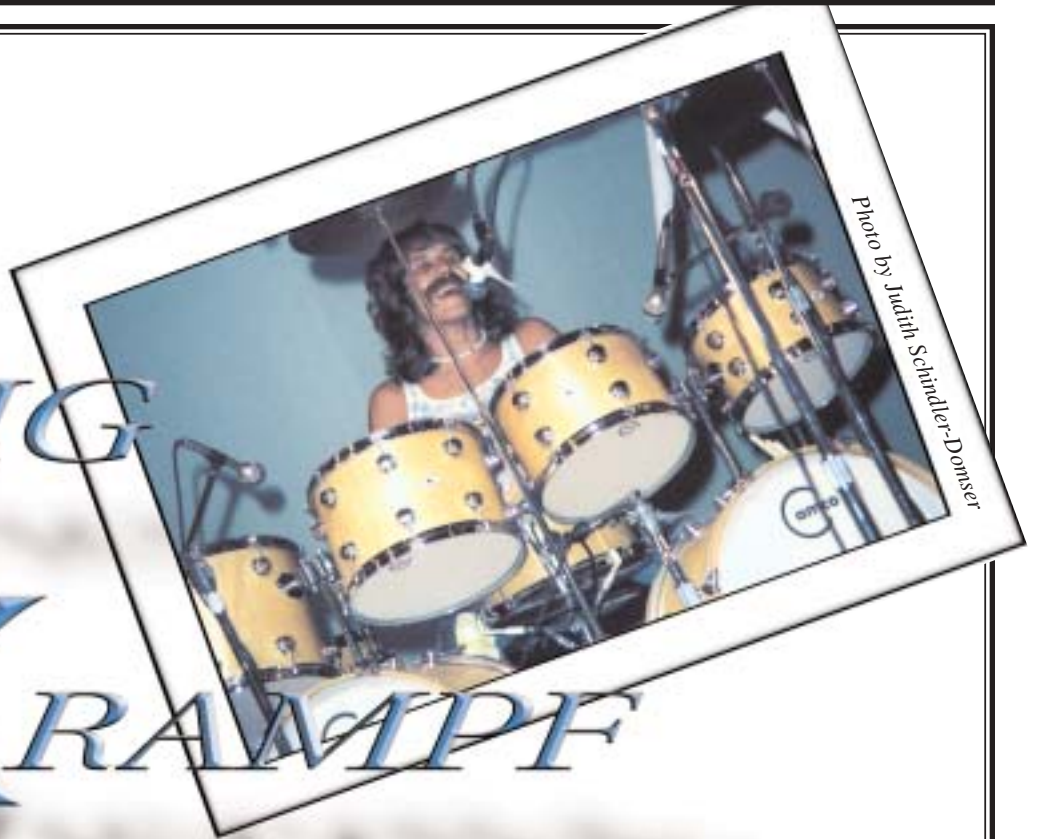


Featured Drummer ...

CRAIG KRAMPF



by Mary Anne Jeansonne
Cover photo by Judith Schindler-Domser

PART II

First of all, I want to thank everyone for their good wishes and positive thoughts on my knee surgery...it was the left, hi-hat knee. It appears that I had torn a meniscus (cartilage) at the end of last October. In early November I went out on tour for two weeks, came back to a lot of sessions and the knee was really bothering me. To make a long story short, I had surgery at the end of December. It was suppose to be fairly simple meniscus repair, but once the doctor got in there, he found a lot of damage that didn't really show up on the MRI. We both feel that it was caused by 48 years worth of drumming wear and tear. I have been religious with physical therapy and exercise, and it is coming along fine. I played three weeks after the surgery, and it was a relief to know that I wouldn't have any problems playing...sitting at the drum set felt quite natural. I still walk a bit funny, and my Christmas lights are still up (with a laugh)...no ladders just yet, but all in all, I am doing well and very thankful.

Craig Krampf



To continue where we left off in the last issue...

M.A.J *What is your all time favorite snare? Drum kit?*

C.K. Well, that would have to be my Tama Bell Brass 6.5" x 14". I just relate to its characteristics...it's loud, sensitive, and has a great ring if needed. It cuts with all the power of a piccolo and can be tuned fairly high, but because it weighs 23 pounds and is 6.5" x 14", it also has amazing beef and depth. It can also sound great tuned down a wee bit...very fat. The rim shot and side stick sounds are wonderfully meaty, but cut like crazy. I believe that the extended snare system also has a lot to do with it. The snares go completely across the drumhead...no rough solder joints or snare end pieces resting on the drumhead. The next time you hear *Melissa Etheridge's* "Bring Me Some Water", check out the snare sound...that is that drum. It also was the snare on about 23 top three *Alabama* records and the majority of songs that I have played on in the last 14 years.

Interesting question about all time favorite drum kit...I guess I would have to answer by saying that it is the one I'm currently playing. And I suppose that I would have answered that question in the same manner during my entire drumming career. I will answer a little more in depth and perhaps even try to answer your question, but I hope you see what I mean by that...the excitement we (my brother Carl and I) felt when we got our first real silver and blue Ducco (I guess it was called) Slingerland set when I was around 9 or so...wow, that was the greatest kit in the world. We traded that in on the Capri Pearl Slingerland set...that was really a beautiful looking set. I still have a soft spot in my heart for that drum set.

I guess because of my ties with Rogers, I would have to say that my "Big R" New England White set still means a lot to me. I probably check out the Rogers stuff at vintage shows more than any other brand. Someday, I would love to own a Blue Onyx Dayton era set. Speaking of that, you guys have some Rogers' stuff that kills me. Your set is beautiful.

But as you know, I am a working drummer and I usually have one kit that is the number one drum set. Right now, that is my Tama Art Star II kit. It is always set to go...in the studio or live. The Rogers had their day and I have a feeling that my Tama's may be retired soon, as well. As I said...I'm working on a few new things concerning my next drum set.

M.A.J *What cymbals are you currently playing and what are some of your thoughts on cymbals?*

C.K. I have been with Paiste since 1978. It has been a wonderful relationship. Greg Perry, the artist rep for Rogers (Rogers was the American distributor for Paiste back then), asked me to try out a Paiste 22" Bell Ride on tour. Well, the cymbal killed me. I came back from the road trip and switched to Paiste. There are many great cymbal brands out there...Zildjian and Sabian among them. Cymbal choice, like that of drum brand, sizes, heads, etc., is so subjective. My ear just really relates to the Paiste sound.

I have always used fairly large 20" crash cymbals...I love the sustain and brilliance of a 20 inch cymbal. The ride is usually 21 or 22 inches. Right now I am mainly using the Paiste Signature Series, but I have an old 2002, a few 3003's, and some odd smaller crashes, like a small color sound and a raised, flat top Sound Formula crash, that come out when the song calls for them. I also use a sizzle (rivets) cymbal and a dark China for special effects. As far as my hi-hat cymbals, I normally use the Signature Sound Edge 14" hats, but I also bring out the drier or heavier hi-hats when called for. I do change cymbal setup depending on the song. It is another tonal



quality that needs to be considered in order to contribute to the song's vibe and sonic goals.

M.A.J. *How would you describe your playing style and how do you approach playing the drums for any gig, be it live or in the studio?*

C.K. I guess what Robyn says in the following, sort of sums it up:

*"There seems to be a descriptive theme that arises whenever you talk to people who have worked with Craig, have had the opportunity to watch him perform or have heard his work on records---passion." Robyn Flans, in her cover story on Craig for Modern Drummer magazine, described it this way: "Craig is known for playing with abandon. He is the perfect combination of raw and polished: perfect in his time and all the necessary recording techniques, but with the heart, guts and soul of an 18-year-old rock'n' roller." ****

It's hard to figure out just what exactly my style is. I guess that the passion I feel for music, drumming, and the incredible honor of getting to play music translates into whatever would be called a style. I can tell you what some people say about me...it's about the groove, feel and the way that I play for the song. I think that I am a simple, lay-it-down type drummer. I don't feel that I have a lot of chops like a lot of players, but what I am called on to do usually is about the artist, the song and what is necessary to support that with my whole heart and soul. Let the song speak to you...be sensitive to it. I usually ask for a lyric sheet. I want to read what it is the song is trying to say. Every instrument, drums included, should try to enhance and help convey that message. Let the artist and/or producer lead you to what it is that you need to do (and often they want and count on you to lead them to it), and do that with everything that you've got. I am not talking about volume and chops; I'm talking about playing your heart out and making the song have a feel and providing great musical support for the artist.

Attitude is so very important in music and actually, in most aspects of life. You are there for the artist and producer. Whatever process that needs to be gone through in order to obtain the result that they are looking for and wanting to achieve, do it with a great or at least, a good attitude. Sometimes that creative moment can be a fragile moment. Or when you're trying to capture a passionate performance, the artists are being asked to stand naked in front of the world and expose themselves...it can be scary for them. Be understanding of this and be supportive.

Sometimes the sessions are a creative open book. I love it when everyone has ideas or suggestions and the flow of creativity is free and without ego. But quite often, you are there to execute the producer's and artist's ideas and concepts. You may not always agree to what it is they are asking you to do or play, but you have to remember...it is their session. They may also have a vision for the end result that you still might not be grasping. Once again, it is about the artist and the song...it is not about you.

I don't talk about this too much, but it is a thought and philosophy that runs through my head, especially on days when perhaps I'm a little tired, or perhaps that the artist, song, studio, engineer, producer (or some combination of that) isn't the greatest, or for whatever reason that things aren't exactly conducive for being creative or striving for brilliance... "This may be the last time that you might get to play music and your drums." Life is so fragile, you never can be sure of anything. Play like this may be your last time. Another way to say that is to use the sports jargon: "Leave it all on the field."



*Photo by Cheryl Raven
1963*

I could go on and on about this subject. I just don't understand when I see artists or players holding back. Play with all the passion, heart and soul that you have...that's what it should be all about.

M.A.J. *Do you have an instructional video out or do you plan on making one?*

C.K. The answer is no to the first question. Making one would be interesting and I have been thinking of a few concepts for one. It's funny...I have done some clinic work and seminars and usually I talk more than play. I usually wind up telling a lot of stories, along with a bit of my life story and within those stories hopefully, are lessons for life, drumming and a music career. A video is really something to think about. I have had this thought for awhile and have been encouraged by others...perhaps I should write a book. There are a lot of stories...it could be a creative and fun project.



M.A.J. *Your discography is truly amazing. Do you have one favorite song that you have played on?*

C.K. There are some very special moments that have happened in the studio that have wonderful memories: working with Paul Stanley for the Kiss Solo albums, working with Yes on two 12" remixes for songs off the Big Generator album, working with Bill Conti on Rocky III, it is a whole long story, but getting the title track for the Kim Carnes "Mistaken Identity" album at 4:00 AM all cut live and in one take, recording "Race With The Wind" with The Robbs (was the first song recorded for our first record deal with Mercury Records and was the first time that I heard a record that I played on being broadcast on radio), recording a live album, over three nights at The Roxy in LA, with Flo & Eddie and the Turtles, overdubbing drums on a Townes VanZandt album (there are a few incredible stories with this project)...I could go on and on, there are so many great memories and stories.

But okay, back to songs that I've played on: "Strung Out" for Steve Perry's "Street Talk" album, "Only the Lonely" by the Motels, "Under the Milky Way" by the Church, "Superhero" by Garrison Starr, "Hot Child in The City" by Nick Gilder, "Reconsider Me" by Warren Zevon, "All the Right Moves" the title track from the movie of the same name, "Fix My Life", by Disappearing Fear, Art Garfunkle's "All My Love's Laughter" (I only played cymbals, but this song kills me)...what an honor to work with Art and also have the Chieftains play on this track, there are so many favorites. BUT YOU SAY ONE SONG...okay, let me try again. When really pressed and trying to get it down to one, I guess "Bette Davis Eyes" by Kim Carnes ranks very high. Kim brought that song in to rehearsal and said the lyrics were great, but musically it was not happening. What could we do to make this song cool? It was truly a group effort and to make a long story short, over three days of rehearsal we came up with pretty much what you heard. That song was cut all "live", including the vocal. I believe it was take #2. There is one overdub on that record...there was supposed to be a backward guitar solo, but as soon as we all heard the playback, it was felt that an "anti-solo" would be more effective. I didn't play the Synare drum during that solo, so Val Garay (the producer), had me go out and overdub that white noise sound during the solo section. I believe that the record sold something like 40 million worldwide. It was number one in the USA for nine weeks and won both Record and Song of the Year awards at the '82 Grammy's.

M.A.J. *Do you have one favorite artist or band that you have worked with?*

C.K. Really, there is not just one. I have been so fortunate over the course of my career to have worked with a lot of wonderful people...this includes artists, fellow musicians, engineers and producers. There are so many people that have a place in my heart for various reasons. I could go on and on about a lot of these folks.

M.A.J. *You did a great job introducing Hal Blaine at the Atlanta Vintage Drum Show two years ago. Would you like to add any insights on your relationship with Hal?*

C.K. We don't have the space here to go through it all, but thinking about Hal Blaine's contribution to music and drumming in a historical context, I would have to say he ranks in the top ten drummers of all time.

continued on page 24

Craig Krampf *continued ...*

On a personal level, he has been an inspiration for many reasons and I have learned so much from him. I treasure the few times that we have got to spend together and for his insights, humor and words of wisdom. Right now Hal would say something funny and self-deprecating, and tell me not to sound so damn serious (*with a laugh*)...so, I will stop there.

M.A.J. *What one bit of information would you tell any drummer to apply to playing drums, be it mental or physical?*

C.K. To me, it is always about putting your heart, soul and passion into whatever you do. I am not just talking about music and drumming, but whatever you do for a living or perhaps even with a chore or mundane task...if you're going to do it, really do it. Try to live in the moment and enjoy that moment, if you can.

For some reason, I don't think that tempo and being able to groove is stressed enough with young players. I guess it's just the enthusiasm of youth that so much concentration is spent on chops and speed. I'm not saying don't spend time on that stuff, but learn to appreciate and be able to play that almost indescribable thing called a groove. It is so hard to put in words, but to me it has a lot to do with the backbeat..how you feel it, where it is placed, how you hit it. I visualize it sometimes as an up and down motion or like a graph that has low and high points...the space between the bass drum and where the backbeat hits, contributes so greatly to having a feel or groove. Don't shortchange any note...give it the space that it deserves and usually wants to have. Charlie Watts, Kenny Aronoff, Al Jackson, Earl Palmer, and Hal Blaine for example, all have that backbeat feel. When the feel is right, you can move people and usually, they don't even fully understand why they are being moved.

It goes without saying, but take care of yourself. Life is precious. I am enjoying life and playing my drums more than I ever have. Sometimes when we are younger, we wonder what age will do to us. I want to give the younger guys hope...it will be all right. Creativity and passion don't know age. As long as my body is willing, I can rock with the best of them (*with a laugh*).

M.A.J *What statement would you use to describe yourself, your career, or life?*

C.K. Life is good. I have been blessed in so many ways: my incredible wife Susie (we have been married 30 years). I could not have achieved the things I have without her love, help and support. We are blessed with three wonderful daughters, Carrie, Katie, and Courtney, and now also a son-in law in Carrie's husband, Jason. Great kids. We are a very close family...a sense of family means a lot to all of us. For me, my parents and brother helped in the development of that sense of family.

When I look back at my career, I have had a strange and wonderful ride as a musician. Maybe I haven't achieved all that I would have liked, but hopefully, there is a chance that I will achieve a few more of those things. And when I take the time to reflect on the things that I have accomplished, I realize that it's been a wonderful career. I consider myself to be very fortunate to be able to be a part of making music. It is something that I don't take for granted. At the start of the day it is, "Thank you God for another day." And if it's a workday, I always feel happy and very lucky that I get to play music and my drums. Life is good.

In closing, I would like to express to our readers what a pleasure it was to interview Craig, someone so accommodating and generous with his time. We were able to pick and choose from many photos he submitted to us from his personal collection. His list of recordings span a successful career giving credence to his talent as a gifted drummer, yet he remains humble. We at Vintage Drummer consider ourselves very fortunate to know such a kind soul. His enthusiasm for life stems from his love of what he does best, playing drums. As long as he can play, his youth will be eternal.

**** quote is reprinted from Modern Drummer*

