



Sound Enhanced

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• Wednesday, November 14 • 9:30 P.M. • Evening Concert •

Exploring Loop-Based Electronic Music

BY TONY VERDEROSA

It is always a pleasure for me to perform for enthusiastic percussionists at PASIC. I was especially excited when I found out that this year's New Music/Research Day theme was electronic music and percussion. During my Wednesday evening concert, I will be performing material from my new videos and CD releases. The music is best described as a crossbreed of Techno/Drum'n'Bass and jazz.

I will begin the evening with some solo electronic percussion compositions to establish the role of the drumset in the evening's performance. During the course of the concert I will introduce some extremely innovative jazz and electronic musicians into the mix.

I have spent the past seven years exploring loop-based electronic music. I was initially drawn to "underground" dance music because of a growing dissatisfaction with the state of contemporary jazz. In the electronic community, I found a number of artists who were exploring radical new ideas with respect to music production, sound design, composition, and live performance. My Techno/Drum'n'Bass influences were artists and groups such as Underworld, The Orb, Goldie, Cold Cut, Talvin Singh, Amon Tobin, SquarePusher, the Chemical Brothers, and Photek.

Although I enjoyed listening to those artists on CD, sometimes their live stage shows lacked vitality because the sounds were trapped inside vinyl records and/or computer sequencers. That precious element of human error—or human "feel"—was conspicuously absent.

When I began creating new electronic compositions, my first instinct was to use a set of electronic drums (supplemented by some acoustic drums and cymbals) and a digital sampler. I became obsessed with finding new ways to create electronic music on stage. It has inspired me to develop new electronic and acoustic drumming techniques. I have also adopted the idea that sound design and computer music production are as important to modern drummers as the basic rudiments.

THE DJ DRUMMER CONCEPT

The basic premise of my DJ Drummer concept is as follows: The sounds captured on a vinyl record or CD are "trapped" and not freely accessible for re-mixing and improvising live on stage. By extracting each sound element (e.g., the bass sound, voice samples, Jungle loops, loop fragments, chord voicings, vo-

cal harmonies, etc.) and placing them on individual electronic drumpads, I can perform a live remix in a truly improvisational setting.

Improvisation has always been the biggest obstacle for electronic bands trying to play live on stage. Most of the time the tracks are "played" from a CD player or DAT machine on stage and the musicians play on top of the prerecorded music. This can be very limiting and confining because if the audience is really grooving on a certain section of the music, when the tape or CD is ready to move on to the next section, you have no choice but to move with it. This is often the case when playing with sequencers on stage as well, unless someone in the band has a designated role to control the computer sequencer "on cue."

My system includes an electronic drumset, a digital sampler, a synthesizer module (that sometimes doubles as a Vocoder), and a small mixer. I also like to incorporate acoustic drums and cymbals into the mix, as I did in my new Hal Leonard video series *Live Electronic Music*

Performance, Volumes 1 and 2 and my *Live in NYC* concert video.

I monitor everything on stage through a pair of headphones; I rarely use stage monitors. The drum module helps me translate all the grooves and stickings into MIDI data, which is then sent on to the digital sampler and synthesizer to produce the final sound. Everything is played in "real time."

It is a huge commitment in time and energy to pro-

duce the sounds that I achieve live on stage and on records. I have to be extremely well versed in computer music software, sound design, sampling, record producing, composition, electronic drumming, and traditional drumming to make it all work.

Software functions inside my sampler and drum module allow me to control each sound element from the drumpads and foot pedals. I can initiate a pitch-bend function that allows me to slow the tempo of a groove down to a complete stop by assigning this to my hi-hat continuous-controller pedal. I often assign different filter settings to various sounds in my sampler so that my sounds respond differently according to velocity. In this way I can open and close filters depending on how hard I play each sound sample or loop.

I can also play bass lines with my right foot by cycling through multiple MIDI notes assigned to trigger my synthe-



sizer each time I press down on the bass drum foot pedal. Sound effects, long spoken-word segments, and keyboard harmonies can also be triggered live from the drumpads or acoustic drums with triggers.

Some of the techniques I will use on the concert include:

1. Sampling and "slicing" Drum'n'Bass/Techno grooves into smaller components called "loop fragments," which I then trigger from pads to create live remixes of the original loop.
2. Voice-activated drum composition. I will be singing into a microphone that is plugged into the front of an Mu100R synthesizer/Vocoder. The Mu100R synth receives the pitch information via MIDI as I trigger MIDI notes from the electronic drum pads. The drums do not make any sounds at all unless I send a voice signal through the synth module and activate the pitch data via MIDI. The exact pitches are determined by the MIDI note settings I trigger from the drum module.
3. Using a "hold" mode to loop a guitar, bass, or percussion part continuously while I play acoustic and electronic grooves over the top.
4. Recreating electronic-based drum loops and breakbeats using acoustic drums and my signature Sabian VFX cymbals.

Of course, all of the elements I used earlier in my career such as chord structures, melodies, and bass lines are still in the mix. I always strive to bring a "jazz sensibility" and a live, improvisational quality to loop-based Techno music.

Here are samples of three drum grooves I use for a tune called "Trillium," which I plan to perform at PASIC. In the Members Only section of the PAS Web site, you can hear an excerpt from "Trillium" in MP3 format, along with three other short excerpts that represent my work.

Performing and recreating loop-based music represents a new art form for drummers. The future belongs to musicians and bands that can learn how to make Techno and all forms of electronic music come to life on stage without relying solely on vinyl records and computers. I hope that this concert inspires some of you to become part of this new movement in music. I am proud to be presenting this concert at PASIC 2001 and I hope to see you there!

Tony Verderosa aka VFX is a New York City-based composer and producer who specializes in Techno music. He frequently tours in Europe, and he is also active as a composer and producer of music for TV commercials (writing for JSM), supplying music for such companies and products as Miller beer, Doc Otis, Sony and Twix. He has released three videos through Hal Leonard Corporation, and is about to release three book/CD packages dealing with Techno music and drumming through Hal Leonard as well. He has also just released a new solo CD titled *VFX Vol. 2*, and his VFX sample CDs are available at Pocketfuel.com. He is also featured with Moby and other Techno artists at www.Mixman.com. For more information on Verderosa, visit his Web site: www.vfxtv.net

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