

He may hail from Chicago, but the world is truly his stage. His talents, which are many, exemplifies this musician's commitment to expand the dimensions of the drum set in whatever context he's in...no limitations or restrictions.

Since arriving on the international scene in 1983 with jazz great Pat Metheny, Paul has taken his drumming to exceptional levels, moving well beyond traditional time-keeping into rhythmic and sonic explorations. With a style that echoes his personality, his approach is both ethereal and practical...flawless in technique and flowing with ideas. He's one of those players who can make a consummate musical statement with one stroke of a brush or the glance of a cymbal...bringing to mind the legendary ECM Records sound: improvisational freedom balanced by a masterful control over the instrument.

His versatility has been a keynote to affiliations with many major artists. A short list includes Larry Coryell, Ramsey Lewis, Ellen McIlwaine, Special EFX, Paul Winter, Jerry Goodman, Lee Konitz, Diane Schuur, Ken Nordine, Eddie Harris, Charlie Haden, Kurt Elling, SBB, Terry Callier, Kindred The Family Soul, and that's just for starters. Performance, however, is not Paul's only passion. As an educator, he's conducted clinics all over the U.S., including the University of Miami, North Texas State University, and Drummers Collective in NYC, along with drum seminars throughout the world. If that wasn't enough, he is also a three-time returnee to PASIC as a featured headliner in '94, '99, and '02.

After years of logging thousands of frequent flyer miles across the globe, Wertico was offered a unique opportunity to share his knowledge and experience not only with those who'll represent the future of drumming, but to chair an entire program instructing young, creative instrumentalists and vocalists. In 2008, he accepted a full-time teaching position and was named Assistant Professor and Head of Jazz Studies at Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. This came on the heels of being honored as a "Chicagoan of the Year" by The Chicago Tribune in 2004.

He also continues to evolve as a world class musician with new projects that include "Paul Wertico's Drum Philosophy" (a DVD update released by Alfred Music of a prior VHS video) and recent CDs "The Exile of Dreams" by Greek keyboardist/composer Vangelis Katsoulis, "Faith and Works" by pianist Scott Earl Holman, and two soon-to-be released CDs, one by Spanish saxophonist Paxti Pasqual, and the other by guitarist John Moulder. Just prior to his full-time professorial debut, Paul caught up with Classic Drummer from his windy city area home. You'll be pleased to know there was conversation o' plenty stored in his musical backpack.

Paul Wertico

drummer-percussionist-composer-producer-educator



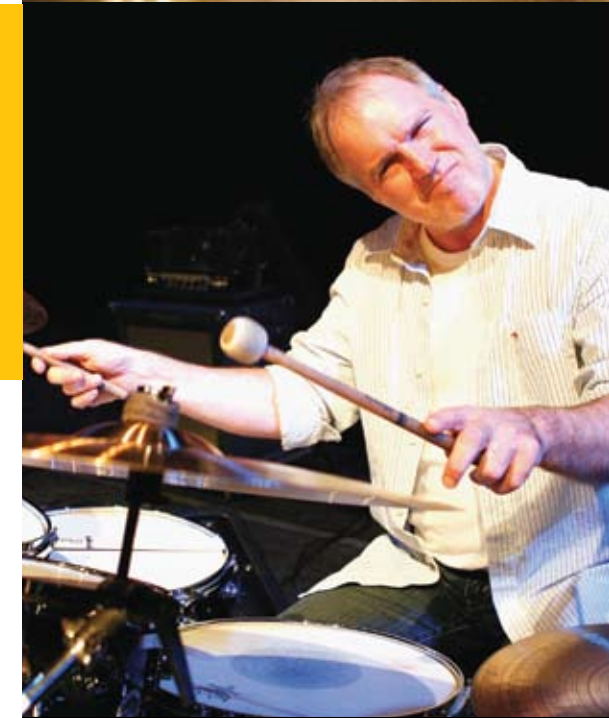


melodic one.

PW: If you really get into each song, not only from a mostly rhythmic sense, but from what's actually going on inside the song itself...the melody, the harmony, the lyrics, the overall emotional feeling... as well as being open to what's being played by the musicians around you... you'll constantly be discovering "new" things because each song and each performance can never be exactly the same and thus the context, no matter how subtle, is always changing. If you're sensitive to those changes, and if you react with a fresh approach each time you play, you'll always be playing

Often I see young student drummers focus too much on themselves and get too involved in the process of drumming when they're playing with a band. It's as if they feel that unless they're constantly being totally inventive and creative while playing their parts, that somehow the music will get boring or that they will be viewed as a less than spectacular drummer. Actually, what almost always sounds better is when they just relax, play inside the music, and listen to what's going on around them. It's very similar to a conversation...everyone can't be talking at the same time and it's

"I often base my dynamics along the melody lines, which allows me to utilize the entire part of the drumset to draw in all the nuances."



CD: Paul, your drumming style has often been compared to an Impressionistic painter, using the instrument to explore the nuances of rhythm, melody, and substance. Do you agree with that analogy?
PW: It's funny, but somebody else brought that up recently as well, and after thinking about it, I guess I would say that I agree. One of the reasons is that Impressionistic painters often leave intentional visual gaps for the viewer's imagination to fill in. Their approach is not so literal. My drumming is often reflective of that type of approach, in the way I try to involve the listener in the music, but also keep some mystery as to what exactly it is I'm playing.

CD: To me, you're like an explorer in that your drums act as a conduit to reflect the visceral. It's that you're not only laying a foundation, but also designing clusters of sound.

PW: Exactly. Actually, the word cluster is a good description, since they're not so

much mathematical subdivisions as they are organic and feel-oriented groups of sounds.

CD: Your playing seems to have an unlimited source of ideas. How do you capture the varied "sounds" that you do?
PW: It's really about the touch...the way you strike whatever you are hitting. I use direct strokes, side strokes, open strokes, and dead strokes, I use a loose grip and a tight grip, the American grip, the German grip, the French grip...whatever works. Another thing is to associate dynamics with pitch. The harder you strike a drum, not only does the volume go up, but so does the pitch. I often base my dynamics along the melody lines, which allows me to utilize the entire part of the drumset to draw in all the nuances.

Some drummers like to use a lot of drums. But for me, I like getting a lot of sounds out of less equipment, even if it's just a single drum or single cymbal. I've

been doing that ever since I was a kid, playing something until I felt I got every imaginable sound out of it that I could. People that only know me from my PMG days might find that strange because my kit with Pat was so huge, but even there, I always tried to get the most out of each individual instrument.

CD: I've noticed on your many recordings, your playing offers not only a great sense of feel but a visual imprint as well. If I were to describe it, I'd say...cultural authenticity.

PW: I always try to listen to what the song is really about, and then transplant myself into that particular zone. If you really visualize what's beyond the notes, you can get to that place.

CD: It reminds me at times of Max Roach or Joe Morello; how they got inside the composition itself, not just from a rhythmic sense, but also from a

something new. It has everything to do with playing inside the music, letting the music play you, embracing the unknown, and getting outside of yourself. The more "information" you can get out of a composition, the more creative colors you have to work with.

Think of it this way: If sounds were colors, and if you only had three colors in your palette, that might not seem like much. But if you're able to mix and blend those three colors with the unique colors contained within different songs, then every time you blend your colors with those of each song, you'll end up with a totally new color combination. The secret is to not get stuck within your limited amount of colors, but to expand outside of yourself and utilize all those other color possibilities. Your three colors can result in an infinite number of colors when they're mixed with all the other colors that are out there.

wonderful when people listen to each other, contribute a thought at the right moment, and respect and complement each other.

CD: When you first came to prominence with Pat Metheny, you set a template for a particular style of jazz fusion. At that time, you seemed to really hone in on textures and voicing, correct?

PW: Actually, I didn't try to do anything. I just let the music tell me what to do. As long as I can remember, I always loved melody as much as I loved rhythm. The music written by Pat and Lyle (Mays) was extremely melodic (as well as being harmonically and rhythmically sophisticated), so it was a perfect place for me to be in. I just tried to complement and enhance the music the best way I could. It was also a unique gig, in that it wasn't just about playing standard beats and mathematical-type figures. A lot of the time I had

Paul's Picks



It wasn't easy, but we narrowed it down to his personal Top-Ten recordings:

Live In Warsaw! - Paul Wertico Trio

Don't Be Scared Anymore - Paul Wertico Trio

StereoNucleosis - Wertico

Still Life (Talking) - Pat Metheny Group

Imaginary Day - Pat Metheny Group

2 LIVE - Earwax Control

Close Your Eyes - Kurt Elling

Tricycles - Larry Coryell

Good Bye! - SBB

Ampersand - Brian Peters & Paul Wertico

Equipment:

• Drum Workshop drums, pedals, and hardware

• Paiste cymbals, sounds, and gongs

• Remo drumheads and World Percussion

• Pro-Mark drumsticks, brushes, mallets, Tubz, KidzTubz, etc.

• Shure microphones and products

• Slug percussion products

• Grip Peddler products

• Factory Metal Percussion

• Stick Stuff

• Alternative Mode/KAT products

• XL Specialty cases

• The Original Drum Screen

• Sensaphonics products

• Cakewalk products

• Alesis products

• Universal Audio products

• iZotope products

• The Drumometer

• The Beatnik

• The Slapstik

• Metrophones

• S-Hoop products

• Fingerstix

• Futz

• PC Drummer

• Hear Technology products

• FXpansion products

• Puresound Percussion

• The Triplet Drum Glove

• Power Wrist Builders

Website: www.paulwertico.com

simultaneous multiple identities- jazz drummer, Brazilian drummer, classical percussionist, Keith Moon wannabe, and the X-Factor all rolled up into one (laughter)!

CD: Your stint with the Pat Metheny Group was not unlike being a "rock-star." I mean you won seven Grammy Awards! Some drummers would think... why would you ever leave a gig like that?

PW: Well, you know...it just seemed like the right time to leave. My daughter was growing up, so I wanted to be home more and be a good parent. I also wanted to pursue my own music more, after putting out a few well-received CDs. Plus, it's always better to leave on an up note, and since the last recording, Imaginary Day, I made with the group had won two Grammy Awards out of the three Grammy nominations it was up for, the time seemed right.

Leaving the PMG was also a good kick in the butt for me because I didn't necessarily leave to join anything bigger...I was just done. After a short time of self-assessing, I really re-focused, began practicing a lot, working out, and listening to tons of music again. Essentially, I got hungry to play again. I remember shortly after I left, Terry Bozzio caught me playing at PASIC with my trio. After our set, he came up to me and gave me a big hug saying, "Man, you've re-invented yourself." I think, as a musician, you should do that whenever you need to. The past is great, but you don't want to get stuck in it. Growth is a good thing, and although change can sometimes be painful, it's usually for the best. And everything worked out for everybody. Pat's group is still out there performing. I got revitalized and started playing and recording with wonderful musicians like Larry Coryell. Plus, I could now be home a lot more with my family. So it all worked out fine.

Now looking back, the PMG was a band of extremely talented, highly individualized,

very different type of people, that much of the time, functioned like a well-oiled machine and together, we made a lot of good music.

CD: Where most drummers go for a conventional range of tuning, your kit tuning is a bit unorthodox. Your bass drum is high and ringy, and your toms melodic, but not to a specific scale. Also, you have a menagerie of percussive toys and self-made creations that perfectly reflect the composition at hand. Have you always done this?

PW: I'll do whatever I think will work for the composition. If the interpretation and execution of the music is successful, then I've done my part to "serve the music". For me, it's all about the mood of the song. I'm not overly concerned with always having a particular identifiable personal sound. I tell my students that if they want to achieve a good performance, they have to either find or create, and then sustain, the mood for each song. It's also important not to break the natural flow of the music with any unintentional time or groove "hiccups", which can be caused by things like lack of concentration, playing past one's ability, trying too hard, playing too much, and/or forgetting to be part of the rhythm section.

As far as my personal sound, depending on the music, I might tune my bass drum high, but I might also go for stuffing it with blankets and tuning it low if the occasion calls for it. I might use found sounds or a pair of TUBZ if I think that's what will work best. It's instinctive, and the more styles you know, the better you understand what will work for the music. Also fitting your sound in with the other instruments is really critical. For instance, with Pat, he had a very pristine guitar sound, so the cymbals I used were very important in allowing his sound to be clearly heard. If I would have used washy, low-toned cymbals, I might have interfered with his sound. So I used flat rides. You have to be very aware of how your sound blends with the music you're playing. Some drummers like to stick out...I usually like to blend in.

CD: Let's sketch a little of your background: You're a self-taught player?

PW: Yes, for the most part. Back in the 6th grade, after my family and I moved to a new town, my mother said, "You should take up an instrument...but please not the drums" (laughter)! Of course, that's the ONLY thing that I liked. So I joined the grade school band where I learned how to play snare drum and read music. I actually didn't get a drum set until I graduated the 8th grade and I never took any drum set lessons until college.


After I finally got a kit, I'd get home from school and play for hours and hours along with Top 40 radio hits, but I would usually intentionally try to play "out" and "over-the-bar line", instead of trying to copy what the drummer on the recording was playing, because that's what I was feeling for some reason. I don't know why, but it seems that the freer jazz spirit was even speaking to me back then!

While I was still in high school, I once asked my mom if I could take some drum set lessons at a local music store, but she didn't let me because she didn't want me to be overly influenced by one drum instructor. So, I guess I have her to thank in part for helping me develop a personal, unorthodox approach.

CD: I hear a multitude of influences in your style; Blakey, Roach, Rich, DeJohnette, and Williams, but also non-drummers. Artists like Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, Chick Corea, and Joe Zawinul. Where and who did you draw from?

PW: Everybody! I was a voracious record collector and I must have owned a couple thousand LPs. I listened to jazz and rock of course, while also listening to music from Africa, Chile, Eastern Europe, etc. I was listening to everyone from jazz pioneer Baby Dodds to Dutch avant-garde master Han Bennink, as well as to Mitch Mitchell and Ginger Baker. As far as jazz drummers, Roy Haynes was probably my number one influence. Also, because of the fresh new sounds and musical approach, I was drawn

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to the complexities of some progressive rock, digging drummers like Michael Giles and Robert Wyatt, while I also still loved Ringo Starr and Charlie Watts. It all came down to absorbing music by osmosis, and not judging things as good or bad, because if the music moved me, it became part of my world.

CD: Your abilities slide all over the spectrum; free-form, fusion, funk, prog rock, blues, Americana, and experimental.

What's impressive is that you play it authentically. What have you found the secret to be in performing all of these?
 PW: I believe if you listen to, study, and play a lot different types of music, you will eventually discover the essence of each of those styles. Once you understand and appreciate each style's essence, you can then try to put your own stamp on it. I always tell my students, "You can play whatever you want as long as you can justify what you're doing." You have to know the history...the point of reference. Everything comes from something before it.

CD: In 2001 you began a new journey as an independent artist. On your own you've released several records as a leader, co-leader, and/or producer. How do these rewards compare to past accolades?

PW: The more you can be involved in every aspect of making music, especially your own, the more fulfilling it is. Even when playing and/or recording with other

artists as a sideman, as long as it seems appropriate, I generally like to share my ideas and opinions if I feel I can contribute something positive, rather than just sitting passively behind the drums. The greater the percentage of personal involvement in any project, the greater the feeling of personal pride when it turns out well.

To me, it's the ongoing adventure that's exciting. If you're enjoying what you are doing and you're exploring different facets of the music experience, then it doesn't matter if you are a producer, engineer, drummer, or composer, whatever. The word musician is a much too short-ended term. It involves so many creative aspects of expression, even including other art forms. I just love the fact that on whatever level it might be, you can paint pictures in the air with sound.

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