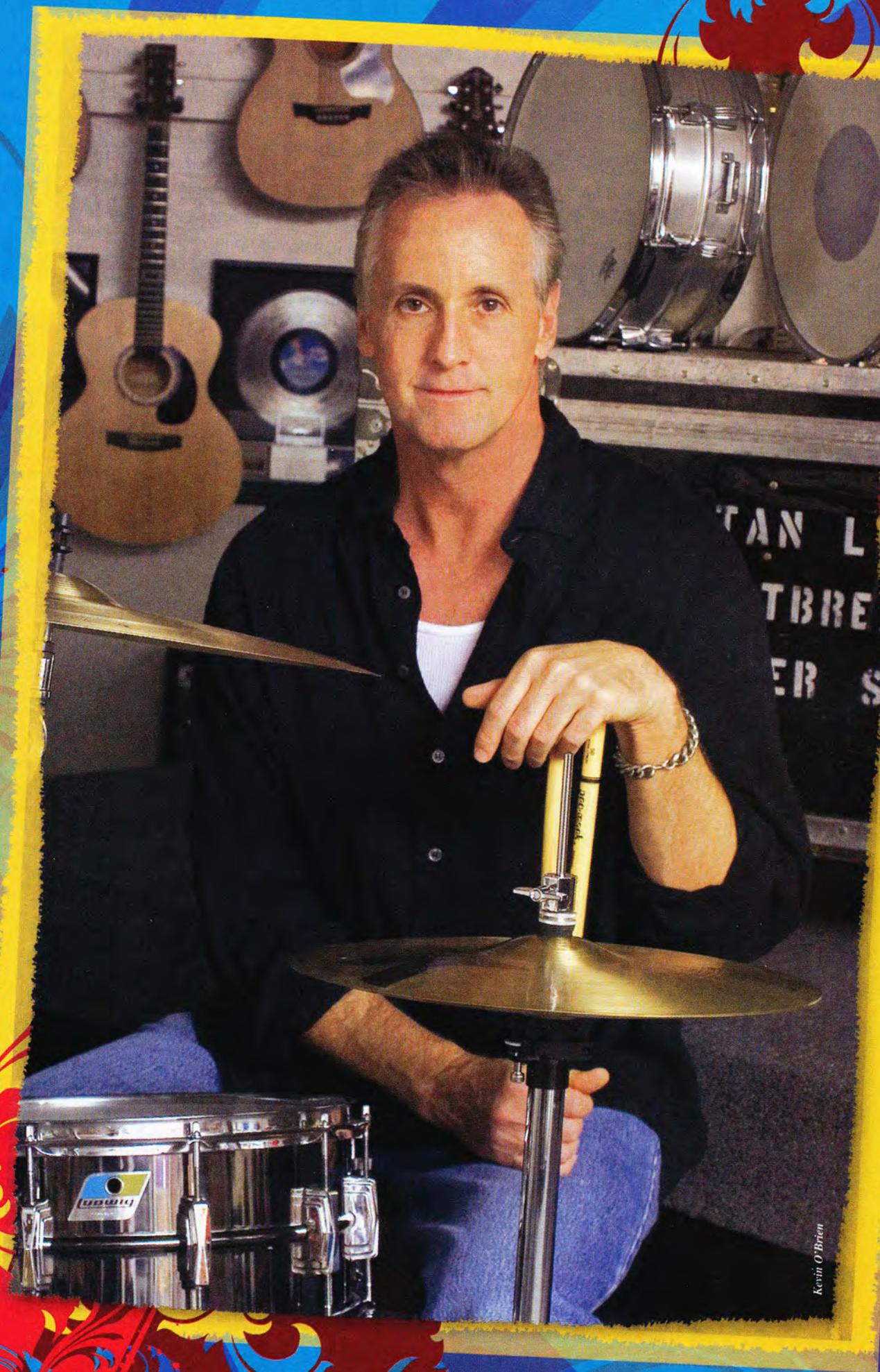


A HEARTBREAKER'S WORK OF STAGGERING GENIUS  
**BEHIND THE MUSIC, BEHIND THE SCENES,  
AND BEHIND THE BOARDS WITH**

# STAN LYNCH

by Patrick Berkery

**W**hen Tom Petty was asked to describe original Heartbreakers drummer Stan Lynch in the 2005 book *Conversations With Tom Petty*, the bandleader responded with, "Stan. Now there's a book in itself." Any book about the fifty-two-year-old Lynch would surely be an entertaining, fairly hilarious read. The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame drummer-turned-successful songwriter/producer (for Don Henley, The Eagles, The Mavericks, Ringo Starr, and Tim McGraw, among others) and tree farmer (a gig he describes as part Zen, part holding on for dear life, and not unlike playing with Bob Dylan) is an opinionated, intelligent guy who doesn't mince words or sugarcoat memories.



TAN L  
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Kevin O'Brien

**F**or now, though, this feature on one of rock's most tasteful timekeepers—a true player of “the song”—will do, for there's plenty to discuss with Lynch.

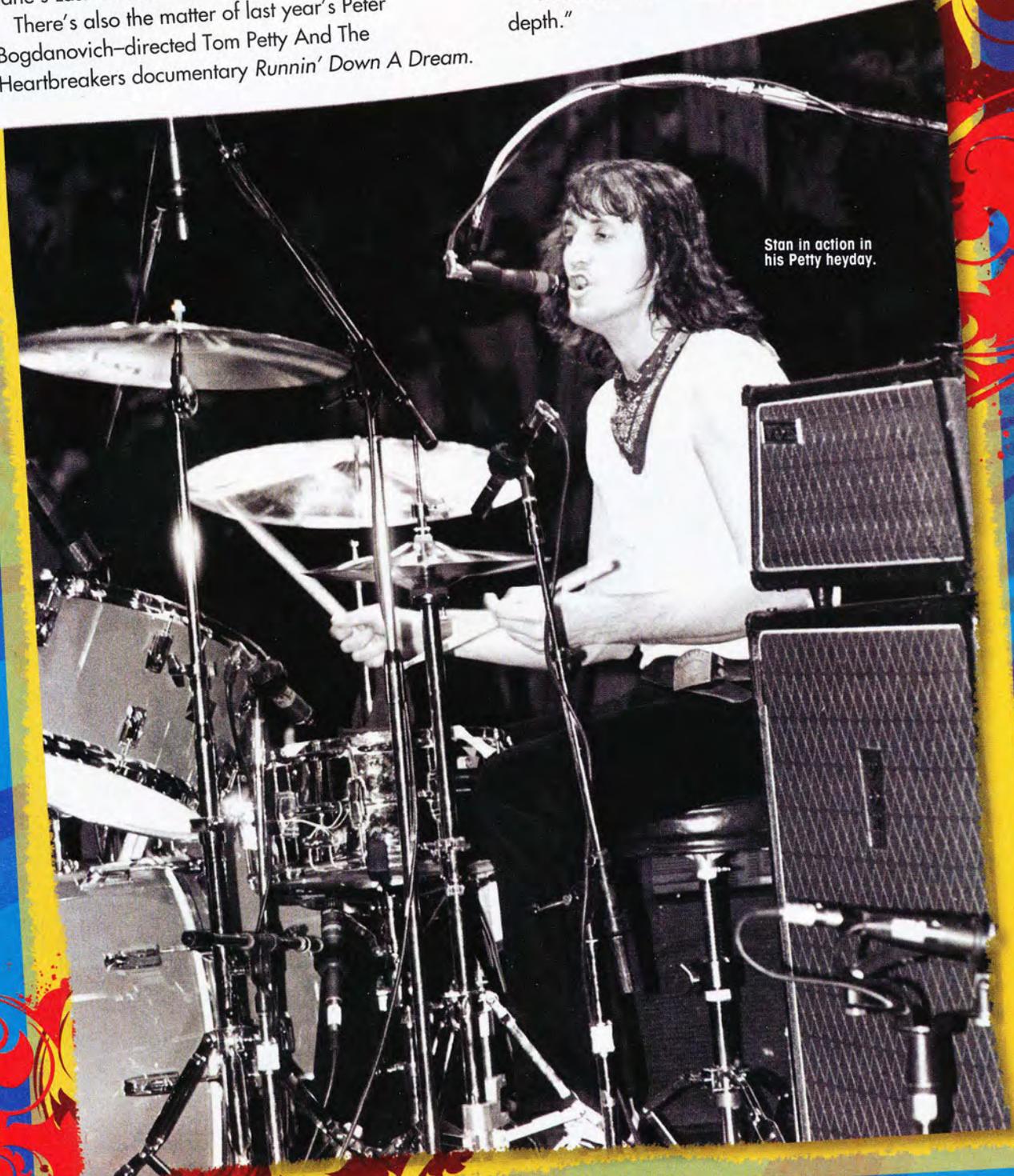
Such as Lynch's understated work on those Petty classics. Oh, my my, oh, hell yes, did Lynch serve those songs well. Just think of “Breakdown”'s slinky pulse, the graceful fills that usher in the heavenly chorus in “Here Comes My Girl,” or the swamp-funk groove of his 1993 Heartbreakers swan song “Mary Jane's Last Dance.”

There's also the matter of last year's Peter Bogdanovich-directed Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers documentary *Runnin' Down A Dream*.

In the warts-and-all film, Lynch's multi-faceted role as steady drummer/class clown/cheerleader/ball breaker/whipping boy was discussed at some length, though his side of the story was represented mostly through older interviews.

“I didn't talk to the Bogdanovich people,” Lynch says. “I just couldn't. It's like a part of my life I've actually...I won't say forgotten, because I actually still dream about it. It comes up in weird ways. But I really had to let go of it or else I would walk around constantly trying to tell people who I used to be.”

“This is the first time I'm talking about it in any depth.”



Stan in action in his Petty heyday.

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**MD:** People love the economy of your playing with The Heartbreakers, and how well you served those songs. That was a fairly enlightened style to have at a relatively

to absorb. So when we went to cut the first demos with Benmont [Tench, Heartbreakers keyboardist], I think I was fairly armed.

**MD:** How was it going from a heavy blues

cally, which was surprising, given that Tom had already worked with guys like Jim Gordon, Leon Russell, and Duck Dunn. The Heartbreakers were more country rock, and I

**“I thought God put me on this earth to play in that band. And it wasn’t until they told me I wasn’t that guy that I believed it.”**

young age. You were twenty when The Heartbreakers formed.

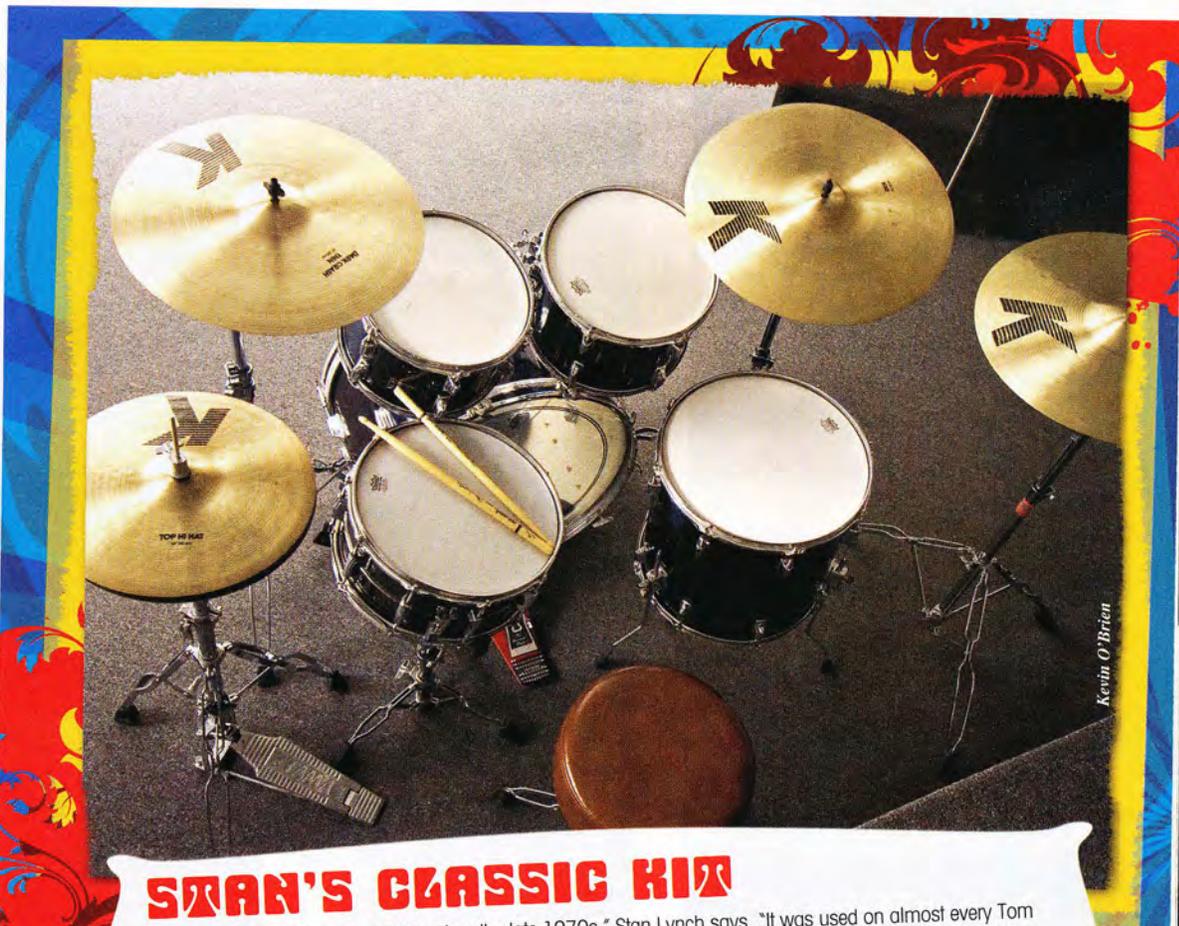
**Stan:** I had a great teacher, Gene Bardo, who kept me on the pad for two years. He really helped me hone my control and my rudiments. I was gigging pretty heavily during high school, working the bars, and my bands had recorded a little bit. So I was learning from the recordings. I got to hear how crummy I was playing. I could pick out my problems a little better. There was a huge discrepancy between what I thought I was doing and what was actually being recorded.

Then when I got to LA, I was working with this great heavy blues band from Texas called Slip Of The Wrist. Their original drummer had played with Stevie Ray Vaughan back in Texas, so that was the lineage. They taught me to really dig in on the hi-hats and snare. They taught me about shuffling. And at my age, that was a lot

situation to Tom’s vibe, which was more song-based?

**Stan:** It seemed a little lightweight, stylisti-

wanted it to fall in a different place. I wanted to be Mott The Hoople. I wanted it to sound big and meaty. And I think they wanted a



## STAN'S CLASSIC KIT

"This is one of my vintage Tama kits, circa the late 1970s," Stan Lynch says. "It was used on almost every Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers session I did, as well as on recordings by Bob Dylan, Jackson Browne, Don Henley, John Mellencamp, Aretha Franklin, The Eurythmics, Brian Wilson, Roger McGuinn, Stevie Nicks, Del Shannon, T-Bone Burnett, The Byrds, Belinda Carlisle, Freedy Johnston, and many others.

"It features a 14x24 kick, 8x12 and 9x13 rack toms, and a 16x16 floor tom. As for the snare drums, at that time I used a 6 1/2x14 Ludwig Black Beauty, 5x14 and 6 1/2x14 Ludwig Supraphonics, and a 5x14 Ludwig Acrolite. Not shown, but included with this kit, were 6x6, 8x8, and 10x14 tom-toms.

"Besides the drums, I have always used Zildjian cymbals, Pro-Mark drumsticks, Remo heads, and DW pedals."



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## STAN LYNCH

pocket that probably was a little more Americana. But that's where it worked. Maybe I was bullish enough to bring something out of them. God knows why that worked. [laughs] In some ways I was probably the exact wrong guy for the band, but the exact right guy.

**MD:** You created such smooth pockets on those early songs, but there were always interesting subtleties like the hi-hat kicks and tom hits on the "&" of 1 in "Breakdown," and the 16th-note hi-hat part in the bridge of "American Girl."

**Stan:** So much of that stuff was instinct and accident—a little bit of both. From the day I was in the band, I thought, "I'm either saving their asses or I'm killing them." I wasn't ever sure, and I don't think they were ever sure. But when it was right, it was right.

**MD:** The Heartbreakers worked with a unique mix of producers over the years. How was it working with an established guy like Denny Cordell [Leon Russell, Joe Cocker, Procol Harum] so early on?

**Stan:** He taught me a lot, sometimes in very abstract ways. I was still young and I didn't really understand what he meant by "groove" and "feel." I remember asking Denny, "What does that mean, can you quantify that?" So he tells me he's taking me to a Bob Marley & The Wailers gig, and he flips me the keys to his Ferrari. As we're driving, he's making me haul ass, and he says, "Stanley, driving a Ferrari fast, that's what a groove feels like." At the gig, Marley had the place hypnotized. Someone's passing a joint through the balcony and Denny says, "That's what a feel is." He was just being helpful in his very '70s way. Saying, "These are the things that feel incredibly good, that can't be duplicated. You'll know it when you know it." Sure enough, we went back to the studio and we got two tracks that night. I was so vibed.

**MD:** Did he offer more specific advice?

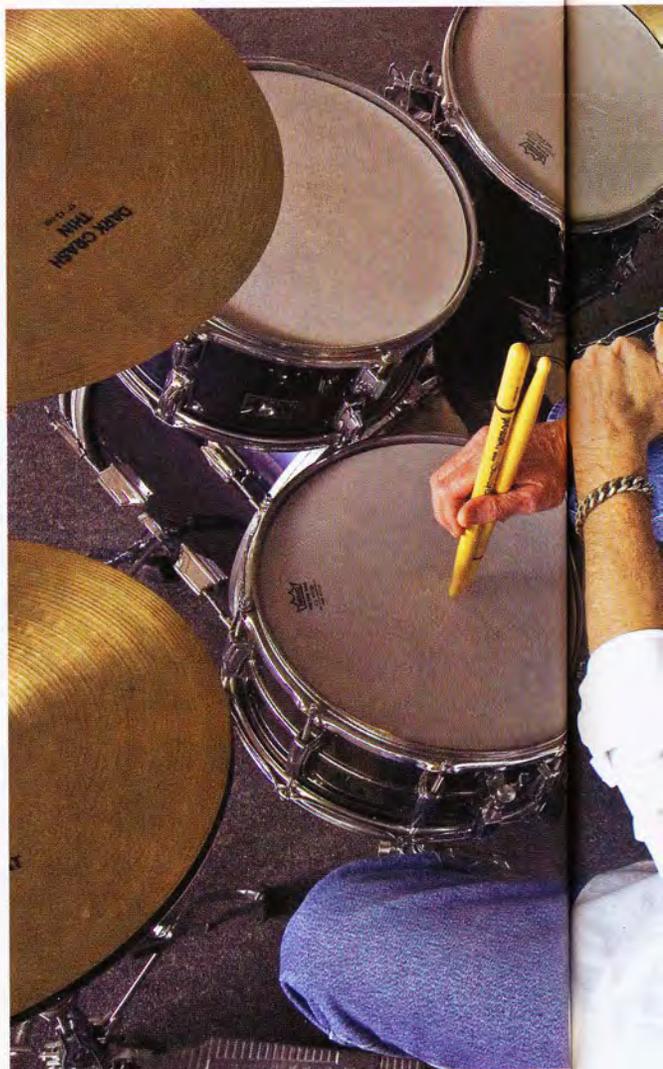
**Stan:** Oh, yeah. Again, in his own way. I remember having a really hard time once on some track. I was playing way too much, trying way too hard. So Denny, in that perfect English accent, he blows a big cloud of smoke and says, "Stan, if you leave all that shit behind and just play the groove, they'll always misinterpret

you as tasteful." That was brilliant. [laughs]

Denny had that ability as a producer to make you want to do great things. He'd show you great things and go, "That's what you should do." And you would. Instinctively, you'd go, "Hell, if they can do it, I can do it. Or I'll do a version of it." That's what great producers do. They take you there without lecturing you. They don't scare you. He made me believe I was exactly the right guy.

**MD:** That seems pretty much the opposite of your relationship with Jimmy Iovine.

**Stan:** In Jimmy's defense, he was under a lot of pressure. He was hired as a hit producer to make hits. He wasn't there to listen to my opinion. In retrospect, I can see that. At the time, I thought, "Man, you're just a drag, you can't help me." I would ask him about a bass drum pattern: "Should it be four-on-the-floor? Anything you'd like me to try?" And he would just wave me off. His quote was, "I don't know, Stan, it's just a million miles away." Again, he was hired to make hits. So, really, the only guy he had to deal with was Tom. I was way down



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**"I'm a guy who always wanted to be in a band. And when it all went away, I was lost. I sat down at the drums and didn't know whether to cry or barf."**

the food chain as far as Jimmy was concerned.

On the list of fifty things, I was fifty-one.

**MD:** By all accounts, a lot of very draining work went into those Iovine records, especially *Damn The Torpedoes*.

**Stan:** It was harder than it needed to be. We never did pre-production. So I'd hear the song acoustically, and then I'd get a shot at it.

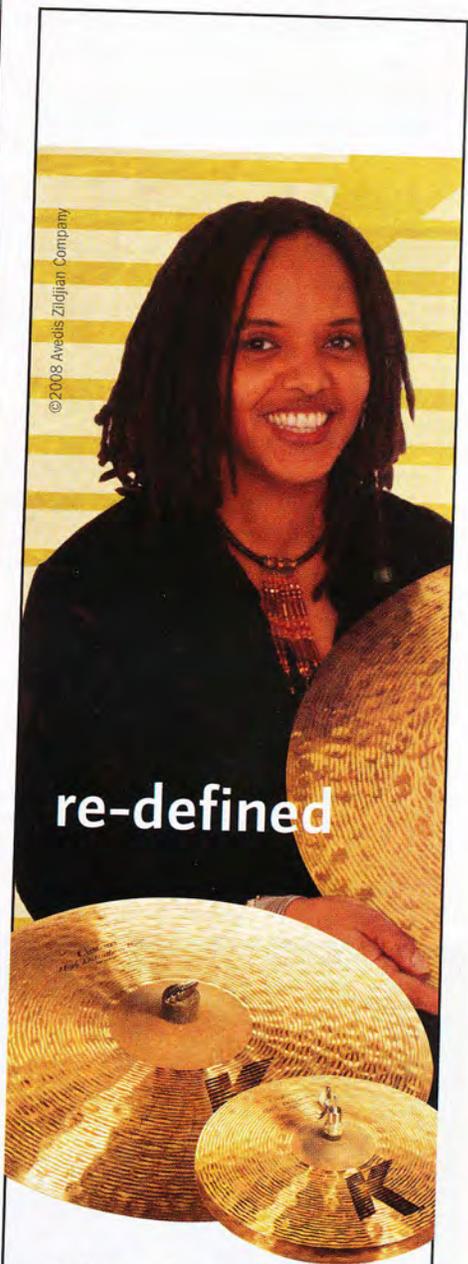
Didn't even get five minutes to work something up.

**MD:** Wouldn't you do a run-through with the full band?

**Stan:** Barely. It'd be like, "Eh, let's just go." Nobody ever talked about it. It was never a demonstrative bunch. [laughs] There was never a great deal of joy about tracking drums.



Kevin O'Brien



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## STAN LYNCH

I had to overcome it, like, "God, I kind of like drums. Drums are kind of cool." And it was like, "Well, they kind of get in the way of the music." That was actually a quote from someone, one day. I was like, "Wow, I don't hear that." And if my part wasn't working, there was always the threat from Tom of, "Well, I'd rather just do it acoustically anyway, and the drums just get in the way, blah, blah, blah." That's how they were treated.

**MD:** There was also the threat—which was carried out during *Torpedoes* and *Hard Promises*—of replacing you with another drummer. Even though, ultimately, your tracks were the keepers, I imagine that had to do a number on your confidence.

**Stan:** Subconsciously, it probably drove me insane. I *really* don't know what it did. Maybe I was too young to realize how heavy a situation it was. The simplest way to put it, I guess, is that I thought they were idiots for wanting to try someone else. The kindest thing I could say was "help yourselves." Whenever there was the discussion about bringing in somebody else, I was like, "How would an outsider know what to do or how to put that kind of love into it?"

My belief was that there was no other guy that could do this better. Later, it made perfect sense because I just wasn't digging it. Back then, you couldn't have found a more loyal servant to the music. I really lived and breathed that band. I thought God put me on this earth to play in that band. And it wasn't until they told me I wasn't that guy that I believed it.

**MD:** Given the band's success up to that point, did you feel you must have been doing *something* right?

**Stan:** Really, all I cared about was blowing my bandmates' minds. I was their younger brother. All I wanted was for them to go, "That part is so cool!" I just wanted it to be amazing. And, really, it was. Those records...they just *sound* so good, the drums, the songs. That was the first time we worked with a really brilliant engineer, Shelly Yakus.

**MD:** Right. You really credit him with helping you shape that classic drum sound.

**Stan:** He *invented* it right in front of me. He gives me credit, but I didn't even know where we were going. Shelly was pushing me to crazy places. On the first two records, there were maybe three mics on the kit.

Shelly had it looking like a press conference. [laughs] He built this kit for me that was big and tuned really deep, with Pinstripe heads on the toms and a black dot snare head. No ring, no rebound, it was detuned to where the lugs were almost rattling. I really had to develop a new technique to play the damn thing. I played with the butt-end of a 2B on the snare, using traditional grip, which is actually pretty tricky to do.

**MD:** After *Damn The Torpedoes* exploded, everything changed for Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers. They began headlining arenas around the world, and for the first time, faced the challenge of following up a huge record. They were suddenly in-demand in other ways, too. Individually, they were tapped as session players and songwriters. As a group, they backed up Stevie Nicks and Bob Dylan. Over time, new faces entered the picture—producers Dave Stewart and Jeff Lynne, new bassist Howie Epstein—yet old tensions remained. When you followed-up *Torpedoes* with *Hard Promises*, Iovine was back producing, and your bassist, Ron Blair, was being replaced by Duck Dunn on some tracks.

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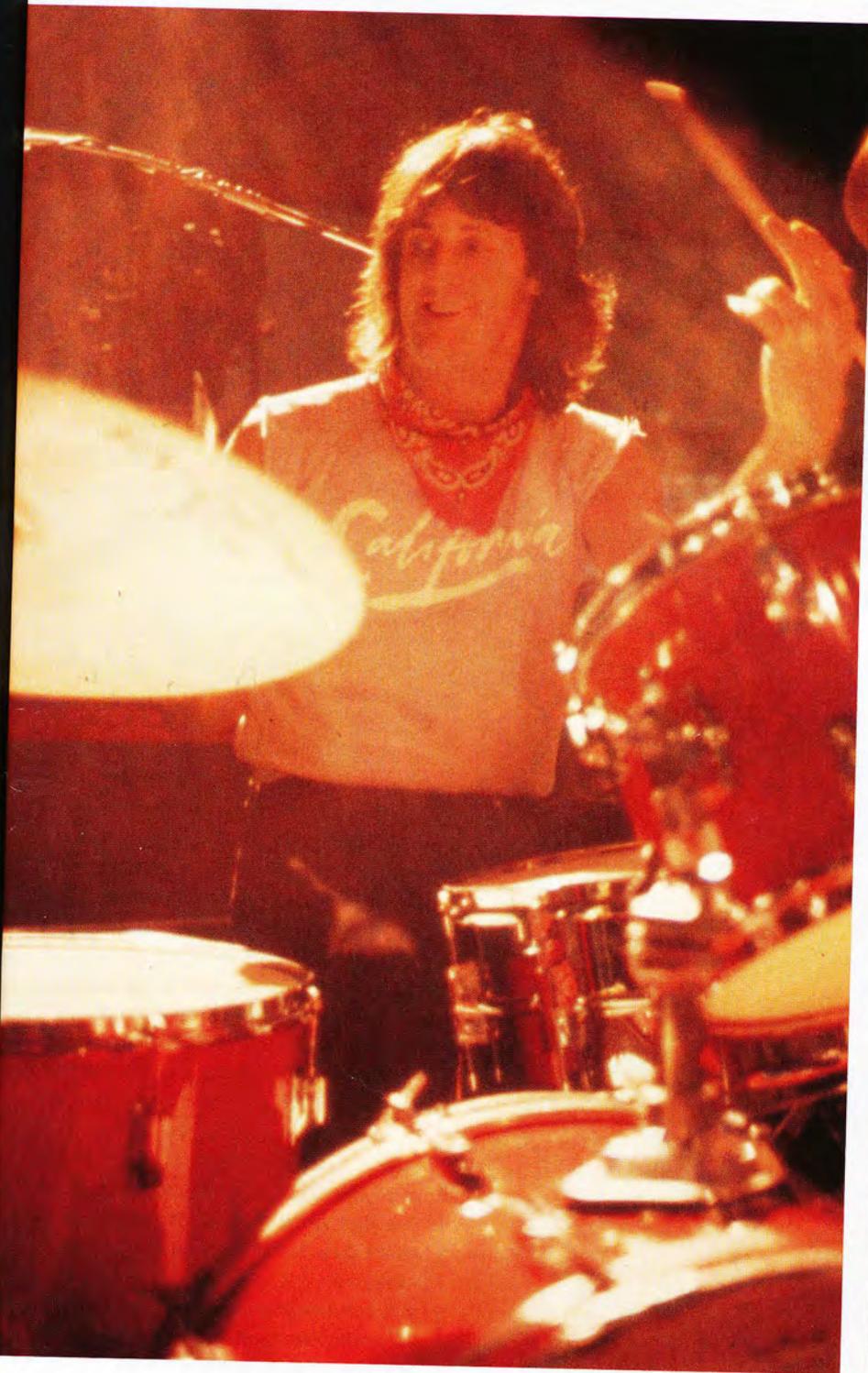
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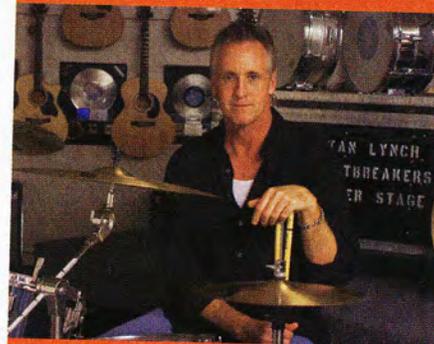


**Stan:** Yeah, Duck came in on "Stop Draggin' My Heart Around," which was ours but got bartered away by Jimmy to Stevie Nicks, and "A Woman In Love (It's Not Me)." And I was catching shit from Iovine at the time, "We're gonna bring in this guy, we're gonna bring in that guy," so I was probably feeling pretty uncomfortable.

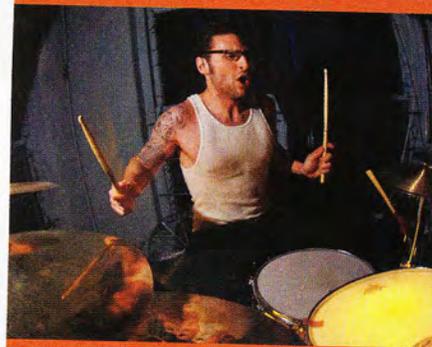
**MD:** Were you leery of a seasoned outsider

coming in, or jazzed because it was Duck Dunn?

**Stan:** I thought it was cool, but it was intimidating. Like, "What if he turns around after five minutes and says, 'I can't play with this guy?'" But there wasn't too much time to dwell on that, because we went right to work on "Stop Draggin'." We listened to the demo, and it was a real static Linn drum machine part—boom/



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bap/boom-boom/bap—the whole way through, no stops. Everybody shakes their head, Duck probably made a little bar chart, and we sit down to play. And right as they were saying, “We’re rolling,” I asked Duck about the kick pattern and he said, “Do what you feel, man, I’m all over you.”

We kick into the song, and instead of coming in with a beat from the top like on the demo, I’m going in with a build, climbing big, and I had Duck’s attention immediately. That first take was a little clumsy, people are hitting bum notes and I’m thrashing through trying to

make the stops happen. People were looking at me like I’m on angel dust. [laughs]

Then on the second take, I threw the Whitman’s Sampler at them: played the first verse one way to see how it felt, second verse, another way, then sprung something else on them in the bridge. We get through the take, nobody looks up, and Duck gives me that look like, “Don’t put your sticks down, don’t breathe, don’t fart....”

**MD:** Did that feel like a stamp of approval?

**Stan:** Oh, yeah, my day was made. I played with Duck Dunn, I didn’t care what happened.

Then Iovine immediately says, “It’s too fast.” Tom says, “No, it’s too slow.” So they get into it, and Duck says, “Let’s just go hear it.” So they push play and there are a few guitar clams, but it’s going by like a freight train. By the end of the thing nobody says a word, there’s this uncomfortable silence. Then Duck says, “Y’all don’t like *that*?” All of a sudden, Jimmy goes, “That’s great, that’s amazing.” And Tom goes, “Yeah, I think that’ll work.”

**MD:** The kick drum patterns and bass parts in “Stop Draggin’” and “A Woman In Love” create a very natural push-pull feel.

**Stan:** Completely unlike the drum parts on the demos, which Tom would get so married to. It was a burnout to try and play “beat the Linn machine,” or sound like the Linn. When the Linn machine came in, everything took on this air of perfection. Man, I just thought that was stale. And once that became the high water mark of what a drummer could do, I re-learned to play my drums again, to cop that feel. I was cool with that theory on certain tracks. But I didn’t want to go back and play the old shit like that.

**MD:** Was the main groove on “Don’t Come Around Here No More” a Linn machine?

**Stan:** I think that was an Oberheim drum machine, oddly enough. I was just working tambourines and gongs at the top. At the end where it goes berserk, they punched me in playing the kit over the drum machine. That song was a great exercise in having to adapt. To Tom’s credit, he was always on the move, always hunting for something. Just when you got comfortable, he changed all the rules.

**MD:** What was it like working with The Eurythmics’ Dave Stewart on that track, and on the *Southern Accents* album? He seemed like an odd choice for producer at the time.

**Stan:** I have really fond memories of working with Dave. Just a really energetic, crazy guy that liked taking chances. He was very enthusiastic about things and a great cheerleader. Really a fun, trippy guy.

**MD:** And he brought you in to play on The Eurythmics track with Aretha Franklin, “Sisters Are Doin’ It For Themselves.”

**Stan:** Yeah, which was a really smoking track.

**MD:** You were starting to do some more session work during the mid-’80s, as was the whole band. Was there concern about whoring out the Heartbreakers sound?

**Stan:** No one ever said as much. But there’d be the weird thing where I’d be off doing a session date and I’d get a call from management,

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## STAN LYNCH

"Tom needs you to come in tomorrow to work on some new stuff." Or when I told him I was going to go on tour with T-Bone Burnett, he'd say, "Why do you want to go back and play clubs?" That sort of thing.

**MD:** Then you turn around and The Heartbreakers become Bob Dylan's band for two years.

**Stan:** Yeah, that was the last time I ever got to play jazz. [laughs] It was awesome. We were really flying by the seat of our pants every night. He'd turn around and say, "What song do you want to play?" I'd go, "How about 'Lay Lady Lay'?" He'd nod, turn away, then

turn back around and say, "What key?" He was so free and so kind, and so loose. And his rhythm guitar playing—man, if you couldn't get on that, you had a problem. He is such an underrated guitar player. I'd just get his guitar and vocal in my monitor and I just loved it.

Bob is freaky, man. He's wonderful—all over the place, but always in time. And he's got a wonderful, authentic, crusty, beautiful stroke that you just have to play to. I keep waiting for him to call and say, "Stan, my drummer's taking a powder, you want to do something?" [laughs]

**MD:** There's a great clip from that tour of

"Knockin' On Heaven's Door," where as the band is building up into the verse, Bob puts his arm out and at once you all quiet down and lay back.

**Stan:** I had to watch Bob constantly. But I'm an old-school drummer, so I was always watching Tom. It changed night to night, verse to verse. Lots of thirteen-bar blues on that gig. [laughs] He could go five minutes before coming in with the vocal, or he could start singing before he started playing. I never knew. That's where you really learn to play the song. And that song doesn't have to be the same every time.

**MD:** As the '80s turned to the '90s, you became disillusioned with new material, new producers, and a new way of doing things within The Heartbreakers. Though musically speaking, you left the band on an extremely high note: "Mary Jane's Last Dance." Looking back, does it feel as if you went out on top?

**Stan:** Well, it just wasn't the greatest experience. I was told by the co-producer, George Drakoulias, when I walked in—before I'd even heard the song—what it was supposed to sound like, which was pretty stiff. They wanted the drum fills from "Gimme Shelter": blap-bum, blap-bum, blap-bum, blap-bum. Killer fill, but not for this. And in my mind, I'm telling him, "I don't know who you are. I'm not aware of your cred." So I went in the other direction.

I was actually starting to listen to a little hip-hop back then, and I think it rubbed off on that groove. I cut that track really quickly—second take, I think—and it felt really good. Then I just put my sticks down and that was that. I never saw them again. I remember talking to Tom about that record later. I was so hurt because I said, "Man I was really pleased to see we got a monster hit that kicked ass." His exact response was, "Yeah, we got away with it." I was like, "Dude, I didn't get away with anything. I went in and spanked the shit out of that groove." That wasn't right.

**MD:** That's one of the biggest hits The Heartbreakers ever had, so something must've been working.

**Stan:** Yeah, it only helped the *Greatest Hits* sell a subtle ten or twelve million, that's all.

**MD:** What was your state of mind when you finally got the call that you were fired from the band?

**Stan:** Tom had basically told me I wasn't the right drummer for him anymore. He decided

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## STAN LYNCH

whatever I was doing he wasn't digging. So I wanted to put the drums down. I was feeling very insecure about them. I felt like, perhaps, I'd made all the noise I could. And I'm a guy that always wanted to be in a band. And when the set lists and all that stuff went away, I was really lost. I sat down at the drums and I didn't know whether to cry or barf.

I had a kit in my house, and I had to take it away. I just couldn't look at it. I had to take all the mementos from the band out of my house, everything. I had to forget all that. It was almost like in *Men In Black*. I had to hit myself in the face with one of those lights; when you wake up, you won't remember you were ever in a band. You're a guy who wants to write songs now.

**MD:** And it was Don Henley who helped you on that path, right?

**Stan:** Absolutely. I had gotten the phone call signifying one part of my life was over. Within twenty-four hours, I was talking to Don and he



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said, "Man, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm probably losing it, I don't know." He said, "When The Eagles broke up, I was thirty-three. I know what you're feeling, so get on a plane." So I did. I pretty much showed up at his door the next day, and he said, "Welcome to the next chapter." Fortunately he had things for me to do, and songs to write, and it was an amazing year.

During that transitional year ['94], I got a lot of my songs recorded. I had a little 16-track studio at my house in Florida. I put it in flight cases, moved it to California, set it up in Don's barn, and just went to work. I just sat in that damn barn and wrote, with him and without him. Don kicked down a big door for me and said, "Run on through."

**MD:** As a producer, what do you look for in a drum track?

**Stan:** I look for the drummer to just hypnotize me, intoxicate me. That can be any old way. Mick Fleetwood could hypnotize me with a bass drum and a cowbell. Dennis Chambers could hypnotize me with every weapon he's got. Gregg Bissonette could hypnotize me just by sitting down. Usually I say, "Play it two times, then come in and listen with me. If you

and I look at each other funny at the same time, we know something went wrong. Or, if we both look at each other with that stupid grin, we'll know it's going really good."

**MD:** Most never get near the kind of success you had in the first phase of your career, let alone the second....

**Stan:** But I'm really not one for dwelling on it; I'm not an awards guy. This is where my dad is so great. "Hey dad, they're putting us in the Rock And Hall Of Fame." He says, "Well, you know your career is pretty well over then." When I co-wrote the number-one song for Tim McGraw a couple years back ["Back When"], I called my dad every week. "Dad, we're number four." When it was number two he said, "This never happens, asshole." When it went to number one, he said, "Quit while you're ahead. Don't ever write another song again. Walk away." [laughs]

**MD:** What comes to mind when you look back on those nineteen years with The Heartbreakers?

**Stan:** I think my timing was good. I couldn't be the new guy now. I can see that. Benmont's a bro. I talk to him with great regularity, and I'm really proud that he's been able to maintain

that next chapter and do all that. But I know when I hear him talk, I couldn't do it. I wouldn't know how to do it and still be me. I'm glad I did my nineteen years when I did them, because I couldn't have done these last ones. I would have been more neurotic.

I'm pissed at myself for not having done a more graceful exit with the fans. I really felt so much love and energy from them. Standing there in some of those halls...shit, man, it's not like they were booing me. [laughs] That's my "regret."

**MD:** Do you talk to Tom with any kind of regularity?

**Stan:** No. We had a very nice talk at the Hall Of Fame rehearsal in 2002. And I loved it. But there were a lot of things I wanted to say, and we just couldn't seem to connect. And as a writer, after being out of the band, I realize how good his songs are. I took a lot of those songs for granted when we were kids, because they just kept flying out of the woodwork. How did I know? He sure made it look easy. But I've tried it, and it's damn hard!



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The advertisement features a central image of a drummer wearing sunglasses, positioned behind a drum kit. In the foreground, several Turkish cymbals are displayed, including a large 'Jazz' cymbal with a perforated surface, a 'Rock Beat' cymbal, and a 'Rock Beat Raw' cymbal. The background is a dark, patterned surface with a crescent moon and star motif. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout with a red and black color scheme.