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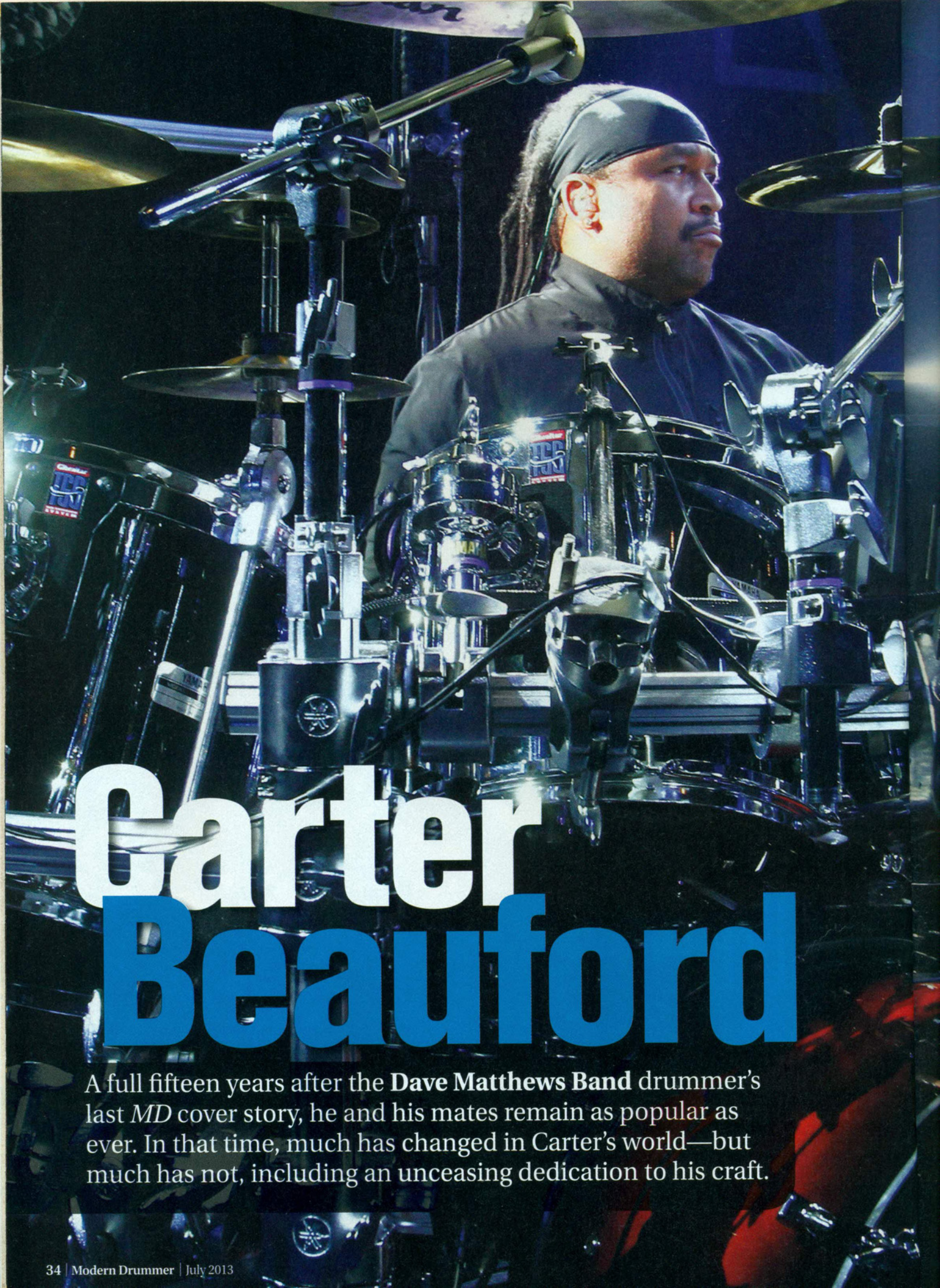
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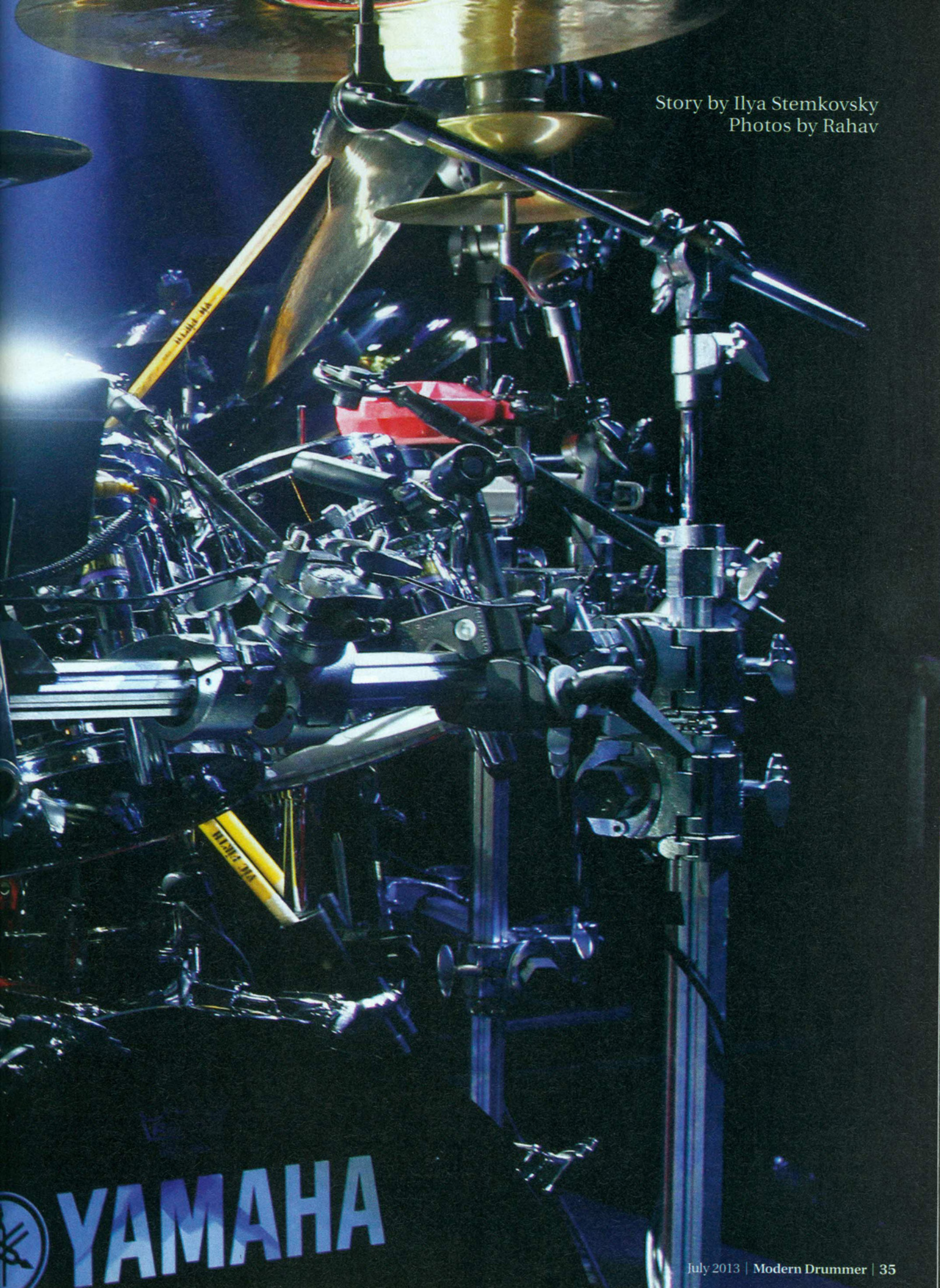
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Carter Beauford

A full fifteen years after the **Dave Matthews Band** drummer's last *MD* cover story, he and his mates remain as popular as ever. In that time, much has changed in Carter's world—but much has not, including an unceasing dedication to his craft.

Story by Ilya Stemkovsky
Photos by Rahav



 **YAMAHA**



Carter Beauford has it made. The beats and fills he's been able to play within the essentially pop format of the Dave Matthews Band

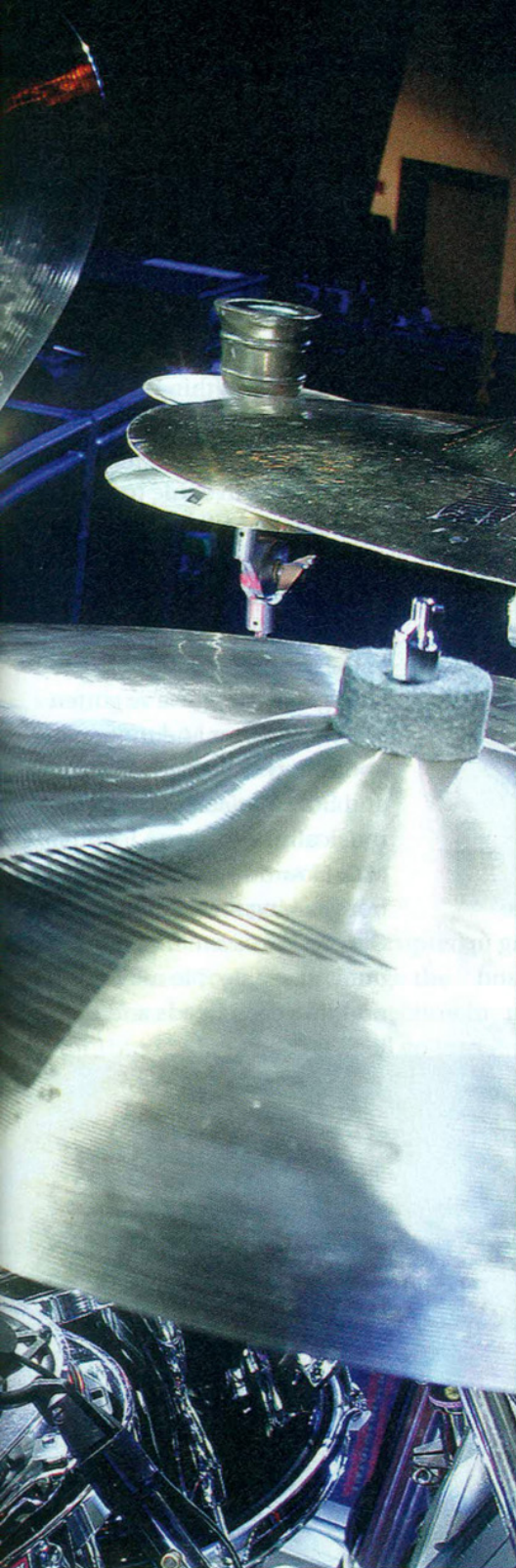
are ones that most of us would never attempt in a three- or four-minute song, let alone think of in the first place. And not only does Beauford get away with it, he's in fact encouraged by Matthews and his bandmates to raise the stakes, to impose on the music in the very best sense, in the studio but especially in concert.

“I’ve worked on the idea of trying to put together a new instructional video for years. **But we get busy...”**

Actually, you could make the argument that the live setting might *not* be the ideal place to experience Beauford's drum artistry. Sure, the mix is dialed in, the kit sounds massive, and the guy is grooving like a monster, ripping tom rolls over barlines and eliciting smiles from his fellow musicians. But at a Dave Matthews show the crowd is

singing along to every word—not just the choruses, but each line in the verses. *Loudly.*

At a Matthews concert at Brooklyn's Barclays Center this past December, it's striking how in tune the audience is with the unique musical blend established by Beauford, guitarist/vocalist Matthews, bassist Stefan



Carter's Setup

Drums: Yamaha Recording Custom in raven black lacquer finish

A. 6.5x14 Ludwig LB417T Black Beauty Supra-Phonic snare with P86 Millennium strainer and 42-strand snappy snare wires; die-cast hoop on batter side and triple-flange hoop on snare side

B. 14x15 floor tom

C. 8x8 tom

D. 9x10 tom

E. 10x12 tom

F. 12x14 tom

G. 9x13 tom

H. 16x16 tom

I. 18x20 bass drum (Yamaha PHX in cherry sunburst)

All toms are equipped with Gibraltar TSS mounts, and all drums except the bass drum are equipped with nylon lug locks on the tension rods.

Cymbals: Zildjian

1. 14" K Mastersound hi-hats

2. 18" K Dark Medium Thin crash

3. 10" A Custom splash

4. 19" K Dark Thin crash

5. 6" A Custom splash

6. 8" A Custom splash

7. 16" K Dark crash

8. 14" K Mini China

9. 21" Z3 Ultra Hammered China

10. 22" K Custom Dark ride

11. 6" A Custom splash stacked upside-down on a 20" A Custom Flat Top ride

12. 14" A Custom crash

13. Chinese wedding bell mounted inside a 6" Zil-Bel, both of which are stacked upside-down on top of an 8" K splash

14. 19" Z3 Ultra Hammered China

Percussion:

aa. 7x13 Dunnett Titanium timbale

bb. LP Jam Block (low pitch)

cc. LP Rock Classic Ridge Rider cowbell

dd. LP Granite Blocks

ee. LP Whole-Tone Bar Chimes

(aluminum, 72-bar, double row)

Beauford also uses various LP hand percussion items.

Hardware: Drum Workshop 9002 double bass

pedal with Hardcore bass drum beaters, 9500TB

hi-hat stand; Clark Synthesis Thunder Throne (round

seat); Yamaha Hex Rack System and 900 series

double-braced hardware

Heads: Remo CS Coated Ambassador X snare batter

and Clear Ambassador bottom, Clear Pinstripe tom

batters and Ebony Ambassador bottoms, and Clear

Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter and Ebony

Powerstroke 3 front head (with 5" offset hole

and black Dynamo Hole Saver); LP timbale batter

Sticks: Vic Firth Carter Beauford Autograph series

sticks (wood tip), mallets, rods, and brushes

Electronics: Hart Dynamics 8" Acupad (positioned

between snare drum and 9x13 tom); two Clark

Synthesis Platinum Tactile Sound Transducers

mounted to underside of throne; Roland and ddrum

acoustic bass drum triggers; Apex Impulse trigger

module; Akai Z8 sampler; Voodoo Lab Ground

Control Pro MIDI foot controller

Miscellaneous: FootJoy gloves

Thanks to Justin "BeaufordBuddy" Scott for help with setup info

Lessard, violinist Boyd Tinsley, guitarist Tim Reynolds, trumpeter Rashawn Ross, and saxophonist Jeff Coffin. The communal vibe is reminiscent of a Grateful Dead or Phish show: The girl next to you is busy texting the rare set list bust-out to a friend; the guy next to her is absorbed by one of the band's lengthy improvisations; and everyone, frat boys and jazz majors alike, is having a good time.

Twenty years into their career, the members of the Matthews Band can proudly point to hundreds of nights like this—not to mention career highlights

like multiple Grammy wins and a record-breaking six albums debuting at the very top of the charts. Through it all has been the charismatic and extremely likable Beauford, perched behind his

array of splashes and chimes, dreads neatly tucked, casually blowing bubbles as he executes intricate patterns made up on the spot, and taking a moment between songs to share a fist bump

View From the Crew



Henry Luniewski has been with the Dave Matthews Band from the very beginning, initially working the backline and later focusing on drum teching. "The band's popularity grew so quickly," Luniewski recalls. "I had to figure out how to get the violin amplified and how to prevent Carter's China from blowing Boyd's head off. I'd stack a couple of Chinas so the bottom one would act as a shield! And I'd haul a rack in a golf club case onto a plane for Europe, so at the gig all I'd need was four cymbal stands.

"To this day I don't have a huge fleet of drumkits for Carter," Luniewski continues. "It's like having one race car and optimizing it to win the race. He's always interested in experimenting with gear or tunings and will listen to my suggestions.

"The kit has morphed over time, from small modifications to major alterations and everything in between, but it's come back full circle to the classic Carter sound, with Yamaha Recording Custom toms and Remo Clear Pinstripe heads. Carter wants a big palette to work from, and he plays every bit of his kit, but you don't want too much stuff to distract from what he's doing.

"I feel very fortunate to work with Carter," Luniewski concludes. "He's fun, humble, and such a good drummer. I never get tired of watching him play. And just like the band, the crew is always striving to get better."

with a wide-eyed Matthews, who has ventured back to the kit to show his approval.

Though in the past he has worked outside the confines of the Matthews Band, including collaborations with Carlos Santana and with Flecktones bassist Victor Wooten, Beauford knows what side of his bread is buttered. Truth be told, his Matthews obligations don't leave him time for much else. "I'm not going to complain about being busy," Carter says. "I can remember the days when I couldn't buy a gig. Every gig that comes up with this band, I'm going to give it the full deal."

GOING WITH THE FLOW

MD: When you spoke with *Modern Drummer* in the late '90s, you discussed changing up tunes so that they didn't sound the same way twice. But you

were also wondering if that was a problem, because some nights everything was clicking and you wanted to redo certain things exactly the same. Where are you now in that thinking?

Carter: It's pretty much the same. It's something that works for us. We'll change stuff if it happens, and mostly it happens by accident. In some part of a tune we may fall into something cool. We'll love it and stick with it for a while until we realize that it's not hitting too well with the audience. But we haven't really changed a thing. We've gotten older and wiser and more mature about how things work on stage and how to reach an audience musically.

MD: How do you know when it's not working for the audience?

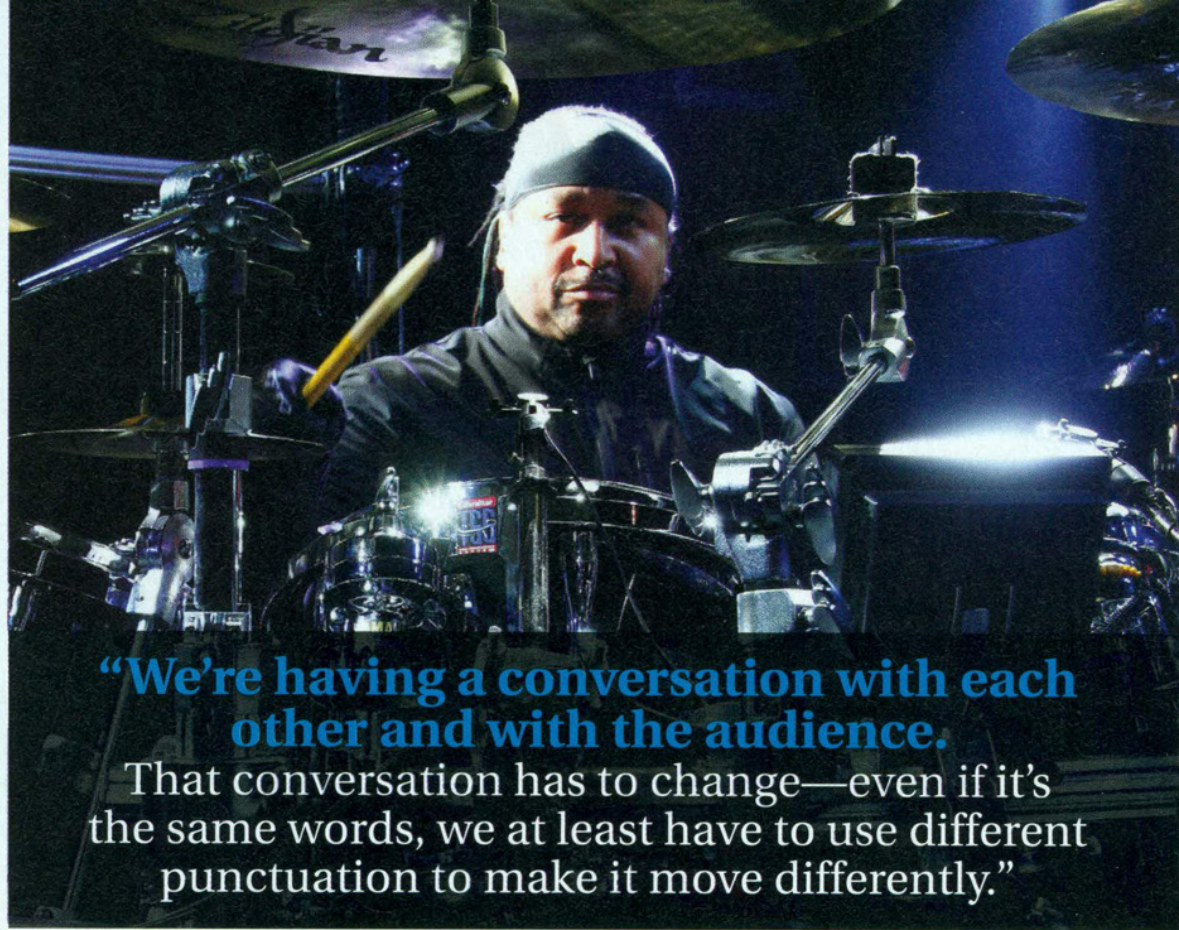
Carter: We can tell. We'll look out and see people maybe just nodding their heads and not



as enthusiastic as normal. A lot of times you see people's arms flailing and they're rocking out, but there are those nights when they're not feeling the jam. We don't have to even look; we can just feel it on stage. We try to adjust when that happens, sometimes by changing the set list during the show.

A couple of nights ago, for instance, it was going great and the audience was getting off. But during the last three songs we felt as if we were losing them. So Dave called an audible after the song "Stay (Wasting Time)" to go into "Ants Marching." I was feeling it too and thought it was the perfect call. We call it our "national Ant-em"—most fans get a big kick out of that tune, and there's a lot happening. So at the end of "Ants," the place erupted. Or sometimes Stefan will change the bass groove in a song, like the section in "Jimi Thing" where he and I will go into a funky thing with a sax solo.

So things are set, but sometimes we'll



"We're having a conversation with each other and with the audience. That conversation has to change—even if it's the same words, we at least have to use different punctuation to make it move differently."

change gears. We'll also check out the crowd reaction to the opening act, to see if they're geared up for a show or they're just there to be part of the scene. **MD:** What about when you're playing in seven or something? Do you ever

feel like bailing from that because of feedback from the audience? **Carter:** You know, seven is a good one to take it out on. I like to play four against seven, and it gives you that thing where the backbeat flips every

Congratulations!

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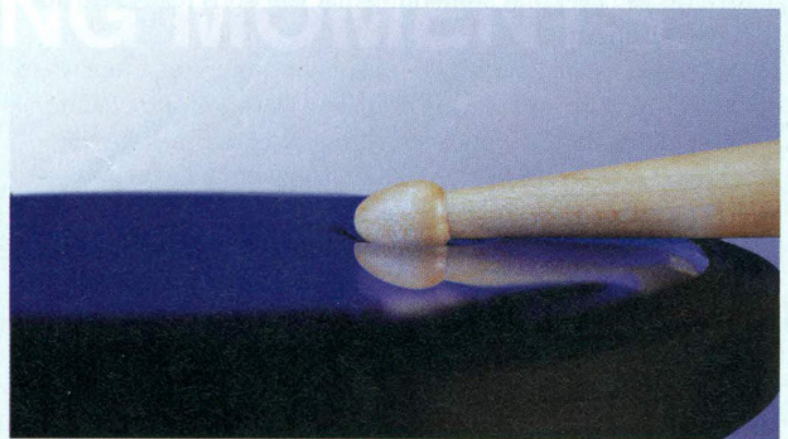
Alex Gonzales, Gil Sharone, Rexels Hardy, Luke Holland, Rich Redmond, Pete Lockett, Taku Hirano, Roland Gajate Garcia, Brian Frasier Moore, plus all of the winners and nominees!

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CARTER BEAUFORD

other bar. And the fans feel that. Most of our fans are smart; they know what's happening. You have to be smooth with it. You have to keep it straight and let them fall into a groove, and then when it flips, they'll be, "Whoa, this is cool."

PULLING BACK, PUSHING FORWARD

MD: Your most recent studio album, *Away From the World*, sounds like a kinder, gentler, more mature Carter. Of course, you're stretching out these tunes live, but was it a conscious choice to play a bit less on the record?

Carter: Yes, very conscious. I wanted to step away from the busyness of my style of playing, just to see what it would feel like. I do that a lot anyway, though maybe not on recordings. So I wanted to give the audience another perspective on what we do—just something simpler, more mature, especially for new listeners, who hear us for the first time and may not quite get it because it's all over the place.

MD: "Gaucho" is not technically a half-time shuffle like the outro of "Drunken Soldier" is, because it doesn't feel dotted, but the triplets are locked and it has a 12/8 feel. And "Broken Things" is a creative way to approach a chorus. There's a lot of space and some floor tom flams. Do you work out a few approaches to arrive at those parts, or are you hearing them naturally as the first things in your head?

Carter: It's something that just happens as we go along. That's the case with almost every song we do. Dave has an idea, and as he's playing it I'm feeling a certain thing that I'll automatically just throw in there and start playing along with him. Sometimes it doesn't fit and sometimes it does, but it's always spontaneous.

MD: Do you ever play something that you don't really love but Dave's all about it?

Carter: Oh, yeah! [laughs] That happens quite a bit, often when I'm warming up and playing exercises. Dave will start yelling, "Keep doing that!" If you listen closely, a lot of tunes we've written are basically exercises, but I try to disguise them by adding things here and there and doctoring them up.

MD: Let's discuss the vibe on stage. After a particularly hot performance, Dave will turn around and acknowledge you or even come over to slap hands. What does that expression of camaraderie do for your playing?

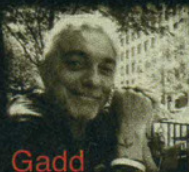
Carter: First of all, it lets me know that everyone has their ears on. The late, great LeRoi Moore [founding DMB saxophonist, who died in 2008] and I used to play a lot of gigs in different jazz groups. And the big thing was eye contact with everyone on stage. It was so important. And when the Dave Matthews Band began, that was one of the first things we instilled. When a hot lick comes from one of the guys—boom!—the first thing everyone does is look over and say, "Uh-huh, I hear you," or respond with their guitar or whatever instrument. But then the eye contact comes in and lets them know, "I'm checking you out." So the whole fist-bump thing is to acknowledge that and say, "Good job, and let's keep hitting." It's like a high five after a slam-dunk.

MD: Who do you hook up with on stage? Are Dave's vocals hotter in your mix, or are you paying a little more attention to Stefan's bass?

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CARTER BEAUFORD

Carter: It's as balanced as we can get it. I want to hear it like I'm out in the audience or like I'm listening to a record at home. Occasionally I'll have Dave's vocal come up when I'm singing my background, to make sure I'm on pitch. It's tough enough trying to sing when you're bouncing up and down on the drums. And Stefan's not hotter, but I have a seat thumper [Clark Synthesis Platinum Tactile Sound Transducers]. The kick drum and Stefan's bass are going through that, so I can feel the low end.

MD: What's changed in your playing since LeRoi's passing? Tim Reynolds, Rashawn Ross, and Jeff Coffin are now on stage all night. Are you approaching anything differently?

Carter: Well, they're different players. Tim and I go way back—we've known each other for thirty-plus years, so I know his moves and he knows mine. Sometimes he will shock me with



something amazing and I'll have to play steady and listen and say, "Keep bringing it!" He and Jeff both have huge ears. Anything that comes out, they're going to complement it in some kind of cool way. Jeff played with Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, so he's a seasoned veteran and knows music. Same with Tim and Rashawn. It's nice to get away

from the rock thing and hear some stuff come back at me from the music I cut my teeth on. It's easy and fun to play with them.

SMOOTH SONIC OPERATOR

MD: Songs like "Smooth Rider" and "Louisiana Bayou" [from 2005's *Stand Up*] and "When the World Ends" [from

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2001's *Everyday*] feature a totally different kit sound from most other tunes in your catalog. Is that your call or a producer's?

Carter: It's kind of irritating, because for the longest time I've worked on trying to improve the sound of the drums so that they're more palatable. I don't want anything too harsh-sounding or tuned all weird, and sometimes I have to battle with the producer, because they have a certain thing in their head that they want to get across to the listener. So they have to add this, or take something away, or put some kind of effect on my kit, and I'm like, "No, no, don't mess with my sound." But then I tell myself to let it happen this time, because maybe the producer will turn it into something really great.

MD: The drum sound on *Big Whiskey & the GrooGrux King* [2009] is nice—beefy and natural.

Carter: [Producer] Rob Cavallo knows how to do drums right!

MD: DMB releases archival material, but you're also in a position to

document and release current tours as audio and video. Are you cognizant of what you're doing for posterity, and does that affect you, knowing the tapes are always rolling—even in the rehearsal space?

Carter: Yes, it's nonstop! [laughs] That used to bother me in the early days, because as soon as I knew the tapes were rolling, I was conscious of that and thinking about what people were going to hear when it was all said and done, instead of listening to the other guys on stage. It would cause me to have train wrecks, screw up and miss parts, miss grooves, beats, sections, cues.... After a certain period of time I just got my head together and forgot all about it.

MD: Do you ever walk off stage after a show that you know was hot and think that you'd like to listen back, or even that it should be released?

Carter: Sometimes, but what I've learned is that in those instances where you tell yourself it was killing and you can't wait to hear it, that's

when you find out it wasn't as killing as you thought. We let other people listen because they have different ears—the trained ear hears everything that's going on. Most people who are listening are taking in the whole picture and aren't hearing all the little things. We stopped listening to stuff years ago.

The great Miles Davis said, "It's not what you did yesterday—it's what you're going to do today." That means so much. If I do listen to something, it's to eliminate mistakes I made, not to listen to how cool it is, like I used to.

MD: Bruce Springsteen has to play "Born to Run" at every gig, and while you guys aren't obliged to play "Too Much" or "All Along the Watchtower," eventually those tunes are coming. How do you keep them fresh as a drummer?

Carter: Improvisation. And that's one of the main things that keeps people coming back. We hear fans tell us all the time that they love seeing us because it's different every time. They've been to ninety or a hundred

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CARTER BEAUFORD

shows and say they've never heard us play "Ants Marching" the same way twice. That's good. That means we're listening on stage.

We're making a statement, we're telling a story, having a conversation with each other and with the audience. If you say the same thing every time you speak to someone, eventually they'll get sick of hearing you. The conversation has to be different—even if it's the same words, we at least have to use different punctuation to make it move differently.

YOUR PATIENCE WILL BE REWARDED

MD: Your 2002 instructional DVD, *Under the Table and Drumming*, was very informative. So much has happened in your career since then. Any plans for a new one? Or clinics?

Carter: I've worked on the idea of trying to put together a new instructional video for years. Every year I tell my drum tech, Henry [Luniewski, see sidebar on page 38], "This year is going to be the year!" But we get busy again, and that opportunity gets ripped from under my feet.

A couple of years ago the band was going to take the entire summer off, which was the perfect chance to put it together. I wanted to do something completely different, with audience participation, incorporating several different drummers and other players to show different styles, so the audience would see how we play together as a team on stage. A lot of kids don't understand that. They'll start a band and just get up and start playing. They won't realize that you have to know how not to step on someone's toes, because they could be making a statement, and if you do that it all goes out the window.

But as we were getting that theme rolling, the Matthews Band decided to do a certain number of gigs, which was cool, but I had to shut down the video. Eventually it's going to come out, and it has to soon, because people have been waiting for it for a long time. Clinics too—Jeff Coffin and I were going to do some, and the same thing happened.

MD: When Dave takes a break, you probably want a break too, no?

Carter: Right, but the time that I want to do these clinics is at the end of tours, when I'm feeling the most ready to go. I've got my muscle memory and chops together,

CARTER BEAUFORD

and everything is happening. That's when I want people to see me. The last thing I want is to do a clinic before our regular tour. At home, I practice all the time, but you can't simulate game speed.

MD: How often are you practicing before a tour?

Carter: Every day. And it may not always be on a kit. It could be on a piano, just getting that psychological advantage and hearing notes and rhythms and being in the mix in that fashion. I've also been involved for

about three years with a violinist named Conni Ellisor, and we've been dabbling in orchestral music. I'm playing kit and doing some writing. Conni and I are trying to fuse the rock world with symphonic music and give these kids something to relate to, get them to lend their ear to orchestral-style music. We've done a test run, and kids are snapping and bobbing their heads.

I've also been writing commercial-break music for ESPN for about six years now. Victor Wooten and I are going to do something else together

too. We were so pressed for time before. There's a whole bunch of stuff waiting in the wings, and everybody in the Matthews Band will be incorporated.

MD: One extracurricular thing you did get to work on was Santana's *Supernatural* record.

Carter: Dave and I were working with Carlos at Electric Lady Studios on this one tune, and it was escalating and getting more intense, with percussionists Karl Perazzo and Raul Rekow, and Benny Rietveld on bass. It was unbelievable. It was starting to take off, and as we got to the end Carlos said to keep going. So we went into another section off the top of everyone's head. It was kicking so hard that Carlos starting screaming and jumping up and down. We finished and looked at each other, like, "What the hell was *that*?" It was almost like something had touched each one of us. Clive Davis was there, recognizing what was going on. Carlos said that Jimi Hendrix just walked into the room, and I believed it! It felt like someone just gave us that vibe and we all went off. I was playing licks I'd never played before, like, "Where is this coming from?" It was crazy!

MD: Licks you've never played before? I want to hear that stuff!

Carter: [laughs] Yeah!

OLDIES AND GOODIES

MD: What's playing on the bus nowadays?

Carter: I listen to cats like Dave Weckl and Dennis Chambers, who are my idols, *all* the time. When I'm sitting on the bus getting ready for a show, I adore that stuff, I live for it. And that's what I'm trying to do on stage, incorporating that style or feel into a tune, just to make it not sound so much like a rock thing, so we wouldn't be pigeonholed. When we came out years ago, people were always trying to categorize our sound. Nobody could really figure it out, because each of us was coming from a different musical background, and we fused all that together and came up with this thing that you couldn't label. Eventually people just called it rock.

MD: So where does the band go from here?



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CARTER BEAUFORD



Carter: We're just riding this wave. People put us into the jam-band category because of our crowd. Kid Rock was telling me once to have him at our show so he could make some of that "hippie money." [laughs] I guess he was thinking it was more of a Grateful Dead kind of thing, and I hear that a lot. And that's mainly due to the solos and the improvisation. And sometimes that conversation we're having can get lengthy. People just have to put an identifier on everything.

MD: You throw out sticks to the crowd before and after encores. It's to the point where signs are raised that read "Stick Me Carter," and your tech is feeding you more and more *unused* sticks that you distribute to lucky concertgoers.

Carter: It's an old-school thing. That comes from seeing concerts way back, but those guys were throwing out their broken sticks. In the beginning I'd throw out two or three pairs of frayed sticks, and then I'd walk off stage. Then I wanted to give people something physical to take home with them, more than

just a musical memory. So if I picked you out, it was something I noticed about you during the show that was really cool—maybe your sign, or I saw you letting someone have your seat. It's gotten a little out of hand now! When I see the younger kid on Dad's shoulders, I'll give them a complete pair.

MD: The drum seat in this band is pretty demanding, but your skills haven't fallen off one bit. As you get older, though, do you ever wonder how long you can keep doing this? You're not exactly in the back playing "Peaceful Easy Feeling."

Carter: It's high-octane, for sure, but it's good for the ticker. I work out before the shows, then do a three-and-a-half-hour concert where I leave everything on that stage. Nothing's guaranteed, but all we can do is our best. I try to eat right. I want to play forever. There's no stopping for me. A lot of drummers played into their later years—Elvin Jones, Max Roach—and they were still killing it. I want to do that. I want to go as far as I can possibly go, and then some.



BEAUFORD IS LEGACY

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