

ous genres of music, who the other key players were, what they contributed, and, at various points, something about the musicians and the styles of music they worked with. It is in the latter area that I was most disappointed. While an incredible number of artist and album names are referred to in the book and the context in which they were recorded is often explained, very little is actually said about the music on any of these albums other than it was “wonderful” or it would have been lost if it had not been recorded and released by Rounder. Perhaps understandably, the book is, at root, a *history* of a company that mainly *dealt with music* (Rounder also had a book division). It is not a history that tells us much about any of the *actual music* that the company recorded.

That aside, Nowlin is a good writer who not only has written the history of Rounder based on his own memories but has interviewed (often by email) and quotes at length many of the other major protagonists in the company’s story. He also quotes from numerous press releases, articles and interviews printed in newspapers, music magazines, and industry trade papers published over the 50-year history of the company.

There has been one earlier book on Rounder. In 2008, Michael Scully published his doctoral thesis, *The Never-Ending Revival: Rounder Records and the Folk Alliance*. While Scully’s manuscript contained much important information, it was not a very engaging read. Nowlin’s *Vinyl Ventures: My Fifty Years of Rounder Records* has superseded Scully’s work if one is interested in the history and impact that Rounder Records has had on our sense and knowledge of a variety of roots musics. ❁

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The past decade has seen a tremendous growth in scholarship about the drum kit. From Gareth Dylan Smith’s *I Drum, Therefore I Am* (2013) and Bill Bruford’s *Uncharted: Creativity and the Expert Drummer* (2018) to Mandy Smith’s dissertation “‘Primitive’ Bodies, Virtuositic Bodies: Narrative, Affect, and Meaning in Rock Drumming” (2020) and now these two books, *Kick It* and *The Cambridge Companion to the Drum Kit*, a remarkable body of literature has arisen in a relatively short amount of time around one of the most central components of popular music. To say that this attention is long overdue is a vast understatement. But why has it taken so long?

For starters, drummers have long been visually, if not audibly, obscured. Hidden behind the frontline instruments of the jazz ensemble and placed at the rear

of the arena rock stage, they have been situated in a naturally marginalized position. They have also been unfairly stereotyped as “non-musicians,” noisily banging away at a kit like Animal on the Muppet Show. Perhaps even worse, their contributions have long been devalued, considered as insignificant and utterly replaceable as the rotating cast of Spinal Tap’s fictional drummers. As Matt Brennan points out in *Kick It*, even the legendary Keith Moon and John Bonham suffered from the low self-esteem of being “just drummers” in ways that very likely contributed to their self-destructive behaviour and tragic early deaths.

Brennan’s book and the *Cambridge Companion* then both stand as crucial interventions, not only against the steady stream of well-worn drummer jokes but as strong advocates for the drum kit as an object of rigorous and serious academic study. In this regard, Brennan’s book, especially, is a towering achievement. Like the drum kit itself, with its ingenious combination of cymbals, drums, pedals, and accessories, *Kick It* is an equally inventive work of synthesis — one that draws from a large variety of primary and scholarly sources to fashion a compelling, multi-dimensional narrative of the drum kit’s fascinating social history. The amount of material that Brennan consults, ranging from memoirs, biographies, and organology to instructional manuals, trade publications, archival newspapers, and catalog advertisements is simply staggering. And the resultant story that he weaves is rich with fascinating details.

For me, part of the pleasure of reading through *Kick It* was simply learning about the specific origins and meanings of familiar drum kit terminology that I

had never pondered before. As Brennan reveals, for example, the label of “trap kit,” often used interchangeably with drum kit, most likely derives from the Victorian term “trappings,” which alludes to all the objects (triangles, cymbals, woodblocks, etc.) that a drummer was expected to play as part of their ever-expanding kit. Drawing from Gerry Paton’s research, Brennan also explains that the use of wire brushes in place of drumsticks can be traced back to African American barbers and shoe-shiners who used whisk brooms to rhythmically brush down their customers. There are many more such revelations throughout the book’s pages.

But *Kick It* is much more than just a study aimed to delight drummers like myself about the history of their chosen instrument. At every turn, Brennan is careful to contextualize the drum kit for a wider readership and situate the instrument’s developments and meanings as part of a larger, more sweeping history of Anglo-American popular music styles stretching from roughly the late 19th century to today. This covers everything from the emergence of ragtime, jazz, vaudeville, and swing to rock’n’roll, rock, and hip hop. Of all these musical styles, it is jazz that first truly elevated the drum kit, for it was here that audiences first associated the instrument with the music’s infectious rhythmic pulses and corresponding bodily dance motions. “If jazz was a motor car, the drum kit was undoubtedly its engine” (86).

The book is organized chronologically, which allows Brennan not only to present the drum kit as part of popular music’s linearly developing history, but also to trace the instrument as part of an evolving array of technological and industrial forces. As

Brennan explains, “the development of the drum kit neatly mirrors the development of industrial capitalism” (207). Thus, he gives space not only to the influential drummers who helped shape the drum kit’s performance practices (Baby Dodds, Gene Krupa, Earl Palmer, and others), but also the entrepreneurs and their companies (Ludwig, Slingerland, Gretsch, Zildjian, and more) who often worked in tandem with these drummers to forward the drum kit’s progress.

On top of this chronological history, Brennan adds a second structural layer that introduces six typologies, one chapter at a time — clever drummers, noisy drummers, studious drummers, creative drummers, working drummers, indispensable drummers — designed to make sense of how drummer roles have changed over time. These typologies, which act as our guide to the drum kit’s shifting social and cultural meanings, allow the book’s narrative trajectory to cohere in a persuasive and logical manner and are worth considering in some detail.

The clever drummer, as Brennan describes, is a constant tinkerer and inventor, always seeking to make drumming a more efficient labour and space-saving pursuit, as exemplified by the ingenious creation of the bass drum pedal in the 19th century. This exceptionally positive and evolutionary view of the drummer was upended in the 1910s and 1920s, however, as complaints surfaced about noisy drummers and their supposed assaults on musical decency. Brennan shows how this outrage over noise was often directly linked to white Eurocentric cultural and social fears over “Others,” specifically the African American performers associated with the scandalizing ragtime dances and

hot jazz rhythms of the era, or the wave of East Asian immigrants whose Chinese cymbals, gongs, and tom-toms now regularly found their ways into drum kits.

One way to counteract the negative associations surrounding the drum kit was through professionalizing drumming itself. Brennan’s typology of studious drumming details the rise of periodicals and manuals that focused on drum technique and training, intended to codify drumming as a decisively musically skilled occupation. It helped that this push towards respectability corresponded in the 1930s with the rise of star drummers such as Chick Webb, who created his infectious rhythms through studying the movements of the swing dancers on the ballroom floor. This opened the gateway for what Brennan labels creative drumming and beboppers such as Kenny Clarke who reconfigured the jazz drummer’s role, pushing their presence further into the foreground. By the time rock’n’roll arrived, the creative drummer had become so central to the sound of modern popular music that a band like the Beatles were encouraged to fire Pete Best and recruit a professional quality drummer, securing Ringo Starr as the final piece of their sonic puzzle.

In his discussion of the 1960s, Brennan turns to working drummers to showcase the impact of famed studio and session players such as Hal Blaine and Al Jackson. He stretches this designation of drumming as work much further, however, when he suggests that even the star drummers who emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s with bands like The Who, Led Zeppelin, and Rush assumed certain traits that could be considered as requisite “job characteristics.” Here, borrowing from Mandy Smith’s scholarship, he describes

drummers as falling within the categories of *primal*, *powerful*, *virtuosic*, and *exhibitionist*, the last of these perhaps best exemplified by Tommy Lee of Mötley Crüe riding on an actual roller coaster during his drum solo.

The book's closing chapter on indispensable drummers brings us from the 1980s all the way to contemporary practices, where we are increasingly more likely to hear the approximated digital sound of a drum kit rather than the actual instrument itself. If the narrative that Brennan weaves throughout *Kick It* is indeed one partly rooted in an eternal quest for labour and space saving efficiency, then the incredible proliferation of drum machines, samplers, and Digital Audio Workstations seems like a truly fitting conclusion to the drum kit's particular story. Drumming for many has become more a matter of punching buttons to achieve a sound ideal rather than "kicking it" or "hitting it." As Brennan writes, "we are all drummers now" (312).

Given that Brennan is also one of three editors for *The Cambridge Companion to the Drum Kit*, it is unsurprising to find some overlap between its contents and those of *Kick It*. In Brennan's own contributed chapter to *The Companion* on the historiography of the drum kit, for example, he takes up and expands upon a term that he introduces in the closing pages of *Kick It*: the "drumscape." He proposes the notion of the drumscape as one similar to widely circulating terminology like "soundscape" and "mediascape," as a way of understanding the complex web of perspectives and forces that shape our experience of the drum kit. Through the drumscape, he suggests, one can view the drum kit in four overlapping yet distinct

ways: as a *technology*, an *ideological object*, a *material object*, and a *social relationship*.

While the *Cambridge Companion* divides its 18 chapters into four sections with their own entirely sensible criteria ("Histories of the Drum Kit"; "Analysing the Drum Kit in Performance"; "Learning, Teaching, and Leading on the Drum Kit"; "Drumming Bodies, Meaning, and Identity"), one can also imagine how the book's contents might be differently organized along the drumscape's four perspectives. And in recognition of Brennan's proposed theoretical model, this is precisely how I would like to consider the various chapters of the *Cambridge Companion*.

At its root, the drum kit, as a *technology*, is a composite of movable parts the drummer arranges to suit their performing needs. This technological dimension is especially thrown into relief when drummers conceive of the kit in ways that noticeably deviate from what could be considered a typical set up. In a chapter on the incorporation of drum kits into contemporary classical music, for example, Ben Reimer looks at how composers have reimagined the drum kit in striking timbral and textural ways that require novel spatial solutions, such as in Nicole Lizée's *Ringer*, which substitutes a glockenspiel for the snare drum. On a different note, adam patrick bell and Cornel Hrisca-Munn's chapter addresses the drum kit's adaptability to disabled musicians. Hrisca-Munn, an accomplished drummer, who self-identifies as "multi-limb deficient," describes how he has ergonomically configured his kit to fit his particular physical approach. As the authors point out, this, of course, is something that *all* drummers do — we make adjustments. But it also highlights how the drum kit's specific modular tech-

nology makes it especially accessible to people with disabilities, in ways that most other instruments are not.

As an *ideological object*, the drum kit is enmeshed within different ideas and values that ultimately contribute to its specific cultural meanings. Steven Baur's illuminating chapter on the cultural history of the backbeat, for example, reveals how this most familiar of rhythmic accent patterns emerged both from antebellum African American responses to slavery and incarceration (such as prison camp labour songs) and Pentecostal worship practices before eventually coming to define the controversial sound of the rock'n'roll "big beat." Elsewhere, two chapters describe various social media efforts to combat the entrenched ideology of drumming as a masculinized musical endeavour. Margaret MacAulay and Vincent Andrisani consider women's participation in Drumming Instagram and Nat Grant provides a history of the blog *Hey Drums* and its ongoing mission to document "the work and experiences of Australian female and gender diverse drummers" (235). Given the increased visibility that female drummers have recently enjoyed backing such high-profile pop stars as Lizzo, Olivia Rodrigo, and Harry Styles on stage, one can hope that the drum kit's prohibitively masculine domain is on its way to being dismantled.

Drum kits are, of course, also *material objects* with certain physical and sonic properties, and their materiality is often tied to the performing practices associated with specific genres. In a chapter on "historically informed jazz performance," Paul Archibald examines the analog recorded history of early jazz in the 1910s and 1920s, and how the drum kit's loudness and its tendency to disrupt the balance

of the recording levels forced drummers to alter their material approach, using dampeners, switching to brushes, playing woodblocks — anything "to avoid saturating the recording horn" (29). Sometimes they simply had to sit out the recording session altogether. In a chapter on Americana music, Daniel Akira Stadnicki takes a close look at the celebrated drummer Jay Bellerose, whose use of various shakes and rattles — deploying a "fistful of maracas, mounted tambourines, or tying bells and shakers to his left leg" (119) — has created a distinctive materiality associated with an Americana aesthetic.

Lastly, there are the *social relationships* of drumming, a motif that is central to many chapters in the *Companion*. In their chapter on the experience of recording studios, Brett Lashua and Paul Thompson reveal how drummers often assume a subservient or isolated social role outside the main creative process. Often the first musician to lay down a track, drummers are then reduced to observers for the rest of the session. On the other hand, in a chapter on musical ensembles as social organizations, Bill Bruford explains how drummers can often assume roles as natural leaders: "guiding, influencing, directing, or otherwise controlling the music actions of a group of performers" (181). These structures of power can function as a top-down process, or more ideally as a matter of "giving and receiving" between musicians. Part of leadership can also involve mentoring, and this is the subject of a fascinating chapter by Joseph Michael Pignato drawn from interviews with Jack DeJohnette and Terri Lynne Carrington, who describe the crucial social interactions with other jazz drummers and musicians and how the advice that they

received helped shape their musical pathways.

Beyond these considerations of the drumscape, part of what is so striking about the *Cambridge Companion* is the plurality of approaches that the authors take to their subjects. There are chapters from music educators that attend to drum kit instruction, pedagogy, and learning. There are authors who view drumming through a philosophical lens as an embodied practice. And there is a heavily analytical chapter by the music theorist Scott Hanenberg on the cycles of patterns in “complex meters and irregular grooves” that had me scrambling to my Pixies catalog to see where many of their songs fit (if I’m applying the models correctly, I believe they are particularly fond of “punctuated irregular cycles”). There are also chapters that extend beyond the Anglosphere to provide valuable stylistic histories of the drum kit in Brazil and Colombia.

Taken as a whole, *The Cambridge Companion to the Drum Kit* is commendably diverse in its contents, and combined with Brennan’s *Kick It*, the two books provide an excellent overview of the burgeoning academic area of drum studies. Each book demonstrates, in informative and enlightening ways, the crucial place of the drum kit in popular music’s various histories. As practitioners and scholars probe further into the drum kit’s different musical, cultural, and social meanings, they can thank *Kick It* and *The Cambridge Companion* for taking drumming seriously and ensuring that the drum kit begins to receive the attention and consideration it has long deserved. 🍀

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The word “global” in juxtaposition with musicology (as in the subtitle of the book under review) has two divergent associations: it could refer to the study of Western art music (WAM) beyond Europe’s borders, or it could signal recent efforts to decentre WAM in music education and scholarship. Colonialism rears its head in either case: rather obviously so in the global spread of WAM, but paradoxically also in attempts to decentre WAM, for if a global music history is written *by* and *for* the West, such a project runs the risk of simply perpetuating colonialism. Martin Stokes has noted the difficulties in coming to terms with the colonialist legacies of Western music scholarship (from *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* to sound studies) as we attempt to forge a “global academic