabric of Rhythm*), a new Vital Information album (*Heart of the City*), played live shows and recorded a new album with Steps Ahead and the famed WDR big band (*Steppin' Out – with WDR Big Band Cologne*), performed straight-ahead jazz at Birdland Jazz Club NYC with the Groove Blue Organ Trio and the next week played Madison Square Garden with Journey! Who else does that?





Marco Socoli