

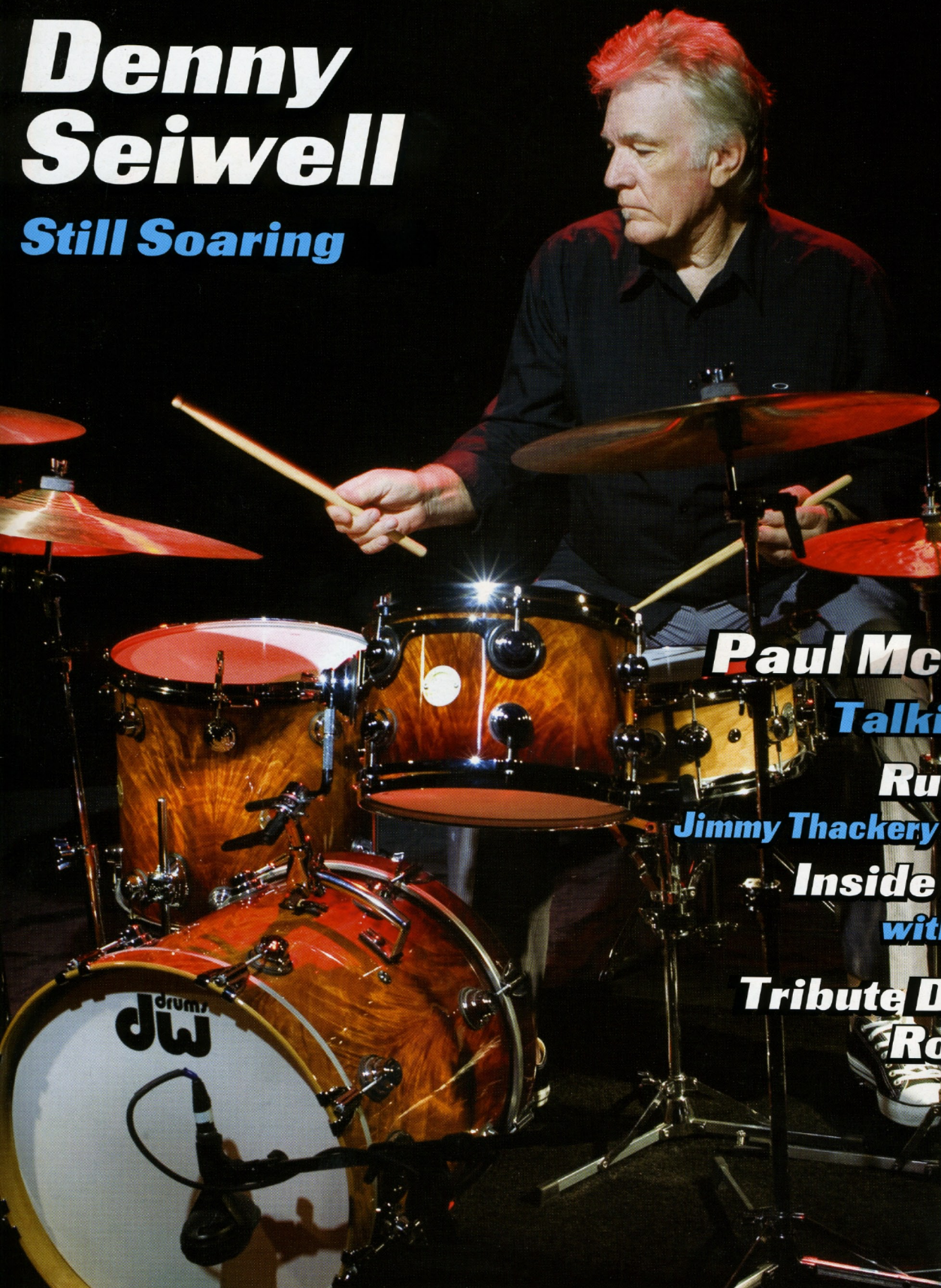
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Tribute Drummers
Roundtable

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The Tribute Drummers Round Table

Interview by Chris Brady
Transcribed by Mike Chiaravalloti
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It's been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Nowhere is this statement truer than in the music business, and especially in the world of tribute bands. Upon hearing the words "tribute band", some people turn a deaf ear and don't take these bands serious. If you're one of those people, you need to take a second look and listen.

Classic Drummer recently sat down with the drummers from four very successful tribute bands to discuss what it takes to do these shows. The bands are not merely putting a new spin on "cover band" by calling it a tribute band; they truly study the music and have taken it to a level it has never been before. Tribute bands have become a very serious business, spawning not only some great bands, but record labels with legendary record producers behind the board. One of these bands even has the endorsement of rock legend Jimmy Page.

This is the conversation that went on between Classic Drummer and Rolo Sandoval of "The Fab Four", Jim Kersey of "Led Zepagain", Marty Brumer of "Which One's Pink", Bart Robley of "Turn the Page, The Bob Seger Experience", and record producer Michael Vail Blum of Titan Tribute Media.

Classic Drummer: When did you begin playing in your current tribute band and how long have you been with the group?

Bart Robley: I joined The Sam Morrison Band in 2000, but we didn't start as a tribute band. We were working in Vegas when Sam came up with the idea. We already had quite a few Bob Seger songs in our repertoire, and Sam sounds like Seger. That's how the idea started and slowly it evolved into what it is today.

Jim Kersey: I started in October 2001. I was in a band with Swan (lead singer of Led Zeppagain); it was a three-piece band and we had five singers. We had a Mick Jagger, a



Robert Plant, a David Bowie, a Jim Morrison, and a Steve Tyler. Swan's band was already together but he was having problems with the guys, so he picked us up. That's how we got started.

Marty Brumer: My first show with Which One's Pink was August 7th, 1998. I was trying to put a Pink Floyd tribute band together. About that time I got a call from a friend who told me there was already a Pink Floyd tribute band and they needed a drummer. He then told the band about me. I made the audition, and there I was.

Rolo Sandoval: I've been doing Beatles songs forever, almost as long as the Beatles. *(laughs)*. Our current group, "The Fab Four", has been together for 12 years. We were two different groups that joined together.

Classic Drummer: Have you been in any other tribute bands?

BR: The closest thing to that was a band

called "Neil Norman's Cosmic Orchestra". We did all this science fiction music and played at Star Trek conventions. We backed up all the Star Trek actors.

JK: I was in a band called "Peace Frog". It was a Doors tribute band. I wasn't really a big fan of The Doors, but I had a chance of getting in the band.

MB: No, I was never in a tribute band before this one.

RS: I did other tribute bands, but they were all Beatles tributes.

Classic Drummer: Were you always fans of the bands you are covering?

JK: I've always been a big Bonzo fan. I was in junior high, and the first Zeppelin album came out. All that drumming was so innovative that it changed rock and roll. As a kid I learned Bonzo's stuff and I followed his career.

BR: I was always a Bob Seger fan. I always loved Bob Seger, he's such a prolific



Bart Robley

songwriter. You can listen to his music and almost put yourself in the situation of the song, and I've always liked that.

MB: I grew up listening to Pink Floyd a lot. I was really into Led Zeppelin in those days as well, but when I was in my late teens and early 20's, Pink Floyd was it.

RS: Yeah, who doesn't love the Beatles?

Classic Drummer: How accurately do you

try to recreate the drum parts?

JK: I work at it a lot! I practice and keep on listening, and I transcribe things. I try to be as accurate as possible to the studio records.

MB: I have one of those trigger pad sets and I use them as a practice pad and listen with headphones. I really scrutinize carefully. I try to play the parts as exact as I can.

BR: On some of the Seger stuff those drum parts are so buried in the mix that you can't hear it. I've sat there for hours with a set of headphones just listening

It's been an undertaking, that's for sure.

JK: The bass drum is not really that prominent on some of the Zeppelin tracks, its way back in the mix.

MB: One song in particular, "Us and Them", seemed like it's real sleepy, real easy. But actually there's so much going on in that song on the drums, and you can barely hear it.

RS: It's really tough to hear the kick drum on a lot of stuff because it just got buried. Ron has all these bootlegs, weird things, where it's only the right side, that kind of stuff. And you're able to pick things out.

JK: I try to get close in the tunings. I use the Vistalite kit with the big 26-inch bass drum, with very little muffling. The front head is

tuned a little higher than the batter head to get more of a ring. On the snare drum I use a coated black dot.

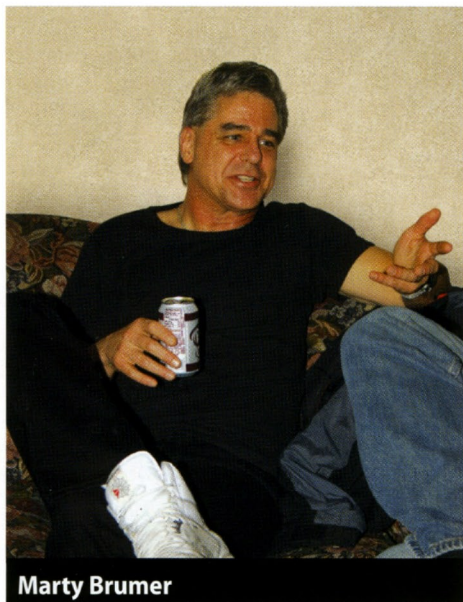
BR: The Seger albums used so many different drummers, that there was really no signature drum sound. I tune my drums the same way; the bottom heads a little higher than the top heads. Live, I usually use a wooden snare drum and just try to make it sound good.

RS: I actually travel with all my own mics, overheads and everything. Every song we do has a different scene; so it has a different sound. I also tune my drums with the bottom head a little tighter than the top just to get that ring.

MB: In the earlier days the recordings weren't so great; Nick Mason's drums really sounded very thin. Then later, on "Dark Side" and "The Wall", they really got a little heavier. I think my drum sound is better than most of the drum sounds on their albums.

Classic Drummer: I have a question for Michael. I know you've recorded a lot of these guys here in the studio. How do you go about trying to recreate the drum sounds? Are there any special mics or techniques you employ?

MB: It's always been a theoretical discussion;



Marty Brumer

are we going to make the drums sound like now, or try to capture something similar to what they did then? We can capture the vibe of what it was, but I don't think we can make it exactly like they did back then. Modern drums are much more balanced sonically. They're built knowing what is going to happen, whereas back in the 60s and 70s, a lot of it was still trial and error. It's a really difficult question for me because when I

was doing a Beatles project or the Zepagain project or even the Floyd stuff, I realized that I probably couldn't capture that exact sound - I don't have the same equipment or mics.

Classic Drummer: Do you guys use the exact type of gear that the original drummers used?

JK: I have a Ludwig Vistalite kit, but I don't use Paiste cymbals, and I don't have a Speed King pedal.

MB: No, they didn't have DW in those days. I go with what I like and what sounds good to me.

BR: I've got a Gretsch kit, and I love the way it sounds. I go with what I like and what I think sounds best. Seger had so many different drummers. It's not like it was with Zeppelin or the Beatles, where you identify with the kit.

RS: All of our gear is pretty much exactly what The Beatles used. I use all Gibraltar hardware. I've been with Paiste for four years. Everybody comes up to me and says Ringo never used Paiste cymbals, but he did in the very beginning.

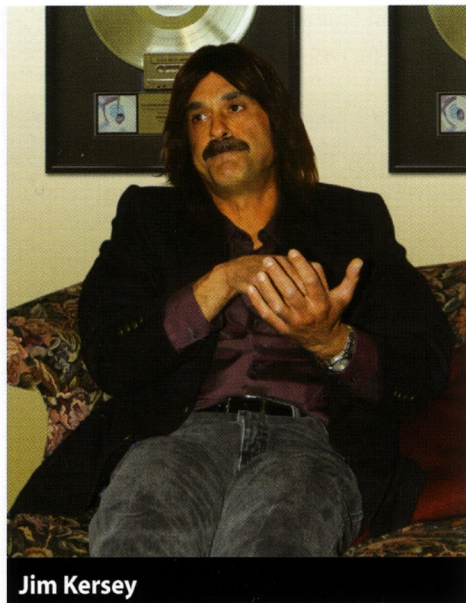
Classic Drummer: Have any members from the original bands seen your shows?

MB: I don't think any of Pink Floyd has seen us. We met a few of them. We got to go to the Nick Mason book signing and have preferential treatment.

RS: We were playing at the House of Blues in Hollywood, and Paul McCartney was in town. The place was sold out and was packed to capacity. A limo pulled up, sat there for about five minutes with the motor running and then it just took off. Security said it was Paul, but the place was super packed. Why would you step into that? I don't blame the guy; I wouldn't do that.

BR: I got in touch with David Teegarden who was a member of the Silver Bullet Band for quite a number of years and played on numerous hits. I told him who I was and what I was doing and how I was getting ready for the second CD. I also sent him a copy of the video from my DVD of Old Time Rock & Roll. He was very complimentary and said he would like to see the charts. He emailed me back and said, "Yeah, they look great."

JK: In 2004, Jimmy Page was in town for the NAMM show. We were playing and he showed up. We got to meet him afterwards. He complemented us, and he really liked what we were doing. He was like a



Jim Kersey

proud father.

Classic Drummer: Some of these drummers have pretty identifiable grooves and feels. How difficult is it to emulate them?

JK: It's an ongoing process. I think the more I play, the better I get at it. It's been noted that Bonham swung a lot when he played. It's almost right on the edge of swinging versus straight eighths. So you've got to find a happy medium.

RS: Ringo's style is a whole different approach to drumming. It's called buttering the bread - he plays the hi-hat like he's buttering bread. It has a whole different swish sound and it's a weird feel. And Ringo is left-handed, so every time he goes for a fill, he leads with his left hand.

MB: Nick Mason's playing can be difficult because a lot of those tempos are so slow. Slow is hard. "Us and Them" is one of the hardest songs to play. I'm a little bit more in control of it now.

Classic Drummer: Are there particular songs that are tough to re-create or get the right vibe?

BR: For me, it's "Hollywood Nights". There are actually two drum parts on the recording. David Teegarden went in and recorded one drum part. He went back the next day and said he had an idea, and recorded another part for the song. So they put those two parts together. No matter how deep I dig I can't figure what the two different parts are; they sound like one.

JK: "Fool In the Rain" is like a Bernard Purdie thing. But if you listen to "Heartbreaker", and listen to the right channel, he's doing a sixteenth note hi-hat thing. And then on the left, it's more like a straight-ahead eighth note thing, and they combine it.

RS: One of the most difficult songs that I have to play is "Strawberry Fields". There are so many overdubs on that song. I'm riding on the floor tom, playing a maraca with my left hand, and doing licks with my right hand. That's how the song starts off, then I drop the maraca and go to the floor tom and start playing all those licks.

Classic Drummer: Did you find yourselves changing or developing certain techniques to achieve the right sound or feel?

BR: I've been studying a lot of technique with Ralph Humphrey. I find that having good technique just helps me get through the song.

JK: I don't think it's more about technique as it is subdividing, how you subdivide the beat, like subdividing in 6 or 4.

RS: No matter how good you get at it, you're never going to be that guy. I mean, you could be the best in the world doing that, but



Rolo Sandoval

you're still not him.

MB: I would say the same thing. I didn't play like Nick Mason; I was a hard-edge 80s drummer. So it took some work to learn that kind of laid-back feel. I'm still working on it.

BR: I was having trouble with one section of "Her Strut". I took the chart to Ralph and he listened to it and said this kick drum pattern's wrong. I charted the song and played it a million times and I never heard it, and sure enough, there it was.

Classic Drummer: Do you guys ever get a bit of burnout? How do you keep it fresh?

RS: I think a lot of it has to do with what we've all touched on. I'm always learning something. So it's pretty much new.

JK: I think when you approach it where you have that frame of mind, where you've got to sit down and play it like it's your last gig, then you're going to have a good night. And if you die on the drum kit, you die on the kit.



Left to right: **Chris Brady, Bart Robley, Jim Kersey, Michael Vail Blum, Rolo Sandoval, Marty Brumer**

BR: That's what Tommy Aldridge says, "Every time you play, play like it's your last time." I love everything about being a drummer. I literally am doing something with drums from the time I get up in the morning till the time I go to bed.

MB: The big crowds help. Some people come up to me after a show and they shake my hand and say thank you for being here. It's a big event, not just a set of songs. When the people are screaming, cheering and singing along, it just gives you a good feeling.

Classic Drummer: You guys have raised the bar. You all do it so well and at such a high level. I could see you guys doing it as long as you are having fun with it and want to do it.

RS: Yeah, we've legitimized it.

JK: I think if you keep the musicianship up and the product good, people pay their money to see it. We're recreating the '77 show with the equipment and the lasers. We might tour the U.S. this year. I think we'll probably be playing at least another five years, minimum.

BR: In our band we're all really good friends. I know it's almost a cliché but we go out on the road and do the things that bands do, and we really dig each other. I think that

almost goes hand-in-hand with being a good musician. You've got to be able to live with the people out on the road.

RS: You have to get along, because if you don't, being good doesn't matter.

MB: I could see this band going for a very long time. There are only so many Floyd albums, but somehow, magically, we make it work. I have two other things to say quickly. First of all, good luck to all of us on whatever we do. Secondly and most importantly, thank you all for doing this interview; it took a lot of doing.

