

mark SCHULMAN

As a drummer who's toured nearly non-stop for twenty years of his thirty-year drumming career, Mark Schulman has commanded the kit for artists as radically diverse and high profile as Cher, Foreigner, Stevie Nicks, Sheryl Crow, Billy Idol, Simple Minds and Destiny's Child. Currently touring Europe with R&B/Pop sensation Pink, Mark is also a producer and composer of both soundtrack music and innumerable commercial jingles. And if his endless commitments in the studio and on stage don't keep him busy enough, you can add "in-demand motivational speaker and clinician" to his impressive resume. For Mark Schulman - whose contagious enthusiasm permeates his significant prowess on the drums and spills over into his life's every endeavor - the show never stops.

Nicknamed "The Rock Star Drummer" by a former manager, Mark laughs that the title applies more specifically to the artists he's worked with than to himself. "I've had the good fortune to have worked with quite a few major artists in my day," Schulman admits. "I view myself as being in the ultimate supportive role when I'm working with them. It's a

very glorious position to be in and I'm really thankful every day of my life. I never take for granted the fantastic talent that I've been able to work with and the fact that I've been in the position where I can support these people and enhance *their* careers by being their drummer."

Classic Drummer caught up with Mark on a Pink tour stop in Brussels, Belgium and discovered him to be a player who's valued as much for what he does away from the kit as for what he can do behind it.



the **Ultimate** side man

Classic Drummer: Right now you're playing all over Europe with Pink. Having played with many rock legends, what's it like to be playing with such a mainstream pop artist?

Mark Schulman: It feels really natural and more like me than a lot of gigs I've done. Alicia – Pink's real name – is just fantastic and the real deal. Although she has a lot of R&B chops, she *really* is a rocker, and she demands that [from the

band]. I was hired for this gig because of my rock edge and I'm hitting harder and playing with more tenacity and fervor than ever. I'm playing so hard that about two months ago my hands started getting ripped up, so I'm now wearing gloves. I'm literally playing *that* hard.

I'm always guided by the muse to play for the music. I'm playing with so much power and pushing my body so far because it's appropriate and I believe that Alicia deserves it. Sometimes my body gets physically beat up. I need to go for more massages (laughs) and sometimes the fingers in my right hand go numb. I can back off five percent and often I will remind myself to do just that to save my body. But I think that this is comparable to being a pro athlete, where you feel like you want to give everything that you can give. I feel like if I'm not giving my all then I'm cheating the audience, cheating Alicia, cheating myself and cheating the band. I'm there to give *every ounce* of my being when I play.

CD: What gear are you using for this gig?

MS: I'm using the Gretsch New Classic kit. For this particular kit, Gretsch essentially took the formula of Maple and Gumwood used in the original Gretsch drums, so that it has that balance of plies. The difference is that the drums get progressively thicker as they get bigger, so that each drum's resonant frequency is more appropriate and related to the size of the drum. They're

called "New Classic" because they took that design of the original Gladstone lugs from the '30s and implemented it with this kit, so there are tube lugs on the drums. They have a great, classic look and they have the great Gretsch sound as far as the balance of Gumwood and Maple.

CD: What are the specs?

MS: Right now I'm using six drums. I have 10-inch and 12-inch rack toms, a 16-inch floor tom and a 24 by 18-inch kick. Then I have a 14 by 5-inch Renown snare drum and a second 10-inch snare drum. I have two identical drum sets, because on this particular tour we're [doing] what they call "leapfrogging." They can't get the same backline to every show because we have to fly in to different cities and it's too tight. So everybody has two identical sets of whatever their instrument is [to make sure everything gets to the show].

CD: In your opinion, how important is it for drummers expecting to work in today's environment to be able to sync up with loops and samples when playing live?

MS: I think it's *absolutely* imperative if you're doing a pop gig, because most pop gigs are very demanding. To get sonic reproduction of the record you need the augmentation of a lot of stuff. Some bands do that completely while others use just a slight bit of augmentation. But I'll be honest, there aren't that many songs on this tour for which we are using electronics, though we do use



loops and samples. I set up my own click tracks using the Roland TD20 and I trigger sounds from the pads, but I also use it as my own metronome. I have a metronome on other songs that we're *not* playing with loops, because I want to make sure the time is perfect. I've been doing this since 1988 and it's my own little formula. I have a Roland momentary pedal that I use with my left heel, and I start and stop it in time. I'll usually play the entire song to a click, but if I don't feel like playing to a click I'll turn it off. I might turn it back on in the middle of the song to check my tempo, because I'm a stickler for tempo.

Years ago, I took one lesson with Joe Porcaro, who's a great teacher and player. Joe told me that when you're playing with click don't freak out; just pretend it's a percussionist with really good time playing a cowbell. Ever since he said that I never got nervous again playing with a click. I've played with Lenny Castro before and he has *really* good time. When Lenny's playing cowbell on 1-2-3-4, he doesn't speed up.

Now I tell my students, when listening to a click, 'pretend you're playing with a percussionist who's got great time.' That's all a click is: it's great time.

CD: What do you bring to the table as a drummer that gets you the gig? In other words, why do people hire Mark Schulman over some other guy?

MS: It's about two things. One is that I try to make it about everybody else. One of my theories is that if *you're* happy, I'm happy. When you have a stage full of happy people then it's easy to be happy. I'd much rather please everybody else because I consider myself easy to please. Not to say that I don't have my moments where I get demanding, but I really try to keep those at a minimum because I want everybody else to feel good. If Alicia is feeling good and everybody else on stage is feeling good, then I'm rockin'. That's the first reason I get hired.

The second reason is that I play with an *enormous* amount of passion. I'm *really* passionate about what I do and I try to

give a hundred million percent all the time. I don't take my complaints very seriously and I just try to give whatever is needed. I think that approach speaks volumes because artists and audiences sense it. There's always a drummer who's bigger, better and faster. The only thing that I can do is to be 100 percent myself. If you can do those things, then you get a good reputation. When people think back about you they'll have fond memories and they will call you back.

CD: Thinking about modern studio techniques for recording drums, such as the use of *Pro Tools* and other software, replacing sounds or "fixing" a performance, and comparing that to the old fashioned way of recording with, say, just three room mikes in the case of a drummer like John Bonham, do you think that modern performances have become homogenized or that a drummer's distinctive sound or personality is lost as a result?

MS: I don't think so at all. The beautiful thing about drum machines, *Pro Tools* and people correcting things is that a lot



of kids grew up listening to [performances manipulated in those ways] and that became their standard. They think, 'Man, I've got to get really accurate, practice and really be able to play this way.' Now you have this whole generation of drummers that are *incredible* because of that. You can be a stick-in-the mud and say that things have gotten homogenized because they're too perfect, but I've been around. I've grown through playing drums in the studio where you needed to play all the parts, then I've gone through the drum-machine-phase and the replacement-of-sound phase and now going into *Pro Tools*, I've seen it all. I think that it's raised the standard. Each generation gets more capable and more magnificent than the last.

CD: Let's talk about the tour dates you did with Velvet Revolver where you sat in for Matt Sorum, and the challenge that gig presented.

MS: The challenge with the Velvet Revolver gig was they'd been playing with Matt for *so long* that *live* the tempos would organically go up and down in certain points of the song; that's what they were used to. I wanted to be able to emulate the tempos and tempo *changes* that they were accustomed to (laughs) and *that* was challenging, because I didn't have a lot of time to learn the songs. On top of that, Brian Tichy did four gigs before I came in. Brian got to rehearse with the band and then *he* played in a certain way. I watched a couple of Brian's gigs, then I came in and did *one* sound check and one run through in the dressing room, but I had no rehearsals with them.

So, initially they were really used to Matt. Then they *kind of* got used to Brian, and then *I* came in. Of course, everybody is going to feel stuff differently. I was learning a combination of the studio and the *live* versions of the songs. I was also hired because Matt sang backing vocals and I can sing, but I had no idea which parts he sang. I learned all the parts, and got on stage and sang the parts for the first time with Scott (Weiland). When I figured out what part was missing I quickly jumped to that part.



I use music as a metaphor where drumming is life and life is drumming.

CD: So, basically you had to *be* Matt Sorum?

MS: Yeah! I had to be him. These guys had been on the road for a year and half and it was the end of the tour for them. But for me it was so new, but it was cool. Plus Slash and Duff are just the coolest guys. They were a pleasure to hang out with and they made it very easy.

CD: Let's talk about your work as a motivational speaker and clinician.

MS: Music is a perfect metaphor for working as a team, whether it's in a classroom or in a corporate context. I use my experiences and the enlightenment that I've gained from watching these incredibly successful people with whom I've had the glorious opportunity of working. I've taken a little bit of philosophy I've learned and I have a mentor, Dr. Jim Samuels – who's a great philosopher – so I've taken some of his philosophies as well. With the popularity of drum circles, I've combined these philosophies with my road stories *and* interactive drumming, and I do these team building, motivational, high energy/rock-show/keynote speeches for corporations. I also work with high-

risk kids in juvenile halls and juvenile lock down facilities. I've done a bunch of work with kids in detention camps and I work with kids with cancer at the "Ronald McDonald House". Finally, I conduct team building and leadership seminars for college students where we do interactive drumming using Remo Sound Shapes. I use music as a metaphor where drumming is life and life is drumming.

Basically, I'm a storyteller. What I do is hand out Remo Sound Shapes for interactive drumming, but the way that I do it is to demonstrate different attitudes and have the audience play with me. I tell a lot of these road stories, but I use them as examples of different attitudes, [showing] how the attitudes shape people's behavior and how the behavior *then* determines consequences on your life. That [process] is called A-B-C: Attitude, Behavior, Consequence, but we *play* these attitudes with the drums. Because that method is *experiential* and not just visual or auditory, the participants remember and really *get* something out of the experience.

I play live drums as well and I play along with live video, so it's a combination of a rock show and a big, motivational event. It's a lot of fun and it's really fantastic to see these kids really get it and see how some of them respond. There's this one kid named Michael Monroe who I've mentored since he was fifteen years old. He's now 22 years old and he does the seminars with me. Michael raps and we bring the kids up and let them freestyle. I play a drum solo and I pass out the interactive drums and I talk to them about Attitude, Behavior and Consequence.

CD: Do you talk about how the experience of being a cancer survivor affected your drumming career?

MS: Yes, I talk about [surviving] cancer in my workshops. I also took care of my ex-wife when she had cancer, so I have a lot of survival techniques that I talk about as well. I lost a testicle to testicular cancer, so when I talk to these kids in the detention camps, the moment you tell these boys that you've lost a testicle,

they listen to you. What I say is, 'Hey man, I didn't have a choice, [but] you do.' They just want to know that someone can empathize with their pain; so, I'll go toe to toe with them. They realize that what I'm talking about is for real and that I've actually sustained some hardship and loss. I can't necessarily empathize with them *socio-economically*, because I might have had a more fortunate upbringing, but I can say that I've had a lot of trauma and have looked death in the face. That's what my seminars are all about: being able to take *my* life experience and enhance other's lives through that experience. I feel like I have a lot to be able to give back to people. And it's a lot of fun because we play the drums!

I'm a bit of a philosopher. I think that success has as much to do with attitude as it does with your playing. You can get playing tips everywhere you look, but it's the stuff *in between* the playing tips that creates the success. That's what I'm here to represent.