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## Catching a Groove

*Stan Lynch's Relationship with Time*

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*Music has been my entire life. I can't remember my world before it and I can't live without it. The drums gave me everything, provided for me spiritually, financially, physically, and socially. The groove, love, and passion are my guiding stars. I was lost when they were no longer the coin of the realm.*

—Stan Lynch<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

In early 2019 I moved to Los Angeles from Vancouver, British Columbia, for the second half of my sabbatical leave from university. I was in the midst of a research project addressing the technological mediation of time in rock records of the late 1970s through the early 1990s, with a special focus on click tracks and electronic drum machines. LA was the epicenter of such activity and technology, and my initial desire was to meet as many engineers and producers who had worked on the big sessions as I could muster.

With only one local name and phone number of a producer in my pocket, I spent those early days cold calling—by phone and email—individuals who I thought I had a chance of holding court with. While I would eventually become part of a wide and varied network, one of the first positive responses I received was from Grammy Award-winning engineer and producer Jim Scott, who had worked with (among many others) Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers, Sting, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Wilco. He invited me to come speak in person with him at his private studio out in Valencia, located north of Hollywood just off of Highway 5 near Six Flags Magic Mountain.

His company, called PLYRZ, was an impressive space with hundreds of instruments and recording gear occupying multiple rooms, much of it vintage. Scott was in the middle of a recording session with a guitarist and keyboardist who had come out from New Jersey when I arrived in the morning, and so my interview became a group discussion, which finished with a shared lunch before driving back to LA. Just before leaving, Scott wrapped up by talking about the great “feel” bands back in the day, the ones who didn't rely on

1. Stan Lynch, email correspondence with the author, April 22, 2019.

a click (what he called “the claw”) and who had that special groove. At the top of his list was The Heartbreakers.

I stored this information on the backburner as I moved forward with interviewing engineer-producers over the following months. But then by chance in early April I saw a special display on Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers at Amoeba Music on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, and it got me to thinking why I hadn’t considered tracking down their original drummer, Stan Lynch, to see if he would consider joining my project. This eventually led to making contact with him, and his gracious acceptance to be interviewed. This piece reproduces that interview in full.

There are at least two compelling reasons for engaging with this conversation in such detail. The first is that Lynch’s perspectives on rhythm and timing in rock music, reflecting what he calls “the human condition and the human spirit,” are particularly insightful and meaningful, and are not well represented in the official record of reviews and interviews. Lynch interacted with many of the legends of the session and studio worlds, including drummers Jim Keltner, Russ Kunkel, Jim Gordon, Jeff Porcaro, Taylor Hawkins, and Kenny Aronoff; guitarist Waddy Wachtel; bass players Bob Glaub and Duck Dunn; inventor Roger Linn (creator of the LinnDrum); producers Danny Kortchmar and Denny Cordell; and composer-vocalists Dave Stewart, Annie Lennox, Bob Dylan, Stevie Nicks, Steve Lukather, Aretha Franklin, Jackson Browne, Don Henley, and, of course, Tom Petty.

The second and more profound motivation is that Lynch represents a key vantage point as one of the great rock drummers who lived through the most significant technological, sociological, and aesthetic changes that occurred in the rock music world. He was a witness to and active participant in the radical transformation from analog to digital, human feel to machine feel, and group/synchronous recording to isolated/asynchronous recording. This interview documents the phenomenon of nothing less than Stan Lynch’s fundamentally altered relationship with time itself.

## STAN LYNCH, THE DRUMMER

Stan Lynch’s impressive career extends over many decades and areas of musical expertise, including performance (both instrumental and vocal), songwriting, engineering, and producing. But for the purposes of my research project and its focus on the influence of timing technologies in the rock music world, his tenure with Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers as their drummer—from 1976 to 1994—matched my timeline perfectly. Before diving into the interview I feel it is important to briefly provide some historical context on this body of work for those who don’t know Lynch and the band’s activities that well, as well as to remind his legion of fans why he is so beloved.

Much has been written about Lynch over the years, yet observations tend to coalesce around four general themes: 1) the wide and creative range of his drumming capabilities, everything from the subtle to the turbo-charged; 2) his dedication to the song and what’s needed for the individual project (the ability to find just the right groove); 3) his attentiveness to the moment (live performance as a way of life); and 4) his sense of humor.

Accolades from interviewers and fellow musicians on the range of Lynch's abilities and his presence come fast and furious, beginning with Tom Petty himself:

He was really a *powerhouse* on stage. Sometimes I still miss him onstage. He was *so* powerful. I used to say he had this fifth gear that he could go into and just really make everything explode.<sup>2</sup>

That power came, however, only when it was appropriate and called upon:

Stan Lynch is a creative, rather than just hard and loud, drummer—lean, subtle and bombastic as Petty's eccentric arrangements warrant. He's proud of his band, proud of his contributions to their music, and he's proud of Tom Petty's songwriting. He's careful to take each song, one at a time, and give it what he feels it needs.<sup>3</sup>

The most detailed (and my favorite) quote is by Lee Flier:

As a drummer, he's all about paradox and contrast: an irresistible blending of Charlie Watts's solid understatement with John Bonham's raw go-for-the-throat power, either of which might turn and rear its head within a single verse. His feel somehow combines the loose gallop of great classic rock 'n' roll with the unrelenting tension of barely contained energy. Combine that with a finely honed sense of dynamics, a big signature tone featuring huge toms and in-your-face snare, and an uncanny attentiveness to every moment of a performance, and you may as well have custom designed the ideal rock drummer.<sup>4</sup>

Lynch's musicianship was always about the song, even before he became a great songwriter himself:

Our job, my job as drummer, is to listen real close and decide what I could do to add to it or if I should walk away from it. As a drummer my job is not to get my nut off and put as many drum licks on the record as I can, it's to make the song work.<sup>5</sup>

Musicians sometimes think they're just playing their instrument, when what they're really doing is playing a song. It sometimes takes a while for them to discover that.<sup>6</sup>

This was the reason Lynch with The Heartbreakers could go on the road night after night with icon Bob Dylan and create something rhythmically and musically special every time, or why luminaries such as Stevie Nicks, the Eurhythmics, or Don Henley wanted him laying down tracks on their albums.

2. Paul Zollo, *Conversations with Tom Petty* (Expanded Edition, New York: Omnibus Press, 2020), 54.

3. Bill DeYoung, "Stan Lynch, the Homebody Heartbreaker," *The Gainesville Sun* (July 20, 1984): 6.

4. Lee Flier, "Interview with Stan Lynch," *The Petty Archives*, <https://www.thepettyarchives.com/archives/miscellany/interviews/2000-stanlynch-musicplayer>; see further Blaire Jackson, "Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers: It's Only Rock 'n' Roll (and That's the Point)," *BAM Magazine* (April 7, 1978): 35.

5. Stan Lynch in Bill DeYoung, "Stan Lynch, the Homebody Heartbreaker," *The Gainesville Sun* (July 20, 1984): 6.

6. Stan Lynch in Jayne Moore, "Renowned Heartbreakers Drummer Stan Lynch Becomes Top Songwriter & Producer," *Songwriter Universe*, <http://www.songwriteruniverse.com/lynch.htm>.

This flexibility and proficiency translated into a way of being in the moment, a way of being hyper-attuned to the mood of the session or concert and how he could contribute something meaningful to that moment:

What's important is that the drummer thinks like the band or the band thinks like the drummer, whatever way you want to look at it, so that they all interpret *feel* the same way. So many times in a group, people tell you, "Groove and feel," and if you don't know what the hell they're talking about, it can infuriate you until you suddenly realize that what they're saying is so simple. They're not asking you to do anything more than just what it implies: "Feel the music our way. Just feel it."<sup>7</sup>

Tom Petty spoke to this almost karmic connection when in performance with Lynch:

He and I had *incredibly* good communication onstage; he could read the movement of my shoulder. He could go *anywhere* I wanted to go. He never took his eyes off me. This is something I still go through with [Steve] Ferrone [then current drummer in The Heartbreakers]. Stan *never* took his eyes off me. *Anything* I did was accented on the drums. Any movement I made. We had a great eye communication where I could turn around and look at him, and he knew just exactly what I wanted to do.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, it was Lynch's sense of humor that drew so many musicians to his side, which was made manifest both in his interpersonal relationships in the sessions as well as the music itself:

"He's one of the funniest people I ever met," Henley explains. "And that is very important when you've been in the studio for two or three months. Things get a little grim after working fourteen-, fifteen-hour days in a little room with no windows, hearing the same song over and over again."<sup>9</sup>

His sense of humor comes out through his drums. When they tried other drummers at one point during the album for a couple of weeks, it didn't sound like Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers.<sup>10</sup>

With a little bit of background knowledge now in place, I move to the interview proper where Lynch discusses how he adapted to or accommodated the click track and the electronic drum machine in the studio and in concert, and what this meant to him as an artist and human being.

## THE INTERVIEW

Lynch had moved back to Florida many years previous, and so our interview took place via telephone at his Melrose, Florida studio on April 24, 2019. Similar to most of the

7. Stan Lynch in Robyn Flans, "Stan Lynch: Heartbreaking Rhythm," *Modern Drummer* 8/2 (1984): 27; see also Robyn Flans, "Drumming and Singing," *Modern Drummer* 18/8 (1994): 30.

8. Paul Zollo, *Conversations with Tom Petty* (Expanded Edition, New York: Omnibus Press, 2020), 55.

9. Don Henley in Bill DeYoung, "The Beat of a Different Drum: Stan Lynch Finds Life's Just Fine after Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers," *The Gainesville Sun* (November 21, 1995): 3D.

10. Shelley Yakus in Matthew Longfellow (director), *Classic Albums: Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers Damn the Torpedoes*, NTSC DVD, B003RIBQNM, 2010.

interviews I conducted while in residence in LA, I sent a list of questions a couple of days in advance to help structure the conversation. Unlike most of my interviewees, however, Lynch emailed me back a set of short but detailed answers the day before the interview to also help me prepare for our encounter. In combination with the lead-off paragraph from his first full email message to me—reproduced in the epigraph to this piece—I knew I was in for something remarkable.

The interview that follows is structured in five parts, addressing the themes of early teachers and musical influences in LA, fledgling experiences with the click track, live performance as a *modus operandi*, finding the right groove, and closing thoughts. Throughout the interview Lynch was curious, respectful, encouraging, and, as much as anything else, side-splittingly funny (I laughed during most of our time together). Both in the interview itself and my time contemplating it afterwards, I was and am humbled, and am deeply indebted to him for sharing a small part of his life with me.

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NATHAN HESSELINK [NH]: What was the scene like in LA when you arrived?

STAN LYNCH [SL]: It was 1976. Great music was being made. There were *iconic* session players [drummers] like [Jim] Keltner, Jim Gordon, and Jeff Porcaro working when I showed up. Those were the guys I looked up to and ultimately ran into—and they were all cool to me. They talked to me. I got to watch and learn from them when I was a little June bug.

There were always great producers working in the various studios. One of them, Danny Kortchmar, would hire me to play drums and sing on his projects. One of his first recordings was *Tapestry* [Carole King]. He'd seen and done so much in the studio. Knew it from every angle. Danny always made me believe that energy and groove are everything. He was part of The Section with Russ Kunkel [drums], Waddy [Wachtel; guitar], and Bob Glaub [bass], all those cats. They were such *feeling* and *groovy* guys—just to talk to them, you'd go “Oh my God! They must have an extra chromosome or something.” Danny introduced me to Don Henley, and they both taught me truckloads about recording.

The great musicians are always picking up on all kinds of things in the room. The temperature of the artist that they're working with was what they seemed to be keyed in on. That's what they taught me, those guys who liked me enough to give me a little leg up would say to me, “It ain't the chops, man. It's great if you've got 'em. But if you can read the room and provide what's needed, you won't be without work.” And do it with a good attitude and make everybody happy. That's the other thing: Don't be a dick, do what's required, really bring it, bring the joy. That was what I learned from those cats.

I didn't learn that from my own band. In my band, everybody had a role. It happened quick in The Heartbreakers. We grew up around each other, but we were all in different working bands as kids. It was an amalgam. When we got together, it was *instant*. I counted four, and that's the noise that came out. You know what I mean? There was no figuring out what we were gonna sound like. It was just, “Shit, this is it!” We make that sound. They were not as communicative with me as the session guys I met; they didn't want to talk. That was frustrating. They did things intuitively, but you never really knew where you stood.

Denny Cordell was our first producer. He produced *Mad Dogs & Englishmen*, Leon Russell, Procol Harum’s “Whiter Shade of Pale,” and lots of really groovy British stuff. When I met him, we were making our first record, and I was green. And he’s telling me [using mock British accent], “Stan, you’ve got to *feel* the music. It’s got to *groove*. It’s got to *swing*.” And I’m like, “Can you help me quantify this? I’m in trouble. I don’t know what that means when you say to me it doesn’t have the right groove. You’re scaring me.”

But he helped me understand all that. And that’s HUGE! I don’t know if that kind of mentorship happens anymore. I don’t know if that’s still part of the *thing*. I don’t think the groove and feel are even brought to bear in a conversation when you start a new album with an artist today. The process is more like, “We’re gonna chop it up and fly it to the grid and make it sound really powerful. And it’s going to be AMAZING.” But it’s not like, “Let’s catch a groove, guys.” That’s a big difference in how I grew up. I was right on the cusp, came in right when it was transitioning.

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[Lynch had indicated in an email response that the title track “You’re Gonna Get It” from their second album (1978) represented the first time he had played to a click, which in this particular instance was a homemade loop.]

NH: What was the thinking behind wanting to make a loop?

SL: The song was not fully conceived. We’d never performed it . . . so it was being birthed in the studio. There was an idea—it was very nebulous. I couldn’t put my foot into it. I couldn’t make a commitment, because every time I made a commitment it felt like I was heavy-handed. I was clawing my way across the arrangement while they were trying to work it out.

So I said, “Maybe we can create a metronome, and Tom can lay it down with guitar how he feels the song will go.” So we needed a click track, but there was no such thing, and we didn’t even know how to do it or what it would be.

So I rolled up a *People* magazine and put some duct tape on it. And I slapped a baffle four times—“brap, brap, brap, brap”—and then we recorded it with one mic onto a 2-track machine. And then made a loop with the engineer that went all around the room. We had to physically print that onto a twenty-four-track machine, if that makes any sense. *Yeah, it does.*

So once we had that “brap, brap, brap, brap”—it was a fairly cool sounding click. It wasn’t like “knock, knock, knock,” it had some vibe because it had a little of the room sound, and the sound of the newspaper slapping backwards, it was groovy to listen to it. And then Tom laid down the tune. There were sections of the song where nobody knew what it was going to do so I could jam with the loop. I had never had that freedom before.

And that loop idea came and went. It was an accident. I don’t know how it worked. It was a drum track laid down to Tom’s vocal, then once we had his vocal and acoustic guitar and a drum track, then everybody built on top of that. I could just freak freely! I did whatever I wanted to do.

And it was fun. ‘Cause I didn’t have to worry about stepping on anyone. I must have been pretty close to the click. I guess by accident I could play to . . . I could play to my click because I *made* my own click track. And it wasn’t on a grid, there was no

bpm. It was just, “Somewhere around here.” Tom played the guitar and I slapped the baffle, and “Yeah, that’s a clock.” But it was still loose.

NH: Did you ever do side sessions with clicks outside of The Heartbreakers?

SL: Yeah, in the early ‘80s, maybe. I don’t think it [the click] was always there. You were still called upon to be a go-getter, you know what I mean? Or maybe I was hired ‘cause I was known to be, “You can light a fire under this guy and he’ll go for hours.”

So that was my only experience with the clock [working on “You’re Gonna Get It”]. It kind of came and went, it was an accidental thing. I was trying to help Tom ‘cause he didn’t know what he wanted. It was really innocent falling on that first loop.

So that was cool, I guess. I never really thought about it again because we learned songs as a band after that.

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[“Don’t Come Around Here No More” was always one of my favorite Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers tracks. It had quite a different sound/feel to it, however, so I was curious about the song’s genesis.]

NH: With “Don’t Come Around Here No More” (1985) and Dave Stewart, was that your only project together?

SL: Yeah, pretty much. You see by then, we weren’t . . . you used to perform songs before you recorded them. You worked them out in rehearsal hall, it was crude, very analog. It was like, “Hey man, I got this song, let’s go play it for a few hours and see if we can put some life under it. And then go record it.”

And this was different. Tom and Dave got together and basically had a record. When you walked in, all they wanted me to do was shout, “Hey!” And hit a big crash cymbal. And play some tambourines. At the end Dave wanted me to play my drums. So I was like, O.K.

So it was different than tracking with The Heartbreakers. I wasn’t privy to the birth of the song. I wasn’t needed. You don’t need a drummer hanging around while we’re writing songs. And the music had changed dramatically by then. “When Doves Cry” [Prince, 1984] came out, that changed everything. I mean, a drum machine with no bass, and there’s a hit record. The game has changed now, you know what I mean? [I ask again about “Don’t Come Around Here No More”]

The demo was the record. That’s what happened. It also allowed the writers to have more freedom. Because they didn’t have to write *for* a band. Bands have limitations. That’s why Stones’ records sound like Stones’ records. But if you wanted to write a song that didn’t sound like the Rolling Stones, you probably wouldn’t want all of the Rolling Stones in the room.

And I think Tom was stretching by then. I mean, God, the band had already been together a long time. Everybody was pretty bored, didn’t know what to do next.

NH: How do you feel about drum machines?

SL: It depends. As a songwriter, I’m thrilled to have a click track and a sequence. ‘Cause I know I can layer and build—for a one-man band, it’s a creative tool, it’s very cool.

But . . . The perfect blend would be “Won’t Get Fooled Again” by The Who. There’s a sequence, and [Keith] Moon *torments* that sequence. You know what I mean? He doesn’t cleave to it, he plays *with* it and stomps it to death. He doesn’t

give a shit about it. He's so irreverent. He comes and goes at his leisure, makes the sequence work for him. That was the perfect combination, a bar of precise musical steel up Moon's ass to make a brilliant record.

That was the perfect click track for him. And they literally duct-taped headphones to his head for him to play to that son-of-a-bitch. And he sure did. He destroys that sequence! A lesser man would play *to* it, if you get my drift. I can't imagine what "Won't Get Fooled Again" would sound like, or "Baba O'Riley," or "Who Are You" without Keith. Moon is so physical, so proud, "Yeah, yeah, I know the sequence is over there, I'm dealing with it."

Nowadays you put such a fine point on where you put that kick drum and snare drum. It's really perfect, perfectly awful. It really is. Music has gotten too perfect. And it's just perfectly *bad*, to me. There's no swing.

You used to hear band awareness in their tracks. At the beginning of the song you'd hear, "Oh shit, hope we nail a good intro." You'd hear the music and go, "That's a live take; they're not even *settled* yet." And then the drummer would do the tighten up on the first verse, and he'd get settled, and everybody would be cool. First chorus, getting better, second chorus, even better. Bridge, great. And by the tag, you'd hear drummers taking victory laps. You'd hear 'em take fills that you knew they would *never* have ventured to take earlier in that song.

You could feel the fear, commitment, and desire and then the absolute "Nailed it!" in the fade. You'd catch amazing drum fills and you knew, he was absolutely riding this thing, couldn't fall off if he tried! Jeff Porcaro's tracks always spoke to me that way.

It's very interesting, the idea of performing, it's pretty well gone. People don't perform much in the studio anymore. I talked to Taylor Hawkins about this, you know, the great drummer and singer in the Foo Fighters. He's fantastic, just a ball of fire. We talk about what music is and what it's become. He was saying the same thing. We both love those records where you had to work to capture a four-minute recording. You couldn't punch in, couldn't correct a mistake or go to an alternate take. There were no play lists. You counted four and prayed to God it was the take.

You put everything you had into a take. You really had to get into it. My drums were tuned so deep to make those big sounds by the third album [*Damn the Torpedoes*, 1979] that I had to pull my left hand *out* of the snare drum. There was zero rebound. It was really hard to play 'em. And with no click, you had to really keep reminding yourself, "Get out front! Get on this!" Because otherwise, you would have dragged. I was dragging ass to get through four minutes.

**NH:** Did that metronomic style playing last past the '80s?

**SL:** Oh yeah, around the time the electronic drums came in everything changed. Roger Linn came into the studio to show us his original steam-powered Linn Machine and said to me, "Your life is fixin' to change, man." I poo-pooed him and then went, "Oh, he's right, it's never gonna be the same again." Because they have a machine that does it. They really do! Oh, crap. Roger Linn is one of the most influential drummers of the twentieth century.

The net result is zero gain for me. Yeah, yeah, technology has made the music more intriguing, more bizarre, and more layered. But the soul, it's gone. Thank God they didn't have a grid for the records I loved when I was a kid. *Thank God* they didn't have one for "Honky Tonk Women," "Whole Lotta Love," or anything by James Brown or The Who. Thank goodness they were banking on the human spirit that day.



I mean drums are very primal, you throw your soul out there. You really do. People don't realize it. When you pick a groove out of thin air, you're baring yourself, you're naked. They're hanging all the drapery on that, they're hanging everything on your groove.

It was heavy in the old days to cut a track live. You really felt like you helped engineer a conquest. When the band walked into the control room and everybody was snapping their fingers and shaking their heads and digging the track during the playback you really felt like you nailed something. Now there's none of that feeling. You just play your drums and they lock it up. Fish around, cut that measure, loop it . . . no rocket goes off. It's just not like that anymore. It's very different now.

Playing live tracks requires discipline. Musicians had to have put in 10,000 hours to have what it takes to cut live tracks. I can't expect a kid who hasn't played five sets a night for six years to walk in and be able to do that. That's what guys did back then—by the time I was in the studio I'd been playing in bars for years. I kind of had the idea—I wasn't any good—but I had the idea of what the drummer's job is.

And now that job is, what? You don't learn to play cover songs anymore. I don't know how you become a good drummer, and what does that even mean today in Western music? What does that mean? It means you kick ass—with a clock around your neck.

Kenny Aronoff is a master. He can bury a click track, he rules the clock. He puts swing and vibe and attitude into it. But it still ain't *nothin'* like listening to Kenny play live when you go to a [John] Fogerty show. That's a stampeding herd of buffalo back there. Man, my God, that's a top-tier Olympic athlete playing drums. You've got to be kidding me, man! Nothing captures that when there's a clock involved, *nothing*.

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NH: It seems like the overall musicianship was higher back then in the 1970s and early '80s, including stamina.

SL: Thirty to fifty takes. As many as you need until you think you have something magical. And a lot of times, drummers would play as many takes as needed until the vocalist felt they got one. You gotta remember we didn't often pick drum tracks, we picked Petty's vocal tracks. So we both had to be there for every take. If we played "Refugee" 60 times, he sang it 60 times until it was the record. "Well, that's our best and it's pretty good. We can't do any better right now; we're not gonna beat it. Let's wrap it up."

So it's a very different game now, and it's not for me to say whether it's better or worse. Like most things in life, it doesn't go back. Those days of great songs, great singers, *great* bands, great studios, *incredible* engineers, all coming together to make a record, that's not gonna happen anymore.

But it was really beautiful, it was a temple, man. And I watched it happen from the other side of the glass, too. Steve Lukather [guitar, vocals] from Toto is my bud, we'd written a song for them and Steve was invited to go in with them when they tracked. I watched Jeff Porcaro play, and I was *mesmerized* at what was happening. Just mesmerized. Frightening. Scary. Beautiful.

And [Jim] Keltner's the same way. He would discuss time, what it means and how you feel it—at length with me. He's a wise teacher, says windshield wipers, everything in life is in time. You've just got to figure it out. He told me there's 50 kinds of shuffles. It's not just *boom-boom-shmeck*. It really isn't.

And for a lot of drummers, I think that's what it's come down to. I've got friends in successful touring bands. They play to a click, every night, live. Because there's so much shit that's being flown in. . . . It's a three-act play on the big screen behind them, and that has to be locked up with the music. Sure, it's a deep skill to pull it off and no disrespect but, it drives me nuts.

What's the difference between doing that and playing Broadway? I don't know. It's a re-creation of your best moments. But there's no high-wire act. There's no flying by the seat of your pants. I can always *hear and feel* that energy. I loved the high wire. Loved it in the studio, and I loved it live. Anarchy was my middle name. I had *no* problem with it.

Playing with Bob Dylan was great because he never played the same song *once*, you know what I mean? He played everything according to his whim every night, and it was *fantastic*. As a drummer you just hung on. He'd start a song and I'm thinking, "I don't know what this is, it sounds like a reggae song." And then it's like, "Oh, that's 'Like a Rolling Stone' tonight. Great!"

But you had to catch a groove. And then once you figured out how you could catch a groove to what he was laying down, you could broadcast a couple fills, turn a couple corners, you could telegraph a couple parts if somebody got a little confused. But basically your job was to find and keep the pulse. And man, there is nothing more fun than that. That was high art for me, that was my jazz.

I lament it. I'm very sentimental about those days. And a couple of the guys in my old band still talk about it. And it's like, "Yeah, man, it was pretty cool to fly that high." You didn't know what you were gonna do. I didn't have an established kick drum pattern for this part of the song. Where is it going? Let's find out.

There's a great line somebody said: "Musicians are either transmitters or receivers." And I *hate* being around a bunch of transmitters. You have to receive, that is, you have to listen. I hate that about the clock. It doesn't listen, doesn't care. When you're on the clock, you don't always listen to where the bass player just changed it up or if there's a football here, if someone wants me to lay back. Everything's dialed in. I'm playing to the clock.

That's different than, "Man, that last take was kind of cool. What happened?" "I don't know, let's try it again." The magic happens when you really play—it sounds corny and spiritual—but it's really true.

**NH:** Our son is twenty-one, and like many of his generation he listens to a lot of contemporary hip hop. But we play a lot of bands like Rolling Stones and Fleetwood Mac and Led Zeppelin at home, and he can tangibly hear it, he can feel the groove, the looseness of it all.

**SL:** Seems to me that Led Zeppelin always had an idea of where they were gonna end up musically. But they didn't always know, or care how they were gonna get there. Unscripted and fearless. I don't want to go see concerts of my favorite rock and roll bands anymore because I know what I'm gonna see. But, seeing the Stones, you'll always get a surprise from Charlie [Watts]. He's playing his drums in a rock 'n' roll band. He's spit-balling it. Getting physical and keeping the fires lit.

"You're only as great as you dare to suck" is my theory. If you don't dare to stink, to really throw it out there, you won't get that cliffhanger moment. That's what the click takes from you—it's homogenized the groove to the point where there's never

an “ah-ha” moment. There’s no drum track with a click that’s gonna blow my mind anywhere near a [John] Bonham track. Nothing is gonna get close to that.

As cool as Prince and his music is, I don’t care for it. I prefer the pure unrestricted attitude of a drummer jumping off a cliff—it’s like an engine revving right to the red. I love the sound of Formula 1 engines hitting 18,000 rpms. That thing gets one more rpm and it blows. No computer’s telling the driver what to do. He knows that at 18,001 is where we explode. And damn it, he couldn’t resist, and he blew the thing up. But what a race! The click puts a governor on everything.

That’s what it feels like when you hear one of Stewart Copeland’s [the Police] tracks, and you go, “*My God*, he’s burning!” It’s great, so fiery, so in the moment. *Maybe* I had a couple moments like that on records where I got to throw down. But after a while it was like, “We don’t need that now.” And by then I was pretty well gone. By then it was, “I’m in the way.”

As a drummer I lost interest in being in a band when the click track came. As a producer and a writer I became interested. But as a drummer I was over it by the time you’re telling me, “Live, we’re gonna need a sequence.” I’m done. Time to bow out.

I’ll tell you a fun track for me that I thought I played well without a click. It was “Stop Draggin’ My Heart Around” [Stevie Nicks], have you heard that? *Of course!* That was a good drum track for me. It was strong, I got away with murder and it was big fun. I threw everything at it. The bridge is a whole different part than the verse and chorus. I’m all over the map, but it was fun as hell. Duck Dunn [bass]. Whew. Any drummer will tell you, playing with Duck is as good as it gets. There’s a transmitter AND receiver.

There’s a song I did with the Eurythmics and Aretha Franklin called “Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves.” That’s a click track, I’m sloppy as hell with it, but it works.

And then there’s Don Henley’s “The Heart of the Matter.” That’s me playing drums and Don needing a perfect track. And it’s really hard to do, and that’s probably the last time I really wanted to be a perfect drummer. Then after that, it hit me, “O.K., you don’t really want my personality. You don’t want me.”

There’s Heartbreakers’ songs I think are good, where the drums are cool. On “The Waiting,” no click track; “Fun” just goes for broke. And then there’s stuff where I got bored. I got bored making machine-bound records. Frankly, it left me flat-footed. I would try to get into it from a songwriter’s point of view. I’d go, “Yeah I know he’s saying something cool.” But there’s no fire under him. So I don’t care.

And that’s what I think the drums did before the click track. The drummer was emboldened to shape the music, commissioned to shape the groove. And sometimes he could bring that extra horsepower into the room that would ignite people. And that’s gone.

*That’s sad.*

It’s O.K. There’s plenty of wonderful old stuff to listen to. And it’s still great. Man, I gotta put fresh ears on some Marvin Gaye. It’s *really* good.

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sl: By talking to me, you picked a . . . I wasn’t a very calm and calculating drummer. Let’s put it that way. But what I think I brought to the party was energy and attitude. That had to be me. You follow what I mean? And I think that was cool. The great

session guys, you didn't always know who it was, but you knew it was great . . . but . . . different animal, different ego.

The fun thing that I got to do for a long time was I got to sign my work. I could go, "Yup, that's me! O.K., there it is." And that was fun. But when the click track came, it was, "Yeah, that's gonna be a whole style of playing I'm not into. . . ." I'm ready to move on, I'm ready to watch great drummers rather than worrying about trying to be one. It worked out for everyone!

The click required a whole set of skills that I just wasn't ready to master. And it wasn't until I built my own recording studio that I realized, "Oh, right, I can handle this." I can dance with the click now, I'm not intimidated by it. We shook hands. But . . . I'm still not sold that the music is better.

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