

# Who's Who in Vintage Drums ...

## PAOLO SBURLATI Italian Collector Extraordinaire

by Billy Jeansonne

Paolo Sburlati is an accomplished drummer and the author of the much in demand book LUDWIG-YESTERDAY & TODAY. His vintage drum collection, which is featured in his book, is very extensive and very colorful. Here is a look at Paolo, the drummer and the collector.

**B.J.** When and where were you born?

**P.S.** January 31, 1959 in Torino, Italy

**B.J.** At what age did you start playing drums?

**P.S.** 10?? I've seen a drummer on Italian TV, black & white, late 60's. He had this big Silver kit, a horrible Hollywood Italian brand, with a 26" bass drum and two ride toms above it. Drumkits have always been my favourite instrument. Used to change it every night, like girls. But the only one instrument which really matters to humanity is the piano. In case of nuclear attack, save a piano and you saved the music on earth.

**B.J.** What or who influenced you to become a drummer?

**P.S.** Jon Hiseman (Colosseum), then Ian Paice (Deep Purple), then Billy Cobham. Still waiting for the 4th interesting drummer.

**B.J.** Who were some of your favorite drummers as you were growing up?

**P.S.** All of the above with the additions of Phil Collins, Terry



Bozzio, Vinnie Colaiuta, Jan Hammer (yes, he plays like hell, both keys and drums!).

**B.J.** What kind of drums were your first kit?

**P.S.** Ludwig. I desperately wanted a Rogers bass drum pedal and possibly a Rogers kit when I was a kid. I wanted an elegant kit, like my mother is; an elegant woman. I had not enough money to afford a Swiv-O-Matic so I bought a

Speed King (actually, when I went to the music shop to buy the Rogers pedal, they had run out of Swiv-O-Matics, so I got what was left, the Speed King, and saved some money). Then found a second-hand Ludwig kit months later and got into Ludwig's too much.

This sickness still lasts today! Ludwigs are stronger in sound than Rogers. And my mom is a very strong woman. I discovered this even more in these past months when I lost my dad, in January.

**B.J.** Have you ever taken formal drum lessons, and if so, from who?

**P.S.** Just a brief period (late 70's) from my friend Furio Chirico in Torino, Italy for 6 months, in time to get a proper grip (Furio is featured at the next Modern Drummer Festival). Then I attended the Antonio Vivaldi Conservatory in Alessandria for 3 years studying Tuned Percussion and Piano.



Then I played all my life (30 years this year) of which 10 years were spent in Switzerland and playing in all of Europe.

**B.J.** *When and why did you start collecting drums?*

**P.S.** I suffered too much not to have a proper drumkit when I was a kid (edipo's complex), so when I had the opportunity to



buy a Ludwig, I jumped on it, then on another one, then another, then another, then it became a nevrosis (jumpin' too much is a simptomatologic effect of a radicated nevrosis in the human psyche caused by a disturbed or partially stopped growth in the sexual evolution of a kid), so I started investing and reselling, elevating the grade, then I did collect the best lookin' Ludwigs and one each in order to be able to write my book, "Ludwig-Yesterday & Today". I'm now selling everything, they have to go back and make music. Got married, became a father, I'm happy, no need for this many drumkits anymore!

**B.J.** *Have you always collected only Ludwig drums?*

**P.S.** I started with guitars, just Fenders and Gibsons. I reached 130 pieces. Kept the best ones and sold the rest, reinvested in drums, just Ludwigs (mainly) and Gretsches (a few). Still, I kept buying pre-MIDI keyboards. I love'em, I always wanted to be a keyboard player, like Keith Emerson, never been able. A keyboard player is a serious musician, a drummer is a blessed musician. So I switched to guitar, then to drums. I also had a few Rogers and Slingerland kits, a few Premier too. Got rid of them all, didn't like them. Ludwig drums have power, sound, roundness, they give when you ask and the look (mamma!!).

Did it really happen by chance that Bonzo, Paice, Ringo, Powell, Palmer, Taylor, Carmine, Brewer, they all used

Ludwig? If it was good for them it's great for me. I've always liked Rogers kits, again, very elegant, classy Swiv-O-Matic tom holders, pedal, hi-hats... had them all later. Still Rogers drums look very nice, but they're not masculine in sound (evolution of the psychologic investment I was starting to express my narcisus side: drums had to represent me, not my mom anymore. This happens when somebody decides somehow to become a man and mark the world with his signature, to leave something valuable and useful to others - that's when I started writing music too).

When you play on a Ludwig you really feel the sound you always heard on those records. Especially when I play Ian Paice's kit or Cozy's kit: I hear THAT sound coming out of the drums.

As well as for Paiste cymbals, nearly every rock drummer in the 70's and 80's had Paiste 2002 cymbals. It did not happen by chance either! I grew up with the 2002's sound in my ear and that's the sound I hear when I hit my 2002 cymbals. I have the pleasure to be a good friend of Toomas Paiste (I work for Paiste, Remo, Ludwig, and DW in Italy) and he did so that I could have new 2002 cymbals with old black ink stamps in order to match the look of Ian and Cozy's kits on stage. Those are the sets! And AXIS pedals. On all other pedals for me is like walkin' in the sand.

**B.J.** *How many Ludwig kits do you have in your collection?*

**P.S.** I reached 67, then I started sellin'em all, while keepin' buying'em. I had more than 100 Ludwig kits in my life. Last year I had bought another 16 kits and this year I'm around 5 so far. I'm into WFL's now.

Must understand the real difference between 50's WFL's and 60's Ludwigs. WFL's are more tribal in sound, remind me of



old Gretschs of which I have still 7 kits, both 50's 3 ply and 60's 5 and 6 ply. 60's Ludwigs are more round, more punch, more levelled in response, excellent for studio, very good live on stage. If you play hard rock (Deep Purple covers like I do) you do really need a 70's Ludwig, much more punchy, more volume. It's because of mahogany wood. WFL kits were mahogany/poplar/mahogany shells, no finish inside, rough sound, brutal, tribal, not too many highs, not too punchy. 60's Ludwig shells were

mahogany/poplar/maple, more defined in attack, rounder, less brutal. It's as if the white paint works like an equalizer, mellowing the extremities and enhancing mid and low frequencies. 70's Ludwig shells were maple/poplar/maple and that's were the total Ludwig sound is! There's all in those shells.

Then Vistalites, very punchy, exaggerate mid frequencies boosted, great attack, very responsive to the kind of head you put on. Best results for bass drums is with Remo Clear Ambassador heads. I had Remo make M5 front bass drum heads for me, very thin, excellent in booming sound! It's tricky to tune those heads, especially on a 22", but if you put'em on a 24", you get a great result, on a 26" is a canon response (I mean the part of the sound that comes after the beat). It's like an exponential response from those heads, the larger the diameter the bigger the boom. But it's also because of frequency. Remo M5 22" heads are constituted by a quantity of material which does not allow the head itself to go down enough and vibrate to a certain frequency. 24" heads have more surface, more mass and thus are slower in moving and reach a lower frequency easier which is a nice, very good boom. 26" have the right amount of mass, of slow vibration and thus a lower frequency is enhanced, the right boom frequency you hear on those Zep albums, late 60's.



It's all in the heads. The shell only acts like a filter, it may add or detract on certain frequencies. Shell is like a fixed filter. This is where my electronics knowledge comes in handy (I studied 5 years electronics at school when I was young). I always like to ideally explode any acoustic instrument in parts and see which part corresponds to the oscillator, which one to the filter, which to the envelope generator, which to the amplifier, which to the pulse width modulator, which kind of harmonics you get from a certain instrument and thus which wave is it referred to (sine, pulse, saw, ramp...) it's a good way to learn how to analyze and then be able to repair, or build or modify an acoustic instrument in order to get the sound result you're lookin' for. Of course, if you know where to touch and how, you know how to get sound.

Then Stainless Steel. Those are THE BEST sounding Ludwig kits to me. I own a large selection of SS Ludwig drums, any size, Aerial, Melodics, bass drums, parade snares... I love

Stainless Steel kits. Carl Palmer loves them as well. I have a few pics of him on his old Stainless Steel kit which he asked me to buy many years ago (too expensive, Ringo has it now) and on my Solid White Octaplus during the last tour I booked for him in Italy. I'm booking more dates for him in the coming May and June and this time he wants to use my Stainless Steel kit. Alright.

**B.J.** Which kit is your favorite and why?

**P.S.** The stainless steel. All drums sound equal, calibrated, great response, many frequencies. If you don't need too many highs you can damp the heads and remove them. If you need highs and the drum does not give'em naturally, you cannot create them. It's better to have more and eventually detract. You cannot create. If you try different heads on SS drums you feel a big difference in sound. Metal acts like a strong filtering on oscillators (heads). And metal rims

(pulse width) are more effective during rimshots and according to the point where you hit the head. Mother nature never guarantees its wood, so each wood shell may differ from another one. Stainless steel is stainless steel! Guaranteed! No need to use Remo M5 heads on stainless steel drums. Any head has power, is punchy, and has bottom on those shells. Bonzo knew this personally well. Ludwig Vistalite and SS were underestimated drum lines. Too underestimated. Because of this they made few drums. They're scarce today. What a pity. Good for any collection.

**B.J.** How many Ludwig snares do you have in your collection?

**P.S.** Many. Too many. Still buying snare drums every week. You should ask my buddy-middleman-brother-factotum, Bill



Cardwell in Kansas City, Missouri. He runs his C & C Drum Shop and sold me all the drums you see in my book. He can tell you much more about the story of those drums. He made a few kits for Carl Palmer also, and he patented and is now using on his C & C drums a special tuning lug I designed many years

ago. It's a self-aligning, self-straightening lug with a pivoting pin which allows tension rods to be always straight into the pin and allows a better tuning.

**B.J.** Which snare drum is your favorite and why?

**P.S.** 70's Ludwig, 12 x 15 Super Sensitive Stainless Steel

Parade drum. 70's Ludwig 6.5 x 14 Supra-Phonic (Ian & Cozy's kits both have it). 60's Ludwig 5 x 14 Acrolite, 60's Ludwig 6.5 x 14 Auditorium Blue Sparkle, 50's Ludwig 5.5 x 14 Classic Red Sparkle Transition Badge, 60's Ludwig Standard 5 x 14 Turquoise Sparkle, 60's Ludwig 5 x 14 Pioneer Red Sparkle, 70's Ludwig 5 x 14 Green Vistalite, 70's Ludwig 6.5 x 14 Red Vistalite, 60's Rogers 5 x 14 Dyna-Sonic, 1962 Gretsch 5.5 x 14 Pink Champagne Sparkle.

Still looking for a 70's Ludwig 3 x 13 Stainless Steel. I do not like Ludwig & Ludwig tube lug snare drums, brass shell, they all sound muddy, dark. I like open sound, brilliant, stuff that I can hear

onstage. If I hear it on stage, then I can taste it at home in the silence of my room and I know I will get more than from a regular sounding snare drum.



**B.J.** What kit do you play out on your gigs with?

**P.S.** Many, mostly Ian's and Cozy's kits, then Amber Vista, Green Vista, Stainless Steel, Green Sparkle 1967, Solid White Octaplus, Black Cortex Octaplus.

**B.J.** What snare do you use mostly?

**P.S.** 70's Ludwig 6.5 x 14 Supra-Phonic, 70's Ludwig 12 x 15 Stainless Steel Super Sensitive.

**B.J.** Your book "Ludwig - Yesterday & Today" is very impressive and enjoyable. How did the book come about?

**P.S.** I asked myself, what the hell am I gonna do with all these drums? I wrote articles about'em all for Drum Club magazine. I played'em all, I enjoyed'em all, I collected'em all, I disassembled, reassembled, learned from'em all, I took pics of'em all... still I must write a book about'em all and then I can sell'em all! Jim Catalano agreed on the idea and there's the book now.

**B.J.** How long did it take to complete the book, from photographing, to writing, to compiling, and completing the book?

**P.S.** 2 months to take pictures. I wanted new pics, the ones I had were too modern. I wanted old kinda pics, yellow pics like in the 50's and 60's when lights were not so clear like the sun like today's 5,500 Kelvin grades. So, I have taken'em in an old style. After all, my book had to be a collection of pictures of old Ludwig



drums. It had not to be the new Yamaha drum catalog! Then 3 months to write it in English and translate it in Italian. Then did all scanning and assembling with a computer, Photoshop, Quark Xpress, etc. Then had friends make the films and print the book. 3,000 copies. All sold!

**B.J.** Do you attend any of the Vintage Drum Shows?

**P.S.** To do what?

**B.J.** You have such an extensive collection? Is there any snare drum or drum kit you are searching for?

**P.S.** Found Ludwigold I was missing at the time of the book. No, the new passed me off. I like WFL's more and more but just for the sake of curiosity.

I'm into synthesizers, always been. Did you see the synthesizers.com site? Wow! That Roger Arrick is the new Bob Moog, which I have the pleasure to know very well. We had dinner several times during past NAMM Shows together with Roger Linn (Linn-Drums), Alpert (E-mu Systems), John Bowen (Sequential Circuits), Tom Oberheim and other geniuses. All thanks to my good friend, Rene Rochat, who was my partner when we distributed Paiste cymbals in Italy in the 80's and who is now the international sales manager for Ludwig since many years.

Must buy a Q150 Ladder Filter from Synthesizers.com and



compare it with one of the original Moog 904 Low Pass Filters in my Moog Modular collection.

And then relax and play some of my newly arrived Paiste Sound Creation Gongs. Those are the frequencies, not bang-bang-boom-dissshhhh...