



Slingerland

DRUM

MICKY DOLENZ

Series Television's First Rock And Roll Drummer

by John Sheridan
cover photo by Billy Tompkins
photos courtesy of John Sheridan

2004 is the Chinese Year Of The Monkey. It's only appropriate that Vintage Drummer pay homage to Micky Dolenz. Though originally hired to "play" a drummer on the 1966-68 TV series "The Monkees," the young actor soon proved capable enough on the instrument to record, and to a greater extent, perform live. As Micky has often been quoted: "It's like Leonard Nimoy actually becoming a Vulcan!"

From the heady late 1960s to numerous reunion tours over the last several decades, Micky has proven that he can both rock and deliver one of the most distinctive singing voices in pop history. And while the Monkees have been the target of much resentment by some musicians over the years, there's no denying that the group ultimately proved themselves to be a bona fide performing entity, capable of playing as a 4-piece rock band and doing so admirably. Conversely, due to the group's heavy shooting schedule, the enormous session opportunities afforded to many grateful studio-players, in both L.A. and New York, cannot be overlooked. It's a far-gone conclusion that those working musicians were anything but resentful. The legendary Hal Blaine put it best: "Smile and you'll stay a while. Pout and you're out!"

Micky's previous acting experiences undoubtedly helped develop his ability to play drums. Like musicians, actors draw from their technique as well as their talent and experience to achieve the desired effect. Sometimes we even find style in the absence of technique. If we're creative enough, we find a way to improvise where

we may be lacking in order to compensate and make it work. That's where the "X"-factor comes in. It keeps us all from sounding the same while occasionally allowing us to do something innovative.

For 1960s television, the Monkees' series was certainly innovative. Though heavily influenced by the Beatles' first two films, the series transcended those films, ever striving, and on a weekly basis. However, before the show could go into production, it was first necessary to film a pilot to pitch to the networks.

The pilot was shot in late 1965 and Micky was outfitted with a Rogers "eagle-badge" White Marine Pearl 4-piece kit with "bread & butter" lugs. It included a 14x20 bass drum, an 8x12 center-lug mounted tom, a 16x16 floor tom, a matching 5x14 snare drum, Swiv-O-Matic hardware and Zildjian cymbals: a 22" ride and 14" hi-hats. (This is the only episode in which this set appears.) The accom-

panying "dubbed" music for the pilot and subsequent series was initially performed entirely by studio musicians. Many great session drummers played for the Monkees, including Hal Blaine, Frank DeVito, Jim Gordon, Eddie Ho, Billy Lewis, Herb Lovelle and Earl Palmer.

When it became necessary for the Monkees to tour, they rehearsed assiduously until it was felt they could pull off live performances. Micky plays right-handed, but he



feels more comfortable playing left-footed. This improvisation, along with his desire to not play “cross-armed,” inadvertently led him to innovate the idea of playing “remote” hi-hats locked in a “fixed” position. Somewhat of a common practice today, this was virtually unheard of 37 years ago!

They opened in Hawaii on December 3, 1966, less than 3 months after their TV series premiered on NBC. This tour continued through late January 1967 with their Phoenix concert being filmed documentary-style. This January 21st performance was aired a few months later as the show’s first season closer.

By this time, the Fred Gretsch Manufacturing Company of Brooklyn had supplied the TV show with guitars, basses and drums in exchange for mass television exposure. Micky used a Gretsch Champagne Sparkle kit for this initial tour as well as both seasons of the TV show. It consisted of a 14x22 bass drum (ultimately sporting the famous red “guitar-shaped” Monkees’ logo head), double 8x12s, a 16x16 and a 5x14 chrome-over-brass with a Micro-Sensitive Strainer. It’s interesting to note that both 8x12’s brackets were Ludwig (timbale type) as well as the receiving bracket for Gretsch’s early double-tom holder post. (Gretsch had yet to design their own post bracket, so they actually sourced them from Ludwig for their earliest double-tom kits!) Gretsch supplied Micky with cymbals from either of their exclusive import lines: K. Zildjian (Turkey) or Ajaha (Italy). They included a 22” ride with rivets (“sizzle”), an 18” crash and 14” hi-hats.

Gretsch’s marketing department took full advantage of this endorsement by taking out full-page ads featuring the Monkees in the various music trades of the day. With a popular weekly TV series, sold-out tours and outselling Beatles and Rolling Stones records combined, the Monkees became the biggest thing in show business by 1967!

For the recording of their third album, “Headquarters”, Micky switched to Rogers drums in early ‘67. Music supervision had changed and Micky played drums on the entire LP, including the non-LP single “The Girl I Knew Somewhere.” He used a Red Onyx 14x20 (reversed with added “clamp-on” spurs) with a mounted 8x12, a 9x13 mounted on a snare stand, a chrome-over-brass 5x14 Dyna-Sonic and a Gretsch Champagne Sparkle 16x16 (likely borrowed from the TV show’s Gretsch set to stand in for the missing Rogers floor tom). That “sizzle” cymbal can clearly be heard on all “Headquarters” drum tracks. A “splash” was also included in this set-up.

Though Micky initially used the Red Onyx set on the Monkees’ cross-country 1967 summer tour, he mostly played a Jet Black Pearl (Black Nitron) Rogers kit consisting of a 14x20 (sporting a black “guitar-shaped” Monkees’ logo head) with a mounted 8x12, a 9x13 mounted on a snare stand, a 16x16 and a 5x14 matching snare, complete with Swiv-O-Matic hardware. (Note that the bass drum is reversed on both Rogers kits so that the tom holder accommodates Micky’s semi-lefty tom setup!) This set can be seen in many second season episode lip-synch “inserts” (music videos) that feature

May 21, 1968 in Salt Lake City), Micky plays a Slingerland Black Sparkle double-bass drum kit. The set consists of two 14x20s (both sporting the Slingerland logo and the word “DRUM” in large generic block letters), an 8x12 and 9x13 mounted on a Set-O-Matic double tom floor stand, a 16x16 and an 8-lug chrome-over-brass 5x14. Micky may have been inspired by Keith Moon some months earlier when he attended the legendary Monterey Pop Festival. There he witnessed Keith thrash and destroy a Slingerland Silver Sparkle double-bass kit at the end of the Who’s set. (Perhaps he thought Slingerland was the only brand to offer a double-bass kit?)

Micky used the same Slingerland kit on the Monkees Far East tour in late ‘68, playing Australia & Japan. He also used it (minus one bass drum) on the Monkees’ February 5, 1969 appearance on the Glen Campbell Good Time Hour.

In their TV special entitled “33 & 1/3 Revolutions Per Monkee” (aired April 14, 1969), Micky plays his Slingerland kit for the show’s climax. It’s the same as it appears on the Glen Campbell show except



a rainbow-colored backdrop. Those particular inserts were all filmed in a Chicago studio during the Monkees’ day off from that tour.

1968 saw the Monkees gearing up for their full-length feature “Head.” In a live performance sequence (filmed



he removed the front bass drum head. (This was a trend that started in the late-'60s which would continue well into the '70s. Ever wonder why so many vintage bass drums turn up with missing hoops, t-handles & claws? We all have that "delightful" trend to thank! I call it "Seventies Syndrome".)

The Monkees were constantly being given musical equipment by all the brands of the day in the hopes of a snagging a Monkees endorsement. Each guy simply chose what worked for him personally and gave the rest away. Though Gretsch was their only official endorsement, they ultimately strayed to Gibson guitars, a Guild bass and Slingerland drums by 1968.

So whether you regard the Monkees as pleasant, lightweight pop music icons or as superficial Hollywood corporate pawns, one thing is certain: a lot of groovy (now "classic/vintage") instruments passed through their hands during their brief tenure as rock's reigning "Pre-Fab Four."



Micky Dolenz Up-Close

by Billy Jeansonne

Nearly 40 years ago Micky Dolenz raided America's television screens as the drummer for the new pop sensation the Monkees.

To capitalize on the pop culture of the mid-1960's, a T.V. pilot was proposed for what was to become television's first rock 'n roll series. The Monkees auditions were similar to that of casting a musical. Requirements included playing an instrument or singing, as well as acting and improvisation. Micky had been a professional actor at the ripe old age of 10, playing Corky in NBC's "Circus Boy" from 1956-1958. He also sang and played guitar, beginning with classical guitar training before moving on to folk music. Prior to the Monkees he started a rock 'n roll band called "Micky and the One-Nighters." These talents combined with his outlandish comedic ability won Micky the role.

This set the stage for some of the most popular music of all time, with Micky pro-

viding one of the most distinctive singing voices in pop. Just listen to "Pleasant Valley Sunday." Put the top down on the convertible, turn up the radio, cruise down the Boulevard and enjoy!

Whether or not you're a Monkees fan, there's no denying that many great songs were written and recorded because of the Monkees' existence. The songs were played by professional studio musicians, and within a short while, by the Monkees themselves. On the concert front, the Monkees silenced their critics. They played competently in a garage-pop style that was raw and appealing, certainly of a caliber with the zestful energy of the early Kinks and Beatles in concert. Without question, their music as well as their T.V. series, had a major impact on American culture of the '60's and earns Micky a rightful place in the annals of pop history.

VDM: Micky, how old were you when you

were cast as the drummer on the Monkees TV show?

Micky: I was twenty years old. This was 1965.

VDM: Did you play drums at the time you were cast?

Micky: No, I played guitar. It wasn't until after I was cast for the part, that I learned to play the drums. I had played around on drums a little, but had never taken formal lessons until being cast as the drummer for the Monkees.

VDM: Where you immediately given lessons?

Micky: Yes, I took drum lessons for a solid year from a few different teachers in the Los Angeles area.

VDM: What was the first drum set used on the series?

Micky: The first set promoted for the show was a (champagne sparkle) Gretsch kit. I

Live in Japan courtesy of Micky Dolenz



had those drums for years and when I moved, I didn't take them with me. I wish I still had that set. The black Rogers drums were also used on the show. That is the set I took on the road. I still have the black Rogers kit.

The Monkees were great to work with! We made some good records with them. They were certainly another feather in our cap.

*Hal Blaine
Legendary session drummer.*

VDM: Micky, at what point did you begin playing on the Monkees' studio albums?

Micky: The first album that we did all the playing on was "Headquarters." Originally, they didn't want us to play on any of the albums, but we revolted and won the right to play and record all our own stuff. I do not consider myself a studio drummer. I play what I play and I do it okay, but I've never played drums on any studio sessions other than the Monkees albums. Jumping

ahead a bit, after the Monkees, Frank Zappa called me up and wanted me to join The Mothers of Invention, but I couldn't do it because I was under contract with another record company. Right from the beginning we were playing on some of the Monkees albums. Mike Nesmith was insistent about playing

on the albums. He wrote a song on the first album with Carole King called "Sweet Young Thing." But it was very difficult to get the opportunity to play on those first albums. All they wanted me to do was sing.

VDM: Did Hal Blaine play drums on the earlier recordings?

Micky: Oh yes, the Wrecking Crew not only did a lot of our early stuff, but played on the Beach Boys, The Byrds, The Mamas and Papas, and many more groups' albums. I learned a lot from Hal in the early days, not formally, but I picked up a lot from Hal.

VDM: Did you do most of the singing on the albums?

Micky: Me and Davy did all the lead vocals on all the singles. Mike did a few songs that were album cuts. Peter did a couple of tunes. But I had the majority of the hit singles.

VDM: Aside from Europe, have you toured other foreign countries?

Micky: Yeah, back in the 60's we toured Japan. Davy and I toured all the Far East countries. We went to Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. We even toured Australia.



VDM: Do you still play drums on tour?

Micky: Well, when the four of us toured England in 1997, we reconfigured the original Monkees setup. I played drums and sang lead, Mike was on guitar, Peter played bass and keyboards, and Davy played percussion and acoustic guitar. When Peter left the group originally, Mike, Davy, and I went out on the road (in 1969), it was not practical to play as a threesome, so we had other sidemen (Sam & The Goodtimers). On tours where Davy, Peter, and I went out, we had double drummers. Sandy Genero and I played drums, but I only played on some of the tunes. Over the years, people wanted me to be more out front, since I sang all the leads. It is a little boring visually for an audience when the lead singer is behind the drums all the time. Davy sort of convinced me to come down from the drums because he was out front doing background vocals and it didn't really work well with me being behind the drums.

VDM: Does Sandy Genero still play drums with the band when you are on tour?

Micky: Sandy is one of our first calls. Max Weinberg from the E Street Band played with us back in 1986.

VDM: Were you influenced by any drummers when you began playing?

Micky: Cozy Cole. Buddy Miles used to come to our house and give me some pointers. I suppose Ringo had an influence on me because I was such a huge Beatles fan. I still think to this day that Ringo is probably the best rock and roll drummer ever. He is not the fanciest drummer but he had such a feel for the song.

VDM: What is your favorite Monkees song?

Micky: I have a few, but the one that I tend to keep coming back to is "Pleasant Valley Sunday." A Carole King tune. It just seems to stand up real well over the years.

VDM: Did you write any of the Monkees' songs.

Micky: Yeah, but I never wrote any of the big hits. None of us did. Most of the hits were written by Neil Diamond, Gerry Goffin & Carole King, and Tommy Boyce & Bobby Hart.

Micky is currently starring in a rock musical on Broadway called Aida, written by Elton John and Tim Rice. For information on

Micky's live concert schedule and Aida, visit www.mickydolenz.com and www.mickydolenz.com/aida/.

Micky was a wild, madcap, zany kind of guy. Always very nice, very fun; a great guy!

Bobby Dick, with "The Sundowners" who toured with the Monkees

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Gretsch drums supplied by John Sheridan

photo by Billy Tompkins

