A CASE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCES OF A NASHVILLE-BASED PROFESSIONAL DRUMMER

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Abstract

Little is known of the training inherent in the career advancement of successful professional drummers. The purpose of this study was to examine the formal and informal musical education and career development of a professional drummer in Nashville. The research questions were framed to provide insight into this professional drummer’s blending of formal conservatory instruction and musicianship attained informally via methods common to vernacular musicians. The participant, a successful professional drummer who records and tours with some of the most acclaimed popular artists in music, was interviewed three times over a two-day period. Analysis of the findings reinforced the importance of performance, preparation, and embracement of a broader range of musical genres and collective learning methods in efforts to attain success in the professional job market. The career success of this participant may indicate that music educators should consider alternative informal learning methods of vernacular musicianship in their curriculum design.

Keywords: professional drummer, vernacular musicianship, music education, informal learning, identity
Little is known about the formal and informal music education of popular musicians. Their learning processes and their application of acquired skills, in the most prevalent popular musics of today, are essential to understanding the manner in which individuals conceive of their “place” upon the musical landscape. Burt (2004) postulates that vernacular learners’ efforts provide a unique look at the aspects of role identity within and beyond the social group network, and seem to be directly attributable to fundamental psychological perceptions that influence our tastes in musical undertakings. The importance of both informal vernacular learning processes and more traditional types of education in the career development and success of musicians who function in popular genres deserves careful examination.

Welch (1999) presents the idea that real world musicianship requires a broader range of music vocabulary and that several cognitive components are at the disposal of the musician participating in improvisatory settings. The cataloging and application of one’s creative arsenal require a mental maintenance inherently necessary in the development of the reflexive psychomotor reactionary skills we refer to as improvisation. Such internal mechanisms may well contribute to the manner in which musicians first embark on improvisatory activities as beginning musicians, and might serve as early stimuli in the motivation of music making processes. Musicians with a non-classical music education that has been acquired in informal settings are often an overlooked, and underrepresented segment of the musical performer population. Kamin, Richards and Collins (2007) found similar psychological characteristics of developing excellence (PCDE) in musicians who shared non-traditional learning experiences. Three key
considerations that were unearthed in the course of their research included the understanding that PCDEs often are a result of musical aptitude developed in non-structured or formal environments unique from traditional classical music settings. Additionally, for non-classical musicians, their musical identity is a result of peer association and social interaction rather than teacher or parent contribution. Lastly, in the technology rich environment of present day popular culture, various musical media are essential in the motivation, and skill development of musicians engaged in informal learning.

Such non-traditionally trained musicians practice efforts are often exhaustive in pursuit of heightened performance due to their higher levels of self-motivation, enjoyment and prolonged engagement with music they enjoy. Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) examined how prolonged effort might account for the expert performance of standout individuals across a range of disciplines. They took into consideration potential restraints that might serve in undermining the intent of aspirants from their earliest efforts in childhood through adult pursuit of excellence in performance execution. Chin (2010) examined forms of music engagement specifically those other than formal music training that might also predict verbal memory performance. Gender, socioeconomic status, and music performance variables were controlled in the main study; IQ was also assessed for a subset of participants. While performance musicianship remained a stronger predictor of verbal learning and memory, convincing evidence is presented that nonperformance music engagement (listening activity) also predicted verbal memory measures. The role of music engagement was independent of control factors both in the main study results and in the subset. The findings highlight the need
for a more extensive conceptualization of musicianship in research that examines the impact of music on cognitive performance.

For vernacular music makers and conservatory or trained musicians alike the creative impulse is essential and it is common for the individual to draw on several different cognitive processes and social identifications in their pursuit of the externalization of their improvisatory product. Burt (2004), addresses such interrelated thinking processes as imbuing the aspiring performer via with their own social investment. Opinions, perceptions and behaviors often motivate an individual to identify with specific groups. Such identification for conservatory trained musicians can often lead to particular cognitive behaviors that embrace very specific means of apprehension processes and skill acquisition strategies. In contrast to these somewhat traditional approaches to group musical study are popular musicians whose mental processes embrace a blending of alternative learning tactics. This latter group embraces a broader means of applying understanding as they interact in various musical and social settings. Such popularly influenced, or vernacular musicians as they are commonly known, activities seem to reinforce the need for a broadening of vocabulary in the modern day musical education efforts. Giddings (2008) addressed the specific manner in which students achieve literacy in popular music, recognizing that it is a much different process from the methods applied by practitioners of the classical tradition of music. Specifically, he demonstrated that in the latter’s ensemble setting a great emphasis is placed upon functional knowledge and understanding as it pertains to reading notation, whereas in the former popular music settings a higher priority skill is the ability to comprehend music by ear, along with the embracement of improvisation. Neither method, informal or formal
serves as a panacea for every musical application however. Green (2008a) emphasized the centuries old conundrum of formal, and informal music learning operating independent of one another with little to no interactive practice. This has resulted in a losing proposition for all practitioners as those steeped in each tradition yearn for the skills and knowledge that the other possesses. Popular musicians often feel a sense of inferiority in their musical pedigree for lack of abilities with written notation, while musicians who are disciples of formal training either feel deficient in areas of improvisation and aural musical aptitude or were turned off altogether from pursuing musical performance due to the rigid structure of traditional methods of instruction. Green found that those who play music they identify in conjunction with like-minded friends are far more motivated, and possess a stronger musical identity that translates into a strong overall sense of musical “spirit” (p. 216) and continued quest for further knowledge.

**Teacher Training in Application of Vernacular Learning Modalities**

There seems to be minimal data demonstrating incidents of traditionally trained teachers in school ensembles teaching parts by rote. Instead it seems that there is a tendency for educators in such setting to perpetuate the argument that students must be encouraged to learn how to read given literature themselves. Giddings (2008) asserts that such arguments hold little sway as students in school ensembles often play by ear regardless the teacher’s best efforts and as such might we not consider embracing this means of perception? His premise being that if we are to address means of motivation, and stimulation in a young person’s learning process might we not apply the popular music concept that it is indeed okay to teach by rote. He postulates that this is how songs
are learned and passed on in vernacular settings, specifically they are only written down into notation after they are composed and become popular, such practices might be beneficial in the classroom setting as well. Lucy Green (2002) in interviewing a popular musician received the following response:

Through [listening and copying], you don't just pick up what they're doing, you pick up techniques, you pick up common sorts of progressions and so forth. And nowadays I can hear a record, and I just know what's coming next. I know exactly what the notes are as well...I can listen, and I can pick out the pitch. I know that's a C major or whatever. (p. 233)

(Jorgenson 2014) addresses the need for multiple values as they pertain to reframing the philosophical and psychological framework of music education. Her study focused on the need for inclusion of four variables including a broad view, personal perspective, constructive vision and a relevant plan. She challenges educators to speak about issues that are important to the future of music education. An embrace of the need for a more holistic approach to students’ understanding and development of a unique musical philosophy is underscored as an essential value in the context of present day music learning. The pairing of popular, or vernacular music making motivations with music education’s more traditional foundational footings of study in pursuit of better overall comprehension amongst varied learning types is a central thread in the integration of informal music practices. (Finney, 1987; Russell 1997; Hargreaves 1999) Jorgenson (2014) further postulates the need to retain awareness of the specific long-term value that holistic musical pursuits might serve in terms of practical application of everyday music making and retention amongst adult practitioners. Such real world transfer for both classically trained and vernacular based musicians is an essential component of both early acquisition and broader participatory motivations throughout the lifespan of conservatory
trained and vernacular musicians alike.

The research in the area of motivational practices of musicians in multiple settings seems to underscore the need for a broadening of scope in perception of that which should be taught as it applies to genre and style. The traditional conventions of musical categorization, addressed by O’Flynn (2006) in his application of the term vernacular as an alternative, or complimentary manner in which we might view the various types of music-making taking place amongst non-professional, or hobbyist musicians across a broad-spectrum of genres, might well serve to imbue our fundamental perception in all music educational pursuits. Woody’s (2007) comparison of vernacular and popular music addresses the musical styles and music making practices common among people across wide spectrums of society. He outlines the dearth of true substantive progress that has been made in regard to the applications of popular music forms in the context of the traditional music education format. Some of which is a product of the impediments of preconception:

Clearly many in the world of formal music education consider classical music (or maybe jazz) to be the most meaningful, exemplary, and real music there is. However, an appreciation of jazz, as an equal tenant of music education, is not shared by the vast majority of people in Western society. This includes the students that school music teachers are charged to educate. (p. 167)

Research indicates that in the minds of many young people there can be a significant disconnect between their conceptions of school music and what they consider to be real music. In emphasizing this need for new ways of thinking as it applies to such educational outreach Woody focuses on the need for authenticity that is educationally meaningful in which traditional educators can be immersed in new learning formats emphasizing creative collaboration. Such alternative learning provides stimulated
thinking that may well directly impact both the teacher and potential student’s thought process in approaching music. The study of amateur music making practices as they might be applied in both formal and informal methods of teaching might serve to revolutionize both grade school and university music education settings. Studies show that the manner in which we design our learning for the future of music education must be guided by thoughtful and equal consideration to not only the culture from which various musical forms are derived but more importantly underpinned with a better understanding of the psychology of the processes of the group that develop such practices of musical expression. Specific applications for such skill acquisition in applying integrated comprehension processes are present in ear-training activities of both classical musicians and those with a vernacular, or informal music learning backgrounds (Woody, 2010). Student’s varying cognitive strategies in assessing processing and representing melodic information might be compared and contrasted based on the number of repetitions of exposure the individual needed to accurately recreate the material presented. The findings demonstrated that vernacular musicians seemed to be capable of more sophisticated generation of accurate representations of the material where as the classical musicians were for the most part more focused on the physical demands of reproducing the tonal information on their instrument or voice. This comparison and contrast in thought processes may well serve ancillary research in framing the proposed need for more frequent application of vernacular or by ear/by rote music making activities in formal music education training. Such studies might be effective in providing foundational evidence of the possible short-comings of traditional conservatory training grounded solely in notation based theory and pedagogy (Filsinger, 2012).
The “Talent” Argument: Biological or Developmental?

Talent development is a central underlying theme of study in the psychological motivations of vernacular musicians. Research of this nature affords another viewpoint beyond the elements of practice and preparation as it pertains to fundamental thinking in music making. Do some indeed possess greater predisposition to musical excellence? It is a question that begs further investigation to be certain. Specifically, Campbell (2010) inquired into attributes of child psychology as it pertains to the growth in learning capacity and manner in which such activity might be stimulated. Multiple aspects of learning development include: the role biology plays on a genetic level the importance of multicultural integration within music education and core concepts of lesson planning as well as teacher training in terms of how educational methods might impact a child’s application of learning. Broader social orientations of motivation as it serves individual learning stimulation and training for pre-service teachers has been addressed in recent research, Vratulis’ (2011) three month study in which pre-service educators utilized the application GarageBand and an electronic bulletin board as stimulants for student community building and better understanding of the broad array of musics encompassed under the heading of vernacular. The study encouraged the participants to contribute personal musical interest playlists, via the technology platform, in order to develop their appreciation and comprehension of the contributing musical elements inherent across a wide-array of genres and cultures. This project encouraged true reflection and potential reframing of the individual educators’ perspective in the manner in which these neophyte teachers approached their manner of inquiry in enhancing their teaching abilities. It remains to be seen exactly how such exercises impact cognitive processes amongst
students but the implications of broader perspective provided by such embracement of technology would seem to be significant in framing a new holistic approach to student understanding.

Findings have addressed this importance in cultural perspective in children’s mental development. In Nature’s Gambit (Feldman & Goldsmith, 1986) examine the lives of exceptional children and their families as they seek understanding for similarities that exist in the upbringing of child prodigies in various settings. Such studies address the advancement of mankind’s long-term evolution and potential for growth not only in exceptional children with heightened abilities in a given specialization but more specifically as to how to achieve heightened ability in all children. Harris’ (1956) early work in emphasizing an understanding of potential practices that might better inform our young people’s developmental and performance abilities (through modeling of the characteristic activities of this study) might well serve to better frame our examination of present day considerations of the mind’s development in the formative stages of childhood. Examining the interactions of children’s music improvisations and interactions, Beegle (2010) observed what took place when the students were grouped in small clusters for regular interaction in their weekly music class. Elements of prepared and spontaneous improvisation both contributed to the study with data being gathered over a three-month period. The children demonstrated three definitive attributes over the course of the study; all seemed to utilize similar planning processes influenced heavily by their respective social roles. Additionally, their music products differed as they were prompted and such prompts had the effect of encouraging further musical freedom. Lastly there was evidence of three specific strategies and value considerations
underscoring their planning and evaluation of improvisation. Encouraging unimpeded creativity of young musicians in their improvisation pursuits would seem to have far ranging implications as such efforts might be highly useful in contrasting adult learning patterns and psychological predispositions later in life. In turn such research might well inform our teaching with more empathy for our students and parents efforts to such ends.

In addressing the apprehension modalities of younger students, Beegle (2010) applied further focus on children’s concepts of music making and improvisation undertaking a more indefinite approach gathering data in which the researcher interacted with the young people in several fashions including: informal interviewer, empathetic recipient and at times a co-participant in their musical activities. The research was framed in the manner in which the students partook in spontaneous music making and addressed the meaning found in roles such as: player, audience, teacher along with activities such as: playing and inquiring. Three particular concepts of note were addressed via the study: Objectification, thoughtfulness and shared intentionality. These three conceptualizations strived to capture the primary principles inherent in better understanding the children’s applications of improvisatory techniques in their music making.

Such activities help to better highlight the need for self-determined action as a means to look beyond skills into the inherent internal narrative unique to each individual and the nature of making music. Readdressing the earlier work of Sloboda & Howe (1991), Gagne (1999) asserts the original author’s missteps in employing stringent adherence to an environmentalist framework that did not allow for the role of musical giftedness in determining the large range of difference between exceptional and average students. He emphasizes the need for the inclusion of broader musical aptitudes inherent
amongst certain exceptional students as a direct corollary to the causation for the original studies results returned.

**Music for Life: Real World Applications**

Addressing the social and real world contexts in the manner in which people engage in music making including how they perceive and understand music Russell (1997) references the work of Hargreaves (1999) in an effort to frame popular music participation as it pertains to present day applications. Focusing on the original topic sources of social and group interaction as it derives from cultural immersion the author highlights the musical developmental issues inherent in today’s society. Such discussion would seem to have direct pertinence in the pursuit of better understanding as to how musicians’ social and cultural settings influence their thinking and approach to music at large. Expanding the range of research to include motivation and practical application studies allows for provisions in referencing the study of the psychological processes at work in both students’ and individual adult efforts toward musical skill advancement. Additionally study of elite performers from other areas of pursuit such as athletics may well provide several quality reference points for further study into the cognitive processes inherent in the acquisition of advanced performance abilities of both practicing professionals and informal vernacular learners alike. Ernst (2001) addresses further life-long music making in this area of varied skill acquisition and its origins in an individuals early music making experiences as a child. Specifically, how ones’ early experience set in motion long-term motivation toward broader goals of music making. Creativity seems to be a cornerstone in such pursuits as it is a bi-product of our respective imagination an extension of sorts of the underlying unconscious our intrinsic free spirit. This is not just a
means of expression for skillful professionals but sometimes seems more readily apparent, or at minimum embraced by the vernacular musician. The latter group seems to embrace creative thinking in music as ‘a dynamic mental process that alternates between their divergent (imaginative) and convergent (factual) thinking, moving in stages over time’ (Webster, 1990a, p. 28).

Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves (2008) asserts that musical creativity has been associated with children’s cognitive and emotional development. He feels that creativity’s value is increasingly acknowledged in psychological and therapeutic studies and that there is a correlation of the importance of creativity now being stressed by many researchers. Additionally, the manner in which creativities positive effects have been acknowledged in many different fields including psychology, sociology, and education seems to demonstrate the importance of fostering it within students early learning experiences. Hargreaves and Koutsoupidou’s view is that creativity is essential in every form of music making. Specifically their research address creativity from the very first sounds that children produce in their play up through that which might be produced by those who advanced to an adult/professional level. Hargreaves states that it is imperative that children possess an ability to demonstrate high levels of musical structure within their music making endeavors.

Drawing further from the work on creativity, as it pertains to improvisation in children’s spontaneous music making, use of their voice and movement or musical instrument participation to express their inner thoughts, children’s music making at an early stage as is defined as having characteristic abilities to express without conforming to limiting parameters of musical structure, style or character. They submit that creativity
in many cases may often occur naturally and isn’t dependent on any kind of previous training or instruction, garnered knowledge, or developed skills. Later on in a child’s learning process more, as they advance to higher skill attainment, creativity may require the acquisition of more intellectual skill and strategies. If we are to truly render enduring musicianship in all age groups the available research seems to underscore the essential role that fostered creativity plays in the broader context of the growth of complete individual. (Piaget, 1926)

The means by which an individual acquires knowledge is in constant flux but the research available indicates that it would seem counter-productive to limit the means of stimuli, learning activities or means of processing creative thought within traditional structures of music educational perceptions of skill acquisition. The literature reviewed reinforces the simple premise that a broad variety in learning applications and activities at the earliest possible stages in ones’ life serves to most fully assist in realizing an aspirants’ creative abilities. The studies cited throughout this review emphasize a need for an early and consistent embracement by traditional educational institutions at all levels of the non-traditional learning practices of vernacular musicians in the pursuit of serving the ever-expanding, more culturally diverse musicians of the 21st Century.

**Need for the Study**

Nashville, TN is an essential hub of commercial music in the United States. The professional musicians who are at the heart of this enterprise have developed specialized knowledge and skills necessary for success in this environment. Their jobs are demanding, and most have worked diligently to achieve their current professional standing. However, there has been little to no formal study of these individuals, their
musical education, and the ways they continue to develop as professional musicians. The purpose of the study was to examine the musical education and career development of a professional drummer specifically in Nashville. Specific research questions included:

1. What musical knowledge and skills are utilized by a professional drummer?
2. How has this knowledge and skill been acquired?
3. What extra-musical knowledge and skills are utilized by this professional drummer in order to be successful in his performance pursuits?

Method

A qualitative research approach was utilized in this study. The participant was purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) sustained success as a professional drummer who has risen to the top of his field (recording/touring and clinician efforts), (b) extensive history of both formal and non-traditional music learning, and education involvement, and (c) active participation in continuing music education and mentorship. Following approval of the UF IRB the case study participant was contacted. This individual, whose name and primary professional affiliations have been replaced by pseudonyms, is a professional acquaintance of the researcher who had provided written consent to participate in the study. The qualitative data gathering was assembled over the course of three semi-structured, in-person interviews, each taking approximately 30 minutes. An interview protocol (Creswell, 2014) (see Appendix A) was utilized in formulating the broader topical queries. All interview content was recorded at the case study participants’ touring technicians’ project studio using the Avid Pro Tools recording technology. The researcher took field notes, and following the interview transcribed the entirety of the recorded dialogue. This data was analyzed for primary
themes using basic qualitative data coding procedures. The story of this musician’s educational journey was then written with a focus on seeking parallel connections to the existing literature on vernacular music and musicians.

**Chad’s Story**

**The Formative Years**

Chad began his journey into the world of music and drumming as a child. At an impressionable early age he was heavily influenced by music from a myriad of quarters due to his families broad range of listening interests: “I was into the Star Wars Soundtrack, Elton John Volume 1, Chick Corea all on eight track tape mind you.” Chad’s aunt was a fan of the 70’s disco craze and the combination of her energetic musical tastes along with his natural predilection to hyperactive behavior created a natural pathway to taking up percussion. “My dad noticed that I was a restless kid always beating on everything in sight. I think he secretly wanted to be a drummer and maybe he was living vicariously through me so he said: ‘Son do you want to play the drums?’ I said, ‘Sounds great!’” Chad’s father recognized the importance in securing private instruction for his son and took him to their local music store. Going to meet his first teacher Chad was completely enthralled with the impressive drum kits arrayed around the store, but quickly encountered the rigid rudimental tradition of percussion education of that day: “I saw a big set of drums up on a shelf on the wall and I said ‘I want those!’ However, my new teacher said ‘No, you don’t get those yet. You have to practice on this Gladstone.’” Chad was quickly immersed into an array of rudiments and before long graduated from the drum-pad to a snare drum. “I worked through five stroke rolls, flams and the like.” From

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1 Billy Gladstone, legendary rudimental drumming pioneer practice pad
that point Chad’s teacher introduced him to Joel Rothman’s long-standing basic drum set pedagogy series as well as several other early drum set coordination method texts. Chad recounts having a hazy memory of these early educational resources: “The Rock & Roll Bible, The Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll Drumming or something like that…I don’t really remember what the third book title was…” It was during this period that Chad procured his first drum set from his teacher, and he was now beginning to play along to rock, and popular music of the day including seminal rockers KISS, and English sensation Queen’s “News of The World”.

A family move interrupted his early musical development, however, as Chad relocated across the United States to the southwest, settling in Texas. This change of locale would turn out to have a lasting positive impact on Chad’s musical maturation.

When I was eleven we moved to Texas, and thank God because music education is super strong in Texas. I joined the band program in fifth grade in my new town. I was ahead of all the other kids on snare drum, rudiments, and reading because I had that background from years previous when I was six, seven years old back east.

Band participation would introduce Chad to an entire range of new musical media as he began to delve into the specific pedagogy and techniques of orchestral crash cymbals, bass drum, as well as melodic instruments such as glockenspiel, timpani, and hand held percussion.

He continued his private studies with several teachers.

When I moved to Texas I had a guy there named Bob. Bob had a large student base tramping through his living room every day of the week and he probably had forty to fifty students most of which he focused on basic drum set studies. He would guide them through the school band program and jazz programs’ curriculum. I was probably one of his more advanced students cause I was always hungry and asking questions. Additionally, I was consistently prepared for my lessons and he was not used to that. You know when a student comes in and is
prepared they’re sort of a diamond in the rough situation and that doesn’t always happen so he was great to me.

Chad also studied some with the head of percussion and symphony member of the local university. Focusing on marimba, and timpani, Chad began to prepare for the solo, and ensemble competitions, and opportunity to audition for the Texas regional and state honors band program. A fourth private instructor of his came from the world of jazz and drum kit quarters of this region, providing important early drum set skill guidance during this formative period of Chad’s early percussion education.

Chad experienced honor ensemble audition success as a result of the fifth private teacher to contribute to his skill set development:

There was a cat named Sam and he helped me a lot with traditional symphonic percussion because every semester I always made the regional band, and one, or maybe two years I made the Texas State Concert band which is like insane because Texas is so big I had to beat out eight thousand other percussionists.

The intensely competitive nature of Texas’ school music scene demanded an exacting toll on prospective percussionists. Chad was all too familiar with these rigorous demands as he recounts the pedagogic expectations and requirements of the highly competitive elite Texas State Percussion Auditions:

It’s massive, just intense competition for these few positions, and they were judging you on the quality of your press roll, how soft your press roll could be, how loud your press roll could be. The quality of your crash cymbals: How soft you could play an orchestral crash cymbal. The tone of your triangle, whether could you do a thumb roll on the tambourine, and your tuning on the timpani.

This extended to the literature expectations of auditioning percussionists as well: “We had to play like Porgy and Bess on the timpani and violin sonatas on the xylophone, but it was great because it made you be an all around percussionist.”
The stringent expectations of these honor band experiences would contribute considerably to Chad’s success as he matriculated to the collegiate levels. Of particular importance were the acquired performance experiences with the honor ensembles he was able to transfer from the high school music setting into his college percussion pursuits.

When I ended up going to university I was never the best timpanist, or the most outstanding mallet player, but I always was the percussion section leader because I had the best overall touch on the various instrument, or percussion media, which ultimately is so valuable because isn’t that how you get through life as a professional percussionist/drummer?!

In retrospective Chad was quick to credit his father’s dedication to acquiring the best possible private instruction and the importance of said instruction in shaping him as a player. He believes that the mentorship, and role modeling, influence of private teachers had a considerable effect in his choosing drums as his outlet for musical expression.

Yeah, I probably would taken up drums regardless, but pursuing it as a career is somewhat of a mystical question if you will, like ‘Would this have happened if I wasn’t pushed along?’ I’m sure that this was probably my destiny, and I would’ve fallen into it, or cultivated it when the time were right, but I think my dad just planting that seed in me assured its growth by putting me with individuals who provided great examples of what was possible through dedicated pursuit of musical excellence.”

Although he was an accomplished school band percussionist, Chad was additionally aware, and highly interested in music outside of the scholastic settings. Specifically, youth culture of the day was having as strong an impact on him as probably most teens across America and beyond. An avid video game fan, he was quick to pick up on musical cues from some of his favorite games.

There was a song called ‘Pac Man Fever’ because someone had wrote (sic) a song about Pac Man, and I loved Pac Man. I don’t know why that one sticks out in my head… but it does. And then heavy metal was coming along as a new, exciting, dominant music style in the early 80’s. We both survived it right?! It was so huge! Motley Crue’s “Shout at the Devil” video was on twenty times a day in the early
80’s. Before that it was like ‘Video Killed the Radio Star’ and Wall of Voodoo, and all those bands that had their first videos on MTV.

Reaching early adulthood during this time of the groundbreaking impact of the MTV cultural phenomena left an indelible impression on Chad as well. “I watched MTV every day because it was coinciding perfectly, my musical development that is, was coinciding perfectly with my… ummm… what would you call it? Puberty.” Chad was a big fan of other seminal shows of the era such as Friday Night Videos, a late night television show that showed many of the top popular music acts of the day’s current hit singles videos. His avid appreciation of all facets of music served as a harbinger of the influence pop culture would play throughout Chad’s life, and career. It seems readily apparent that such embracement of a wide array of music was foreshadowing what was to come in his application of his craft.

Many young percussionists recount their earliest opportunities performing on drum set as having transpired in a church music making setting, but this was not the case for Chad.

No, no we weren’t like a super church family… We were all, well let’s just say my Grandfather is rolling in his grave because he wanted everyone to be Catholic, but everyone kind of broke away, and just started to do our own thing. So we were never really a heavy church family so I missed out on that musical experience, but thank God for The Police!²

Due to this lack of church performance outlets or experience, Chad spent considerable time continuing to play along to recordings of some of his aforementioned earliest musical influences such as KISS, Queen, and The Police. There were several drummers from these band that were influential on him during his elementary school during elementary, middle, and high school. “Oh yeah, it woulda’ been like… Peter Criss

² Referring to the Rock Band
with KISS, Roger Taylor with Queen, Stewart Copeland from The Police, and just listening to popular radio when I moved to Texas in general.” During this time he recounts some of his earliest efforts to study, and feed his voracious appetite for music of all genres. “I remember having like a jam blaster\(^3\) and you would put cassettes in there and record the hit songs off the radio so you could have them on the cassette.”

With his school band success as an accomplished percussionist it was inevitable that Chad would pursue some aspect of ensemble performance not only at the high school level, but within the collegiate ranks as well. His enthusiasm for embracing all aspects of percussion underscores his early ensemble participation, and during middle school his ensemble membership included concert band, pep band, and if there were drums to be played in the choir or orchestra, he also would participate in those ensembles. He was active in marching percussion both at the high school level and during his undergraduate college years. “We had a marching band. So, for four years I did the marching band, and then I did four years of marching band at University.” This experience would lead to development of technique fundamentals that he would employ throughout the remainder of his playing career to present day. Specifically, regarding the pedagogy of his college drum line, and its impact on his performance applications as a player, Chad stated:

In undergrad we were a matched grip drum line thank goodness because I’m a matched grip player. My first teacher, as I’ve mentioned was teaching me in 1976-1977. This was the high point, golden era of rock and roll so he was a matched grip player, and I never really took the time to learn how to play traditional grip as it wasn’t something I was exposed to in my formative years. I lucked out that I landed in a matched grip drum line at university.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Referring to 80's radio
\(^4\) Traditional grip is widely used amongst modern marching percussion aficionados.
Pedagogic understandings aside, Chad’s ensemble participation also had a considerable impact on his compositional pursuits. It was through his involvement in the college band that he first had the opportunity to both instruct, and even compose for a percussion ensemble.

My final year at University I actually convinced the band director to let me write all of the drum line music so that was actually the first and last time I composed drum line parts. It was probably 1991 or 92, and things have changed a lot since then.

Such proactive behavior is symbolic of much of Chad’s formative years in pursuing as many venues for personal development as possible. Every semester he was an undergraduate he took full advantage of the affordable public university education he was receiving. He continued to participate in numerous ensembles including the college’s symphonic band, pep band, symphony orchestra, percussion ensemble and jazz groups sometimes being enrolled in as many as eight ensembles in a given semester. His rational was to maximize his time on task and gain the full benefit of the opportunities the university setting afforded him.

I graduated with more credits than I was supposed to, and thankfully my parents never questioned it. I knew I had to take these classes, to take Algebra, Physics, have to take this American History course, but they always knew I wanted to play so they encouraged me to just play. Of course back then college was affordable. My entire college education was thirty thousand dollars, which amounts to something like half of a year of out of state tuition at a University here in Nashville.

After completing his self-imposed, rigorous undergraduate experience, it seemed inevitable that Chad would continue to seek further opportunity and challenges to grow as a musician. Once again the state of Texas’ outstanding music education system had a considerable impact on his future. Looming large on any serious musician’s radar, the University of North Texas (UNT) is the gold standard for professional musicians across a
range of disciplines from symphonic to jazz, popular, world, and rudimental percussion. The university’s faculty and programs have produced a steady stream of prominent professional alumni over the past forty years. This lineage of success was a driving force in attracting Chad to seek entrance into UNT’s graduate program. “I was graduating from University, and I was twenty-two years old, and I keep hearing about this place, UNT where all my heroes went.” A sampling of the alumni include: Steve Houghton, an internationally renowned jazz drummer, percussionist, clinician, author, and educator, drummer with Woody Herman’s Young Thundering Herd and many others. Gregg Bissonette, known best for his work with David Lee Roth, post Van Halen, as well as a session, and live drummer with: Santana, Ringo Starr, Maynard Ferguson, Tania Maria, and Brandon Fields is another prominent UNT alumnus. Lastly, a particularly significant player who had a lasting impression on Chad’s decision to attend UNT was Ray Brinker. A former One O’Clock Lab Band drummer, he has worked with Michel LeGrand, Joe Pass, Jack Sheldon, Woody Herman, Les Brown, Gordon Goodwin’s Big Phat Band, Randy Brecker, Diane Shure, and a host of other legendary artists since his relocation to the Los Angeles area in 1986. This impressive abundance of talent had a lasting impression on Chad, and swayed him toward the graduate degree pursuit.

I’m thinking, ‘All these people are highly successful, maybe that’s the missing link’ cause I didn’t really know what to do with my life at that point leaving West Texas. I didn’t really have any strong community connections in the music business, and I knew I didn’t want to teach school, I wanted to play.

This led to Chad participating in a summer camp hosted by respected percussion educators Robert Breithaupt, Steve Houghton, Ed Soph, and Henry Oxstall. “That camp was a great point of entry to the program offerings available at UNT, and it was really fun.” Attending this camp was additionally useful as it not only made inroads with the
faculty, but also provided Chad with the confidence that he possessed the aptitude and fundamentals necessary to tackle the considerable challenges of the UNT Masters programs.

Once enrolled in graduate school, Chad received valuable guidance that would further shape not only his future performance endeavors, but also his interest in music instruction and education as a whole. Dr. Robert Schietroma, currently a Regents professor at the University of North Texas after serving as Coordinator of Percussion from 1977 to 1999, was heading the UNT percussion department at the time Chad entered graduate school. He had developed an internationally recognized program offering a myriad of percussion opportunities and was instrumental in guiding Chad in the direction of music education for his graduate studies.

Robert Schietroma was the head of the program there, and he said ‘You know, I think its awesome that you treat yourself like a performance major (referring to Chad’s heavy involvement in performance ensembles on campus), and I know you want to play, but thirty credit hours, and you’ll have a Masters Degree in Music Education.’ So, I became an Education Major pretty much on the spot.

Dr. Schietroma's innovative courses such as Percussion Pedagogy and Percussion MIDI Systems were groundbreaking curriculum models for numerous major universities at the time as they embraced the reality of the eventual application and demand for varied skills in popular musical settings. His ensembles had been widely recognized for their excellence in all genres providing exactly the diverse range of study Chad sought to further reinforce his comprehensive range of skills in preparation for entering the professional drumming workforce. With his considerable participation in traditional ensembles prior to UNT, Chad was attracted to Schietroma’s emphasis on World Music in the standard collegiate percussion ensemble settings. The professor’s intimate
knowledge of cultural influences and native performance practice in many world disciplines ensured the authenticity of his programs’ reputation for quality. The world music ensemble opportunities available to Chad included the Caribbean Steel Band, Thai Gamelan, Javanese Gamelan, West African ensemble, and East African Amadinda ensemble. While he didn’t participate in all of these diverse performance ensembles, of course, he was quick to credit the overall impact of the influence and impact they had due to their demand for detail, and as yet another challenging aspect of the university’s vetting system:

You’ve got to get through these performance barriers. Masters students are expected to be highly proficient in skills on timpani, marimba, marching snare drum, concert snare drum, and drum set. The expectation is you are accomplished on all the material of course, but at even faster tempos than the undergraduates.

Outside of actual musical practice, and implementation, Chad had to account for the usual time demands of graduate course work. Maintaining his already considerably full schedule of activities presented its own set of challenges and some of the more arcane course requirements for graduation were occasionally lost on Chad.

Back then, some of the credits… things you had to study were not always the most practical. We were studying things like MS DOS! Floppy drives, and all of this stuff, and I’m paying money to learn technology that even then we recognized was changing so quickly it would be outdated in no time.

Of course this was a common problem for many students in the 1990s as technology was advancing in leaps and bounds, seemingly every day. This was the era with the advent of email communication, and yet many students like Chad didn’t even own a computer. His experiences with the earliest incarnations of the Internet are telling in the mysterious perception this new means of communication presented.
I remember my music theory professor saying: ‘I don’t keep office hours, but you can EMAIL me whenever you’d want.’ This was 1993. None of us new about email as it just seemed at that point that it was purely a communication network between educators, and scientists. My response of course was ‘What is email?’ I didn’t have a computer. If you wanted to email somebody you had to go to the college library to get on one of the computers. You were in the *In-ter-net*, and as I’ve said that was all academic based. It all changed so fast. I remember when I had a Blackberry, I got a Blackberry so I’d never miss a gig, but then I started noticing that little, twelve year old kids had Blackberry’s, and Smart Phones, and then it became all virtual, and along came the iPhone… Whoa! The technology changes happened so fast.

Encountering technological changes, and adapting to them became a theme for Chad as he continued into the competitive musician sideman settings as he recounts

“Even at that time I began to realize that I would have to make embracement of technology a core aspect of my professional training.”

On the ensemble front Chad continued to maintain a feverish pace of participation, maximizing his opportunities to play in any and all settings available. North Texas is renowned for its marching/rudimental percussion program, or as Chad best expresses it: “That drum line was a religion there. It was a world class organization with members who put so much time into it they were failing their academic classes.”

However, for Chad, his days of rudimental percussion participation ceased upon graduation from university. His realization of wanting to focus on his drum set playing provided the impetus to delve into the extensive Jazz Lab Band offerings complimenting the world music ensembles he was already participating in. Additionally, UNT’s extensive performance offerings afforded him opportunities to play in some non-traditional music settings. “Besides the Lab Bands, Percussion Ensembles, and Small Group Jazz Ensemble, I began to sub in a rock/jazz fusion focus group called ‘TZ’. It was primarily just a rhythm section with maybe an occasional featured horn player or two.”
During this time Chad was applying his world ensemble experiences in his music education pursuits, taking courses in ethnomusicology and other historical studies. “We were focusing heavily on the pedagogical foundations of music education. Music history was of course a cornerstone, and we had those ‘drop the needle’ listening tests, back when you actually used vinyl albums no less!” Oral exams for a committee made up of a cross section of the faculty (one classical, one jazz, and one percussion representative) were components of his “barrier” exams, with the subject matter encompassing any musical concept, or construct addressed during his graduate studies.

**The Transition to Professional Practice**

Academic challenges notwithstanding, Chad’s insatiable desire to perform and apply his training contributed to his eventual immersion in the Dallas/Fort Worth metro areas’ vibrant music scene. His ambition and work ethic served him well as he began to implement the foundation of some of his long-range career goals and plans to hopefully achieve success in the competitive world of the professional musician. “I tried to figure out a way to maximize my time while I was there so I was highly overscheduled (between his academic commitments, and professional endeavors).

At night I would drive into town because I didn’t want to get left out of the scene. I noticed that my classmates, guys like Keith Carlock⁵ were driving into town every night. Keith was playing in a group called Dallas Brass and Electric. So I said to myself ‘How can I get on that sub list for him?’

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⁵ Legendary UNT graduate who has played for Sting, John Mayer, Steely Dan, Toto, and James Taylor amongst his many credits.
Trying to balance such a demanding schedule of participation on all fronts, was of course trying for Chad. “It was long days, and long nights… Because, you know, school was very, very demanding, and I always brown bagged it every day.”

However, his efforts were not going unnoticed as he quickly proved to not only peers such as Keith, but also more established professionals in the area that he could be counted on to know the material for each gig and have a command of the expectations of a professional drummer in such settings.

You had to show up on time, have the appropriate equipment setup for the musical style, be well versed in the styles of the given ensemble, count off the right tempo, and basically demonstrate all the elements necessary to engender trust from these players if you wanted to be called to sub for them on any of their regular professional commitments.

Delivering in these pressure situations contributed to Chad’s reputation for excellence spreading quickly, and he began to garner more of his own permanent jobs as the primary drummer for a variety of artists, and musical ventures in the region.

I was playing around Dallas with all of the different groups the town had to offer. I was playing with Bill Tillman and the Horns from Hell. Bill Tillman was the saxophone player from the group Blood, Sweat, and Tears for a period so he had his own kind of cool corporate band. There was another band called The Project that I played with on, and off, and there was of course Dallas Brass & Electric. Frontline was another working band I was in, along with a group called Random Access. I joined Random Access because I’d go out every night and see this guy named Dan Wojciechowski play. Dan was five years older than me, and as a matter of fact, I just got to recently see him play with Peter Frampton: he’s playing with Peter Frampton right now.

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6 Brought lunch to save money.
7 Which by now he had taken over as the primary drummer when Keith Carlock relocated to New York City.
8 “Wojo” is a legend in both the Dallas scene, and amongst professional drummers in Nashville, and LA appearing on countless albums by stars across the spectrum of popular music.
Chad was also active in the alternative music scene transpiring in the Deep Ellum Entertainment District in Dallas at that time. This was where a number of original music bands were making a name for themselves, and the spirit of collaboration of the bands impressed Chad. “It was a very productive era of musical growth, and I was excited to be a part of it.”

As his professional reputation continued to expand and diversify Chad began to receive more opportunities to apply some of his more advanced formal reading and jazz training from his UNT Lab and Big Band experiences. “As I was forging my way into the popular music scene there I was also playing smooth jazz, and I was playing with the Dallas Jazz Orchestra, and the Collection Jazz Orchestra. These were all ‘Reading Bands.’” His diversity inevitably brought him to the attention of those involved in the vibrant commercial and jingle business thriving in Dallas at the time. Chad was called upon to play on bed tracks for a variety of clients including AT&T and the Texas Lottery.

Additionally, as he was completing his graduate studies he had begun to teach privately a good bit to further supplement his income. With so much professional activity comes personal challenges, and Chad’s first marriage came to an end during this time.

My marriage did not last because I was so focused on… being the best I could be in the academic arena, and best I could possibly be in navigating that music scene. I simply had no time to give to my partner as my priorities lay elsewhere.

Professionally, however, Chad was in the midst of a renaissance of outstanding musician/drummers, many who were destined to make an immense impact on the music world at large.

Okay so there is this long trajectory of really successful musicians who came from that era at UNT: Ray Brinker, Steve Houghton, Greg Bissonette… the Dan

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9 Big Bands and Small Groups with Detailed Charts/Arrangements.
Wojciechowski’s… then my bunch with Blair Sinta who went on to play with Alanis Morissette, and is now with Idina Menzel\(^\text{10}\), Carlock of course, I mean we all knew Carlock was gonna’ kill it. Who else was in school with me? There was Craig Pilo who plays with Frankie Valli\(^\text{11}\) these days. Oh, Brian Delaney also who plays with the New York Dolls and Melissa Etheridge right now I believe. They all went to school with me at the same time.

Being a part of such a fertile environment of diverse professional success, and ambition, it was inevitable that Chad would seek greater challenges. However it is salient to examine what exactly it was about the training he and his peers received within the confines of the UNT that would ultimately lead to so many of them to achieve such far flung professional success and acclaim. Specifically, it is interesting to note the elements of professional practice, from his educational background, and beyond (e.g., vernacular music making) that he found himself calling upon ever more frequently.

So by the time you start gigging and stuff you’re drawing on experiences of playing all those different styles of music. The extensive reading (from the UNT Lab Ensembles) really paid off because when someone calls you to fill in, such as when I had to go sub for Keith for instance or any of these bands in Dallas where you’re required to learn new material all the time you could write a condensed chart; something that we still do to this very day in Nashville as a source of survival when there is no opportunity for rehearsal.

Without question, Chad feels that his conservatory training in reading was essential in developing his knowledge of rhythmic notation.

Obviously being able to read classical notation is invaluable in subbing situations. Often people ask me now ‘How do you create a “cheat sheet” for a show?’ Well, you can write out a road map: ‘4 Bar Intro, 8 Bar Verse… ya’ know’ but if you don’t know or you can’t write out any of the figures (rhythmic) or all the stops or you don’t know what a whole note looks like or a quarter note or a quarter note rest then you’re missing a lot of the important information. (With that approach) you are just seeing a phrase but how are you going to remember all of the rhythmic variations (specific vagaries of differing song forms)?

\(^{10}\) Star of the Frozen soundtrack theme song, and Broadway musicals

\(^{11}\) In addition to Pat Boone, Player, and appeared on numerous television soundtracks from Sex In The City to CSI Miami
Time and again Chad returns to the importance of blending a full range of musical studies & integrated disciplines.

Thank goodness I had those skills as all of that came into play where I was drawing from my full range of training, my rudimental background, in depth study of advanced limb coordination and styles on the drum set, interpretation of detailed charts and then just the time in the “cockpit”\(^{12}\) playing all of those different styles of music.

Reflecting on this period in his and his peers’ professional music efforts Chad recalls that some of these challenges better prepared him for future musical situations that he might encounter. He and his fellow UNT alum’s readily recognized the need and value in exploring the furthest reaches of musical composition and creations of legendary composers in all genres. Coupled with the challenging conservatory requirements they all had in common (barrier exams, orals, extensive ensemble participation, etc.) the local music setting in Dallas provided unusually difficult musical challenges that better prepared one for the remainder of a successful professional performance life.

I tell everybody that the most challenging music I will ever play in my whole life is already behind me. I already did that in college. Ya’ know if you’re playing big band music with charts that are twenty pages long and you’re playing Frank Zappa music such as *Strictly Genteel* or *Black Page* those aren’t things you run into every day (in the popular music realm). So we were playing the most challenging music that we were ever going to play. In essence our efforts were setting us up to be overqualified for the majority of situations we’d ever find ourselves in.

**The Move to Nashville**

Eventually, having exhausted the Dallas/Fort Worth market for all it had to offer him musically, it came time for Chad to relocate in order to pursue performance opportunities of a greater stature. There are essentially three major markets for professional musicianship participation in the United States. In terms of importance of

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\(^{12}\) Being on the drum kit in pressure situations
where, in Chad’s parlance, “The machine of the music business actually operates,” and they are New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville. Chad knew he was not interested in New York, his early years living in Connecticut notwithstanding, the metropolis’ hustle and bustle never really appealed to him.

I couldn’t see myself in New York its so fast, and so cold and the people can be a little cold as well, and just your expectation of moving a set of drums around… in a taxi and a subway? It didn’t appeal to me, whereas in Los Angeles you are in traffic but you can have a car.

He wasn’t even considering Nashville until a few trusted peers brought him to the realization of where many of his primary goals could be achieved.

Nashville was never really on the radar until maybe early 1997. I started asking around to my peers locally ‘Hey, I want to get out of here. I want to play in a national touring artist gig, I want to hear myself on the radio and I want to travel the world on somebody else’s dime. These are the three things I want to accomplish. They are not going to happen for me in Dallas, Texas so what do I do?’ Sure, enough, just as I tell all my students these days asking for help is the best way to achieve something you aspire to. So, I was working with this saxophone player, we played in a group called ST. His name is DN, and he’s a consultant for the restaurant industry now but he’s a killer saxophone player. He said ‘I heard that TY is looking for a drummer. I have a friend who works in her organization.’

This opportunity served as the impetus for Chad to begin to rethink his view of Nashville as a viable professional destination and he seized this opportunity to pursue the lead for potential work.

Based off DN’s referral I was able to get my cassette demo to JG, who was T’s bandleader at the time and he had also done some time in G’s band. He listened to my cassette demo that I’d put together and said: ‘You sound really great. I don’t know you from Adam but I feel comfortable putting you in this lineup (of audition invitees) if you can get yourself to Nashville.’ So I flew myself to Nashville, I learned all the material, went out there auditioned and it came down to me and another guy” (who ultimately got the job).
While he wasn’t able to secure the opportunity with T’s band, this first foray into Nashville’s music scene gave Chad a glimpse into the importance of being present and willing to once again prove oneself in a new marketplace.

Even though I didn’t get it, her people recommended me for another audition one week later with DC, whose career was taking off. She was all over the trade magazines and had an abundance of media following her every move. Access Hollywood was filming the day that I auditioned so there was that extra pressure. DC had a new album that included a hit recorded by one of Nashville’s most respected drummers, Greg Morrow. I went and auditioned for that and once again I didn’t get it but they recommended me to BM and again, one week later I flew to Nashville, did the audition and everybody was like ‘Your great, but it came down to you and this other guy…who lives in Nashville.’ So prior to all of this I had been thinking I was going to move to Los Angeles and shop at Chess King, play smooth jazz and instead I end up saying to myself ‘Well I have a bunch of people in Nashville who actually seem to dig my playing, unless they were lying to me, so looks like I’m going to move there.

In leaving Dallas to pursue the possibility of new opportunities in Nashville, Chad had to abruptly walk away from the extensive network of performance and teaching commitments he’d built up during the previous few years. It was daunting to leave the comfort zone of an area where he had an established a hard won professional reputation but he felt that it was an imperative to make this move at such a pivotal point in his career arc.

So I give my band two weeks notices. I literally gave two weeks notice, didn’t waste anytime. I just went back (after the third audition trip) and said ‘Guy’s, I’m sorry, I have got to do this.’ I packed up and moved to Nashville.

Such radical change is rife with potential sacrifice and Chad knew that his greatest ally was his relentless effort, and willingness to hustle, regardless the short-term economic strife in the pursuit of his ultimate professional goals. Upon arriving in Nashville
I started crashing parties and shaking hands, going to open mic nights, playing down at Barbara’s\(^{13}\) and playing for tips at all those joints on Broadway that we walk past now and thing to ourselves ‘God, thank goodness I’m not playing there anymore!’ but boy, back then I loved it. We played there and were just happy to have the work and make the connections with new musicians.

Much as in the formative stages of his skill development, mentorship would play a considerable role in his efforts to make inroads into the commercial music business of Nashville. Eddie Bayers, and Lonnie Wilson (two of the industries most recorded, and acclaimed professional drummers) were instrumental in providing new opportunities for Chad.

I came to Nashville with four hundred cassette demos of my playing and I got one to Eddie Bayers, and one to Lonnie Wilson and they both got right back to me. I saw Eddie three weeks ago at a dinner, and I set right next to him and we couldn’t stop hugging each other… He said ‘Damn I’m proud of you!’ And the other day I was backstage at the CMA Awards and I ran into Lonnie Wilson, who is doing double duty with Reba and Brooks and Dunn now in Vegas, but he was playing on TV that night with them and I said ‘Man, thanks so much for helping me’ because he just made the smallest effort to actually LISTEN to my demo, and wrote a handwritten letter for my promo pack that said something like ‘Chad is great. Call me if you need to hear about him,’ or whatever. Basically saying he could give a reference or ‘thumbs up’ if needed. Both those guy’s not only served as a reference, but set me up with a few showcase opportunities, and a little van and trailer road gig.

The impact of these early referrals, and professional recognition by respected mentors cannot be underestimated as to the potential impact it had in securing performance outlets for a struggling musician such as Chad in such a competitive market place.

It wasn’t like I was setting the world on fire, but I had at least kicked the door open to Nashville, and was starting my journey. Eddie, and Lonnie helped by means of something as simple as taking the time to listen to a five minute cassette demo for some dude that was prepared, determined, hungry, and ready to do what it took to be successful.

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\(^{13}\) Legendary honkytonk in Nashville during the 1990’s
How though does one impress the likes of established, legendary musicians of this caliber? Chad emphasizes the importance of preparation when such opportunities arise. Of particular importance, knowing the work of those from you whom seek referrals. “So yeah, I did my homework, I listened to anything that I could possibly get my hand on that had Eddie Bayers, or Lonnie Wilson on it because they were some of the world’s most recorded drummers.” In pursuing this research Chad found that it led him to delve deeper into a more exhaustive study of the history of influential drummers in the country genre and this pursuit required amass a new collection of musical resources. He collected everything from albums to cassettes and all forms of media available in an age before digital downloads, and streaming services. “Then going back to the Buddy Harmon era and doing my research into his massive catalog, as well as in Larry London’s period of influence I used to go to this used music wholesaler called the Great Escape, and I bought all these used cassettes for 2.99 and 3.99…” Chad noted the parallels in his study of this new genre as being comparable to the manner in which he had needed to immerse himself in jazz’s history upon arriving in Dallas previously. As he combed through the extensive career histories of a diverse range of country artists a broad new palette of musical information became available to him and he was able to put his new skills into applied practice locally.

Tammy Wynette’s Greatest Hits, George Jones Greatest Hits. It really wasn’t music that necessarily RESONATED with me like a rock and roll did, but neither did jazz initially. Like I said, you know, ultimately I’m a rock and roller (self-perception), but I knew that I had to learn to speak that language, just as I had

14 Considered the father of country drumming
15 London is recognized as the most influential of Nashville drummers in the modern age having changed most of the modern paradigms of what was acceptable to appropriate from modern pop, rhythm and blues, and jazz influences in adopting to the country recording processes
with jazz at UNT. So I was just devouring all of these different artists’ work and then going down to lower Broadway\textsuperscript{16} and applying that stuff in a practical situation.

Expanding on the sweat equity that he employed in developing his new vocabulary of musical approaches, Chad emphasizes the importance of research and practice, along with perseverance, in developing a unique voice in order to achieve a certain “niche” in the musical scene.

Little did I know that if you just stick it out long enough and work diligently in this crazy musical market to create enough of your own opportunities you might even be able to help come up with a new sound all your own. Not that it was easy. I had a little storage unit out in the southern central region of Nashville with three other guys and it was a non-temperature controlled space. We’d go in there with the garage door rattling when we played and I’d practice along to albums cut (recorded) with all of the top players in town, or the hits of the day basically: Whatever Eddie and Lonnie or any of those guys were on I’d play top to bottom so I could get their playing style into my musical DNA (in hopes of developing his own voice as he appropriated their vocabulary).

Arriving in Nashville when he did Chad became aware of changing trends and evolving styles in Nashville’s recorded music output. In the late 1990s and early new millennium popular music was exerting a great influence on new artists in the country genre. Chad was not alone in relocating to the region. Many exciting and unique, talented new drummers were having an impact on the Nashville musical scene presenting a necessity for consistent focused effort to remain current with changing aspects of popular music making, and performance.

Having been in town for a bit I noticed things were changing from when I first moved here because there was that first album by the Dixie Chicks that Greg Morrow\textsuperscript{17} played on, \textit{Wide Open Spaces} not to mention Chad Cromwell was already here and not only working with John Hiatt\textsuperscript{18} but doing more country

\textsuperscript{16} World famous honky-tonk night club district of Nashville

\textsuperscript{17} Morrow went on to become one of Nashville’s most versatile recording drummer

\textsuperscript{18} Legendary songwriter from the Americana Rock World
albums where he’d bring in his roots rock influence. Of course Shannon Forest\textsuperscript{19} was doing groundbreaking stuff in this period as well (97-99’) so there were definitely some new faces coming in that were challenging the status quo. In order to keep up I was transcribing\textsuperscript{20} and listening to these performances in depth as well as playing along with the music as much as possible.

Many of the new influences Chad speaks of represented the opening salvos of what would become a complete revolution of the country music industry. Country as a whole had up until this time been quite insular, and cloistered from the more expansive practices of the other popular genres. This tumult created new opportunities for anyone positioned with the skill, connections and guile to navigate the realm of artist development.

From the time of arriving in Nashville in 1997 Chad’s career path has been inexorably intertwined with two other musicians (a bassist and guitarist respectively) who shared his relentless drive and considerable ambition. Cumulatively he and his musical cohorts began to refer to themselves as the Three Amigos and over the course of their first decade working in the country industry they established themselves as one of the most versatile, dependable and accomplished rhythm sections available. One of their hallmarks was their ability to seamlessly blend many of the aforementioned disparate style influences permeating the new era of country music. These styles were becoming more prevalent in the musical design of leading producers and artists’ output making the Three Amigos the go to backing ensemble for many aspiring artists of the early portion of the new millennium. During this period, the trio befriended a struggling singer/songwriter from Georgia who hadn’t been able to make much, if any, headway into the industry. His

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Typically acknowledged as Nashville’s most innovative, and impactful session drummer of the modern era
\item Writing out note for note the finer details of these session players output
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overtures in pursuit of a recording contract up until that time had fallen on deaf ears as he had been turned down by over a dozen different record labels in Nashville. Simultaneously, the Amigos profile was extremely high professionally and they took it upon themselves to champion this artist. His blending of roots country traditions placed against a backdrop of their aggressive rock musical styling melded perfectly with the sound they’d found themselves cultivating while backing a number of new artists. Within short order they had brought said artist to the attention of a start up record label funded by an extremely wealthy private investor who made a commitment to throwing his considerable fortune behind the artistic vision of the combination of the Amigos and this young Georgia farm boy. Essentially these would be the roots of an entire new musical sound that in the next five to ten years would overthrow the status quo within the Nashville power structure of country radio and record sales. “We didn’t see that coming but thankfully we’d already paid our dues mastering many of the traditional country musical style musical approaches, learned the ‘rules’, so to speak, in order that we could BREAK them (in introducing this new musical impetus).” The resulting musical output commonly referred to in recent years as “Bro Country” has made their once struggling artist one of the most distinct and identifiable performers, not only domestically, but worldwide.

**Paying It Forward: Leveraging His Success In Educating A New Generation**

The central theme throughout Chad’s musical evolution has been preparation. However, this most obvious element of his success seems lost on ensuing generations of drummers who idolize him. He finds that these aspirant’s efforts to prepare for the marketplace and gain historical knowledge of the important leading performers (in
essence many of whom are now Chad’s peers’) in essence doing ones’ diligence in research, lack the breadth of effort compared to that which he once employed in establishing himself. “Today’s players are not doing their homework. They are not doing the their due diligence.” Chad intimates the importance of being passionate and hungry for knowledge due to the intense competition with the many incredible talents who also possess a comprehensive knowledge of music in general.

Take a guy like Jim White that was in school with us (back at University of North Texas): He set the bar as far as being a musical historian. He’s got this massive record collection and he was just bordering on obsessive about knowing the history of all aspects of popular music regardless genre but that sort of comprehensive knowledge and musical vocabulary is what it takes to be a true professional drummer.

As discussed earlier, Chad’s research started with jazz owing to the emphasis his instructors at UNT placed on its role as a unique American musical art form upon whose foundation many other 20th century popular musical styles have evolved. He intimates the importance of knowing the drummers that helped to forge that style and the lineage which that spawned leading to the rise of rock, country and rhythm and blues.

I mean, the top players in Nashville know the work of Earl Palmer and Hal Blaine21 coming in and doing more of the straight 8th oriented stuff evolving popular music away from the dotted 8th triplet feel of jazz. I’m nowhere near as knowledgeable as him, but for instance you have guys like Greg Morrow; I’ve been over to Greg’s house and he’s got a gigantic man-cave full of vinyl albums. That’s just one example but the bottom line is these guys22 are all very passionate about not just what’s on radio right now, but where it all came from.

From Chad’s perception, this change in mentality in today’s aspiring drummers, as it pertains to expending less effort to learn about their musical predecessors, and

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21 Two pioneering drummers who were part of Los Angeles’ crack recording team of the 50’s-60’s The Wrecking Crew
22 The leading session, and touring drummers of Nashville
origins of modern music may well be a bi-product of the immediate-gratification expectations instilled possibly through social media immersion.

Many of these kids don’t even want to take the steps to go down and play local bar gigs anymore. They just want to get that road gig (with an established national artist) where they’re copying the studio work of a guy on the record for fifteen to twenty songs a night. They’re not going down and doing the preparatory developmental work to roll up their sleeves and just be on a bandstand, be able to take direction and go (imitates interaction with other band members on a pickup gig discussing a songs arrangement)…‘Do you know this song? It starts with the V, we’re gonna’ walk it up from the V chord on the bass and we’re in. It’s a shuffle. Here we go!’ New guy’s don’t get how that ability to think on your feet and have quick reaction instincts, that’s important man…

This importance of embracing participation at any level of music making and embracing every opportunity to further set oneself apart from the pack remains an essential element of Chad’s continuing motivations as a professional player.

I think one way to differentiate oneself is to have an extreme work ethic. I was driving by the Nashville Convention Center the other day and I found myself reminiscing about all the years I played in this CRS (Country Radio Seminar) house-band. It was a disco themed group, and we all dressed up with these giant afro-style hairpieces and giant collared shirts. We would play disco music and then one by one Keith Urban, Brad Paisley and Jamie O’neal23 and all the artists of that day would come up and do disco tunes with us. I was already in a signed band, I was in a band that had two hits on the radio so I was already starting to play with my current artist doing all these bigger events, having some success, riding a tour bus yet I would still go out down there and pull up in my broken down green mini-van and take out the rock and roller (cart to carry his drums) and march through all the people who knew me as the guy on the video on CMT (Country Music Television), who’s still going to set up his own drums at the CRS event because I loved to play, and I wasn’t ever going to say NO. I thought that, as far as showing people what you could do, what a great showcase. Just like (people thinking) ‘This guy plays disco too?’

He observes today’s players as having lost some of this grass roots approach of affording every gig equal respect:

Sometimes I see that disappearing in the ‘millennials’. I just don’t see them wanting to work that hard. There is an art in making someone look good that you

23 Top artists of the country genre during this time period
play for. It’s like, this person isn’t a very good singer, and actually their band isn’t very good, but if you have a great drummer that can lift up the entire undertaking. We’ve seen that with some of our peers, that come out, and take an otherwise unimpressive band up like three hundred percent in terms of energy and effect on an audience.

Expanding on the discussion of preparation and survival as a side person Chad details several extra-musical considerations that transfer beyond musical specificity and underscore potential success in any employ/employer relationship. He recognizes the importance of a positive attitude and genuine interpersonal skills as being just as essential to long-term success as comprehensive preparation.

Smile! You have to look like your having fun, I mean even if you’re not having fun what’s the point, but then how could you not be having fun when your playing the drums?! Beyond this obvious state of mind I think there are two things: Being overly prepared at all times and exceeding expectations. Like it goes back to an audition someone tells you to learn a group of songs (to perform on the audition). I learn as many of those as best I possibly can inside and out. It doesn’t end there as I work to have a little bit of a deeper understanding of the history of that artist and why the other drummer is getting replaced or what are they looking for in a drummer. It (success in procuring the job) is always about being flexible, being able to take direction because it is almost a given expectation in our industry to be incredible on your instrument. Heck, that is the minimum expectation.

Continuing on the essential intangibles of achieving longevity as a band member, Chad further emphasizes the significance of interpersonal abilities with peers coupled with the music specific skills of technical pedagogical command, uniqueness in style and approach along with creativity in contributing beyond the expectations of the material at hand.

The other ninety-nine percent of it is can you take constructively critical direction and not be offended: Can you offer insight into taking a project somewhere on the bandstand or in a recording studio. Can you get along with your fellow band-mates and do you possess flexible musicianship. Also, do you have dynamic control on your instrument, can you make something sound good without a click track play super-tight with a click track24, or play LOOSE with a click and make it

24 External tempo reference
sound like Charlie Watts. You just can never have enough different musical ideas that you can offer but you have to always know your place and be able to present them in a way that fits the vibe of the room.

Such effort to maintain ones profile goes beyond the numerous obvious settings of performance (rehearsal hall, clubs, road gig stage) as there is a premium importance of simply being present at any/all industry events such as band shows on a consistent basis. From Chad’s point of view social interaction is absolutely essential in serving to keep a side person in the mind of potential employers as well as musical peers.

Yeah, you and I both know, its and an out of sight, out of mind industry and so even the first, I would say, the first ten years that I was in Nashville I hardly ever missed a night out on the town. It was like if I wasn’t rehearsing or doing a gig I’d be out with the guys (the Three Amigos mostly) at 12th and Porter or we were at Third and Lindsley.

This same tireless approach must also be applied to ones’ embracement of performance trends and technological advances as well. Due to the fast paced, ever-changing evolution of music industry expectations from the late 90’s to present the appreciation for musical skill goes in and out of favor taking a back seat to the necessity of technology.

I remember in the 90’s it was a big deal to have singing drummers in Nashville and I was like ‘Well God… I’m a horrible singer I guess I’ll just have to be a really good drummer and I’ll promote myself as being that’. Now no one cares if the drummer sings, but instead they expect him/her to be able to run Ableton. Its really crazy, the skill-set expectations change every couple years ya’ know? I don’t know how you would further differentiate yourself but you can’t ever relax and take your skill development for granted or you will get left in the dust by the industry at large.

Experiencing almost another decade of success at the highest levels of musical performance Chad has appeared on numerous platinum albums, performed in the largest

25 Rolling Stones seminal drummer
26 Major showcase nightclub venues in Nashville
27 Pre-recorded samples, and loop software
venues in the United States and abroad becoming one of the most respected drummers throughout the music industry. Considering his strong advocacy for education in percussion it seemed inevitable that he would eventually feel the impulse to share his experience with a new generation of performers encouraging them to learn from his blend of formal conservatory training, and vernacular music pursuits.

Like I tell the kids: All the things that we learn in that collegiate environment can be taken to the stage. For example, when your doing that Percy Grainger piece and your job all semester, when they rehearse that composition, is to pick the best cymbal and the best mallets to do that cymbal roll that at the end of that piece. That attention to detail is going to help you whether your playing in a raw, punk rock band or when your called on to do a session and there’s a suspended cymbal roll. So I think all these skill sets cross-pollenate.

This continuing theme emphasizing diversification and knowledge no matter end musical goals is a cornerstone of Chad’s clinic presentations.

That’s why I tell kids who just want to be rock and roll drummers: ‘You have got to be able to play a triplet, you will need to be able to work on playing a triplet with a jazz feel because just having that understanding will make you a better rock and roll player. You don’t have to be a professional jazz drummer, but these things (the core skill sets) are all worth applying.

Acknowledging these fundamental motivations Chad is somewhat at a loss for the exact moment that provided the impetus for his educational presentation undertakings.

I really don’t remember having an “A Ha!” moment. However, as we began to tour more and more I do remember cruising down the highway on the bus and thinking, ‘What can I do with my day in the cities we’re playing?’ As it happened at the time we were playing more college towns with my artist. So, I’m thinking ‘Each of these colleges probably has a music department, they’ll most likely have a drum set and they’ve got to have some sort of ensemble or pep band.”

Following up on these musings Chad embraced the process of securing initial clinician engagements, reaching out to percussion professors, or other music college administrators of the universities appearing on his artist’s future touring schedule. “I started to pitch myself and say ‘Hey, this is a FREE clinic. I’d like to come and share my
professional experience with your students.” Seeking a means to brand his offerings and create an identifying theme of educational content Chad contemplated the means to be effective in having a succinct approach that allowed him to stay on message while being easily embraceable by a broad range of attendees.

I was just trying to create a new persona as a legitimate educator to go along with my exposure as a performer. It took time and along the way I kept refining it and eventually I came up with a platform called “C.R.A.S.H” which is just an acronym for five professional traits that I think are essential. It also serves as a great icebreaker allowing me to pace myself in any presentation format. I’m not careful I can really get off on a tangent when addressing different educational topics. However, if I have those five points and I know I only have an hour I know that I have about ten minutes per concept, which helps to keep the proceedings on track.

The enjoyment of teaching is something Chad cherishes. He recognizes the importance of cultivating ones teaching and communication skills and acknowledges that not all performers make great teachers.

Yeah, its fun, and I love it… You know, you and I are thankfully just natural teachers but let’s face it, there are a lot of people that have some amazing skill sets behind the drum kit but they just don’t have the gift in conveying the information. It takes work. I try to work on being an effective teacher and the only way you can do it, just like anything, is by doing it.

He embraces the opportunity to get specific suggestions on improving his clinic presentations from attendees of all backgrounds.

Getting feedback, from your students and videotaping things and getting testimonials (mimics himself asking someone) ‘Hey! How did you like that?’ (Mimics student/attendees’ response) ‘Well, once you got to like this one point in the clinic, you kinda’ of lost me. I wanted you to address this, but…’ Okay, that person has a valid point that I can learn from and I try to revamp my next presentation to incorporate some of this constructive criticism.

The success of his CRASH program has afforded Chad the opportunity to participate in a number of other motivational speaking situations beyond music specific events. In describing the specifics of his clinic program and the wide variety of situations
in which he applies his teaching techniques Chad once again returns to the core tenants of sustained proactivity. “C.R.A.S.H. is an acronym that stands for Commitment, Relationships, Attitude, Skill and Hunger. These are five concepts that anybody that aspires to attracting more success to their life can apply in any endeavor and at any age level.” Chad asserts that these primary motives transcend language, cultural background and social standing. Additionally, these components translate across a wide variety of application settings, possibly explaining the high demand for Chad’s events in across such a broad expanse of end recipients.

I can employ the CRASH outline just to improve my presentation and be a more effective speaker. I’ve done speaking engagements without my drum set for kindergartners, Fortune 500 companies and high schools, but the best thing that I feel I do is to combine my speaking philosophies with my playing. When you do a talk/play talk/play format it keeps everybody highly engaged and it seems that almost everyone can relate to the drums. No matter what walk of life someone is from the primal nature of the drums is something they gravitate towards in a positive way.

Further applications of the core tenants of CRASH have allowed Chad to address commitment as it applies both in his own life journey and how it can benefit the business of the client base to which he is presenting.

I can play a song that they’ve heard on the radio (one of his artists’ hits or other hit songs he’s recorded for respective national artists). So, it’s again, the talk/play, talk/play format that is so effective and that format is excellent also for younger children or teens that have a shorter attention span. Chad has found that C.R.A.S.H. concept can be an effective tool in motivating young adults as it resonates at a crucial transitional period in their lives.

I’ll speak to a group of high school students that are about to graduate, they’re seniors and then I’ll say: ‘Okay, these five essential life skills are what I’m going to be presenting today but REALLY what I’m doing is posing the question ‘What are you going to do with your life? That’s what I’m here to challenge you to contemplate and can we maybe figure this out in the next 60 minutes because your going to be 18 and your going to be cut off. Then I intimate things like how expensive life as an adult is. How difficult it is to have bills for gas, bills for your
car, food, lodging, cell phone, insurance etc. I then ask them if they know what a minimum wage job pays. One of the things I say is ‘It is difficult to make ends meet on the amount of money minimum wage pays.”

However, he finds that authenticity is a crucial component in communicating his message in a manner that will be taken seriously by today’s highly skeptical young people. Chad feels that his greatest strength in establishing trust and interest in his presentations to a younger audience is the unique life experiences he possesses that they probably have yet to even contemplate in terms of life’s challenges. He calls upon select examples from his career to demonstrate and reinforce his central message of the importance of persistence and remaining motivated no matter what potential obstacles life presents.

I just got back from presenting at a southern university in Florida and it was great. I had exactly sixty minutes with the student, and I just was spewing information. You know… lots of anecdotes but they seemed to get that my enthusiasm for life is sincere and that what I’m sharing is hard-earned information. Information that was gleaned by the sweat of my brow in challenging settings, earned by making mistakes and learning from my mistakes but always moving forward.

Truly someone who walks his talk, Chad not only emphasizes professionalism but he consistently demonstrates his ability to separate his personal and professional life never allowing personal setbacks to undermine his enthusiasm for his work.

That’s the one thing I always like to tell people, no matter what, you just have to keep moving forward even in the face of personal and professional challenges. Like I have all sorts of personal things going on in my life right now and people go ‘I would never know!’ and I’m like ‘I don’t want to burden you with my thing if your paying me to be your drummer. I’m not going to lay that on you.’ I’m just going to be the best drummer I can possibly be for you at that time.

This outlook has served Chad well in the Nashville music community in establishing a sterling reputation as someone who can be counted on in any professional setting to not only deliver high caliber musical performances but also be an inspiration to
his peers in contributing to a positive creative environment. In the highly competitive and pressure filled setting of major recording sessions there is little tolerance for the vagaries of the human condition. The expectation of “A List” session musicians is that they will deliver the best possible product in the most expeditious manner consistently.

Anytime you are in a recording studio somebody’s money is being spent. The artist, the label, some investor or it could be the producer’s. So, I feel that it is my responsibility to really be present and fully engaged in the work. Put the cell phone away, get off Facebook and deliver the goods you know?!

Inspired by some of his favorite motivational readings and citing several personal improvement texts as impactful on his approach including *The Law of Success* by Napolean Hill, *Awaken The Giant Within* by Tony Robbins and of particular note Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers* Chad employs a motivational acronym in his plan for professional success.

Its what I call your Four P’s for Success: Your Playing, Your Personality, Your People Skills and Being Present in the moment. Now don’t let that seem like I’m not on my phone during the course of a session because there are always “fires” to be put out in one’s life or whatever, but I try to wait until I’m between songs or I’ve listened to the playback (of the pass he’s just recorded) and the producers happy. Just trying to give and give and give in essence over-delivering on the client’s expectations.

Expanding on the challenges of the recording studio scene as it has evolved over this past decade Chad intimates the ever-changing landscape of the musical market place and advances in technology contributing to a loss of distinct identities of session players.

With technology now the one thing that I’m hearing from a lot of my session player friends… for instance I just had lunch with the drummer on most all of Taylor Swifts’ albums today and he’s like ‘Fewer and fewer people are worried about requesting a particular player for their personality or sound, because it’s so easy to get the results with technology.'
Such generic approaches to musical staffing are a true departure from the past traditions of session booking practices in Nashville where once a small cadre of drummers, each with their own highly developed style, were in constant demand.

They’ll just get whoever is available. They might have five guys, but if it’s a triple session\textsuperscript{28} and one guy can only do the first one and not the latter two the producer or session leader will just go down the call list and find someone who can do all three to make their life easier. They know that they’ve got Pro Tools and all of the sampling technology and they know that they’re gonna’ get a good product that they can make sound like whomever they wanted originally!

Such practices inevitably have impacted the employment opportunities for top call player’s as their unique identities on the instrument have become a devalued commodity.

So the days of ‘I’ve got to have YOU, we really have to have your playing on this project when can you make it’ have gone by the wayside. Of course I’m still holding out hope that somebody still values my strengths and signature contributions. I want to believe that if your good enough and your always bleeding passion for the work then somebody is going to be willing to wait for you to be available if they want you bad enough. (Mimics and example of a phone conversation to book a session) ‘I can do it on the 21\textsuperscript{st}, but not on the 22\textsuperscript{nd}, that’s all I got.’ (Client Responds) ‘I’ll get back to you…’ Basically, the likelihood these days is if you say any of that you’ll never hear from them again!

With the music industries ever growing abundance of employment issues and the loss of traditional recording opportunities Chad emphasize the importance of aspirant professional drummers embracing alternative means of making a living as musicians. This has become a primary thrust of his presentations in encouraging the next generation of performers to recognize the benefits of diversification of ones’ life skills.

It’s tough. The recording environment, who knows how long that is going to last and the touring work is drying up or management and labels are encouraging their artists to pay less while asking for more from side people. Our industry is in troubled times, and that’s why I think that it’s great that the opportunity is there to educate as well because even if the kids that we educate don’t become full time musicians we’re teaching them a range of important concepts they can employ elsewhere in their professional lives: Time Management, Persistence,

\textsuperscript{28} Referring to a full day of work: 10am-2pm, 2pm-6pm, 6pm-10pm
Determination, Follow Through, Teamwork all of that. Those five things are five really important skills you must master to attain any sustainable success in the workforce.

Embracing his continued emphasis on education Chad’s primary professional motivations seem to have morphed from an emphasis on furthering his own performance career into a new phase centered around his commitment to sharing knowledge and in essence paying forward what he received from past mentors in hopes of inspiring ensuing generations of young performers. He cites the positive reinforcement and reception to his educational efforts as providing a continued impetus to utilize his platform of prominence (from his touring artist gig) to positively impact as many people as possible.

I know that if I keep doing it, I mean, I’m getting good feedback about my teaching ability and the message and the content I’m providing. One of the things I’ve done to set myself apart from other teachers was calling my clinics events. These are events, not just a presentation. They are moments in time and in that moment in time we literally have the ability to change lives.

Chad sees not only a benefit for the attendees as he feels each event experience impacts him positively as well.

The positive interaction provides so many benefits for all involved: It could be the event content, specifically the way I’m delivering the information or it could be the way I answer a question (based on his expansive experience in the industry). Maybe its something as simple as the thirty seconds of time I spend hugging a student or taking a picture with them, signing a drum head or whatever that can totally change the trajectory of possibly their entire life while at the same time providing me with a sense of reinvigoration and perspective on my own existence.

Chad emphasizes the positivity of the experience for his attendees as his ultimate motivation in presenting each of his events.

These things have to be fun, and good things have to come from it. Heck, I’m getting my butt out of bed before everyone else on the bus to go do these things! This is one of those activities that just feels good ya’ know? It’s like by the time noon comes around or before sound check for that show day I’ve already accomplished something very special.
Elaborating on the logistics of presenting clinics in conjunction with touring, specifically the alternate planning necessary to travel to a given region in advance of the counterparts with his artist tour, Chad further demonstrates his unparalleled drive and willingness to go far beyond the efforts of most of his peers in seeing an idea through to it’s fruition.

In Nashville the way we tour is we do Thursday, Friday, Saturday shows traditionally. So, we’re home in town four days a week and we probably get on the bus between 8pm and midnight on a Wednesday and come home Sunday morning for breakfast. We basically take the music to the people on Thursday-Saturday. That works great with Nashville being in the heart of the country. We have tight tour routing so we can actually be home a good bit for our families, girl friends, children or if people want to water their plants or take care of their cat they can actually do it.

In order to present his events within the constructs of his artists’ tour schedule Chad often has to plan alternate travel and accommodations with his sponsoring presenter.

If someone wants to host me in a city say the night before or on like a Wednesday I’ll fly out on the Wednesday and do the clinic on a Wednesday night then they’ll put me up in a hotel and I’ll be there on that Thursday morning to meet my band at the show site. Other times I’ll do the same thing on a Sunday, I’ll stay behind after the Sunday show and do the event on the Monday. Of course a lot of times I’ll do things day of show so like with our tight routing the bus always pulls out from the previous show site at 2am and say for example we’re going from Raleigh, NC to Charlotte, NC its only a two hour ride. I wake up in the morning (early), take a shower and then somebody from the drum shop or the high school or the college (depending on the venue) picks me up. There’s a set of drums waiting at the clinic venue. Once I get there I fine-tune the drums, maybe hang out a bit with the presenters. I check a track (from his laptop recording rig) that I’ll be playing to in order to dial in the sound for the room. We do the event hang out with the kids and basically I’m DONE. The only reason I can really do that nowadays is because of the supportive efforts of my drum tech with my artist gig. While I’m at the event teaching he’s back on our show site setting up my tour performance drums, tuning them, cleaning them and checking the drums with the front of house system for that nights show.
Where as his present day clinic/event planning tends to run smoothly Chad has certainly dealt with his fair share of challenges in administering events in the past due to the limitations of him trying to implement too many aspects all himself.

Now back in the day doing these things required commitment because before traffic (into his artist’s shows) got bad we’d be performing in convention centers and have college basketball arenas that they’d take half and slice it in half for our artists’ show. So, we would pull in to the venue and I’d have a set of drums in the bay underneath the bus. Then the person from the clinic would pick me up in a van, I’d load the entire clinic drum set into the van and we’d go setup and sound check that set of drums. Then I’d go back and set up MY set of drums at the artist show venue (again, this is before he had a tech), tune/maintain etc. do a sound check with my artists’ band after which I’d rush back to present the clinic on the OTHER set of drums, break that set of drums down, bring them back to the venue, put them back under the bus and be ready to play the show.

Ever aware of the essential interpersonal relationship intangibles of a high level touring operation and the potential impact of the obvious additional time constraints of his clinician activities on his primary obligation to his artist/employer Chad strived to make certain that his clinician efforts never detracted from the collective camaraderie of his band mates, artist and production crew.

I always promised my band that I would never be in the dressing room later than 8pm (because they traditionally played shows at 9:30) as they would get really upset with me if I wasn’t there to “vibe out” with them and like, be part of the energy at 8 o’clock. That’s a LONG day as it is and that was before traffic started getting really bad (for his artists shows due to increasing popularity) to where I could no longer effectively balance the two obligations.

Reaching a critical mass between heightened demand for his event presentations to be held in prime afternoon time slots for schools and music stores coupled with his artists’ sky-rocketing stature as a stadium filling, chart topping act it was inevitable that at some point one of Chad’s day of show events would jeopardize his primary obligation as a side-man performer.
I remember there was a tipping point if you will and it was in the mid-west. I did one of those late afternoon, early evening clinic events, pushed it too late and when we got back near to the venue there was a backup of almost a mile of traffic. Realizing I wouldn’t make the show otherwise I literally jumped out of the presenters vehicle who was driving me back from the clinic, got my cases with my essential gear for the show and started running past cars. People were saying ‘Hey, there’s Artist X’s drummer!’ as I slipped past all these lines of cars but I finally made it to the venue and called our road manager who came out and grabbed me with a venue golf cart. I made it for the show but that was the last time I ever scheduled an afternoon/evening clinic day of show!

From his current career vantage point Chad has the benefit of having participated in most all facets of the music business and currently functions in a diverse range of roles from session drummer to clinician, contractor, songwriter and producer. He has first hand experience interacting with literally thousands of world-class performers and educators, as well as a multitude of aspirant performers and musicians from a diverse range of backgrounds. Considering his own extensive history in formal music learning settings both as a student and a contributing clinician/educator his perspective on the future and preparatory obligations of music education provides valuable insight upon which further research for the enhancement and integration of new methods might be constructed.

My favorite hash tag, in most of my social media posts, is #musiceducation because I’m a big believer in the importance of remaining a perpetual student, and embracing all aspects of learning from the formal conservatory setting to vernacular music making.

Like so many of his peers, Chad laments the loss of music education and performer opportunities within the school systems of the United States.

Hopefully kids will always have that outlet but I know that in some states music classes and band have almost totally disappeared. For example, you would think in a very forward thinking state like California that the arts would be stronger than other states and yet the support, and opportunities are nearly gone. So, I hope we have the ability to have these outlets for ensuing generations.
Additionally, Chad emphasizes the importance of younger musicians remaining open minded in their consumption of musical knowledge, striving to be as diverse as possible while not buying into formulaic stereotyped categorizations as career aspirations. He feels that the potential transfer applications of a diverse skill set will help defy any preconceptions of professional limitations.

I think all of these things just feed each other because for example, when you and I moved to Nashville you were either a “Recording Drummer” or a “Touring Drummer” and I never bought into that. I was like ‘why do you have to put a label on, or limit yourself?’ Let’s create opportunities for ourselves and what I found was that my live drumming would lead to session drumming and my session drumming would lead to live work and it was this kind of symbiotic relationship.

From Chad’s perspective aspirant professional drummers must embrace a broader, big picture approach to the enhancement of their total musicianship always allowing for the potential to evolve beyond their anticipated end goals.

The way that I’ve always thought about life, and cultivating a music career was I never wanted to be pigeonholed, or categorized in any way. I am all about performing, recording, and teaching as well as how all of that impacts my broader potential creativity throughout my life.

Discussion & Conclusions

Chad’s varied educational and career experiences reinforce numerous tenants of recent research into the benefits of blending conservatory and vernacular music education approaches, as well as the importance of genre diversification in musical participation. In their retrospective overview of the Lakewood Project (Koops, Hankins, Scalese, & Shat 2010), researchers found that participation in the school’s rock orchestra provided members with skills that had transferable value. As Chad recounts repeatedly at each juncture in his musical maturation, his embracement of as many diverse performance opportunities as possible contributed to his accelerated growth as a drummer. In the case
of the Lakewood Project participants the variation of component elements that comprised the learning environment and interactive process skills for life, when blended with components of informal learning, allowed for an enriching dialogue between Western symphonic and popular rock music traditions. Additionally, much as with Chad, varied involvement for the rock orchestra members provided true multi-faceted growth in the development of an enriching musical vocabulary. The alumni of The Lakewood Project’s varied experiences might serve to underscore the similar transformative experiences that participants such as Chad gleaned from active involvement in non-traditional world music ensembles and the like. As Chad has found during his clinician efforts across the United States and abroad there is a consistent need, within music education to embrace instruction that is more student-centered and inclusive of informal music making processes (Kratus, 2007).

Beyond the classroom benefits Chad’s performance experiences underscore several primary themes common across music education research. First, it is important for popular musicians’ to be versatile in acquiring information to put into practice in today’s competitive popular marketplace. Regardless of the locale, as in the case of Chad’s initial career in Dallas and later move to Nashville, it is essential that an aspirant professional individual do copious research in order to ensure their place upon the musical landscape. The mentorship aspects of Chad’s role identity development and his efforts to associate with the elite professional social groups in both metropolitan music centers influenced his undertakings and had a direct impact on his long term capabilities (Burt, 2004).

Secondly, motivation and more specifically the efforts one undertakes in securing
new knowledge, is essential in achieving success (Welch, 1999). Examples abound, for example Chad’s efforts in establishing a reputation of dependability for subbing work in the Dallas Metro region, and the reputation he developed as a trusted sideman for Nashville touring acts. The exhaustive research employed by Chad in developing both his understanding of the jazz and country music genres reinforces Welch’s postulate that real world musicianship requires a broader range of musical vocabulary. His supposition of the importance of developing cognitive abilities that can serve as a mental tool set at the disposal of the musician participating in improvisatory settings is well-founded as evidenced by Chad’s numerous anecdotes regarding the benefits of performing in several of the challenging UNT lab bands and independent Dallas jazz orchestra ensembles. Such ensemble experiences provided the foundation of the vast creative arsenal and mental acuity Chad calls upon in his improvisatory undertakings in the recording studio.

A third component of Chad’s professional musicianship that correlates with findings of music education research is the focused practice in pursuit of maximum performance effectiveness. This of course applies to the concept of inherent talent presented by Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993). They examined how prolonged effort might account for the expert performance of standout individuals across a range of disciplines. Chad is an excellent example of how such sustained practice and durable work ethic conspire with innate abilities to create the illusion of natural or innate talent when in reality, as we see repeatedly in our Chad’s career arc, it is a bi-product of exhaustive effort.

A goal of this case study was to contrast and compare the creative impulse of vernacular music makers and conservatory-trained musicians alike. Focusing on the
participant’s application of cognitive processes, such as the interrelated thinking that imbues such an aspiring performer with social capital (Burt, 2004) Chad’s behavior in attempting to identify with specific musical niches underscore his end goal career achievement motivations in learning. His identification of place is a far more fluid process than many of his conservatory trained peers. He recounts numerous instances of employing particular cognitive behaviors that functioned as a means of skill acquisition. Such strategies parallel the more flexible informal mental processes that embrace a blending of alternative learning tactics. Throughout his career, Chad has embraced a broader means of applying understanding in order to interact in various musical and social settings. His flexible approach to embracement of ever-advancing musicianship belays a blend of his many years of formal training with the more exotic genre blending common to vernacular musicians. Such activities further reinforce the need for a broadening of vocabulary in the modern day musical education efforts. Addressing such unique means in which practitioners achieve literacy in popular music, Giddings (2008) recognized that the efforts of popular musicians of the ilk of Chad differ greatly from those applied by practitioners of the classical tradition of music. While Chad imparted the importance of his employment of functional knowledge or musical literacy, specifically through his frequent use of notation for charts to learn material for live performance or studio sessions, he is equally adept in his ability to comprehend music by ear and improvise new ideas quickly upon command. These latter activities require simultaneous skill application derived equally from formal and informal ensemble pursuits and provide a salient rationale for the inclusion of more exotic music ensemble opportunities at all levels of school music participation.
Considering the economic challenges present across the music education landscape, Chad’s advocacy efforts with his educational presentations parallel the work of his peers like the Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith. Working for over a decade on behalf of the foundation Little Kids Rock, Smith shares “Chad’s” passion for ensuring access to musical instruments and instruction regardless of financial means. (Lawson, 2015) Both musicians have contributed considerable personal time and fiscal resources to this worthy causes and are trailblazers in their work to bridge the considerable gap that sometimes exists between school music administrators/educators and popular music practitioners. Additionally, they similarly espouse the embracement of all performance opportunities and eschew the idea that the inclusion of non-traditional ensembles will somehow diminish traditional band or symphonic offerings participation as long as the music education community as a whole employs creative means in emphasizing the importance of total musicianship for vernacular and professional musicians alike. With prominent drummers like Chad Smith and Chad advocating for such versatility in discussions of creative musical training it would seem that the future of music education may well benefit from more frequent contributions of those steeped in non-traditional vernacular musicianship and traditional music education.

Conclusions

The obvious take way from Chad’s career is that the long-held, fallacious preconception of prominent popular music musicians (especially drummers) as untrained amateurs who simply had opportunity fall their way is completely false. However, the more significant consideration in examining today’s popular musicians, specifically

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drummers working not only in Nashville but also across the pantheon of nationally recognized pop music, is that his story is not the exception, it is the norm. In the past 25 years, professional drummers have become some of the most versatile and comprehensively trained persons active in the ranks of professional musicians today. Not only do they possess competency in all expected areas of expertise within their immediate spheres of influence as performers, but they also “moonlight” in numerous other performance pursuits due to their comprehensive musical training in all genres. Hailing from institutions such as the University of North Texas, Indiana University, University of Miami, Berklee College of Music, Belmont University, Florida State University, and dozens of other highly respected schools of music across North America and abroad today’s professional drummers are quintessential examples of the value in blending formal/traditional pedagogic training regimens with vernacular music making pursuits and copious knowledge of the authentic traditions of a multitude of musical genres. Furthermore, Chad’s example of a commitment to exhaustive research is simply another example of the norm, baseline expectations amongst his professional peers. It also underscores an important area for further research specifically in the area of musicological study, and professional practice as it pertains to group psychology.

Tomorrow’s aspirant professional drummers must be made to understand the value of knowledge of the history of their profession via the pursuit of comprehensive knowledge of every musical style or genre they may be called upon to play over the course of their career. It is also essential that the inexperienced players come to fully value the extra-musical considerations of employment in understanding that professional drummers not only work but also live with their professional peers for long periods of
time. The ability to co-exist in a malleable manner that allows for consideration of your fellow musicians’ needs and social idiosyncrasies if valued far more than any musical skill set. Every applicant with whom an aspiring professional drummer will be competing for jobs most likely possesses considerable talent and has left no stone unturned in the pursuit of constant professional improvement. What sets individuals such as Chad apart from the pack is their attitude and treatment of others, their genuine enthusiasm (even in the midst of difficult situations) and their embracement of the role of the perpetual student.

It is inherent upon all involved in higher education that students are presented with a timely, informed understanding of the realities of employment in today’s professional music environment. The only means to achieve this is to encourage further collaboration and contributions between working professionals such as Chad and the academic ranks of music educators in hopes of imbuing the conservatory curriculum with applicable elements pertinent to the potential success of tomorrow’s working performers.
References


Appendix

*Interview Protocol Professional Drummer Case Study*

Date:  
Time of interview:  
Place:  
Interviewee:  
Role of interviewee in the Professional Drummer Case Study: Research Subject

**Purpose of the study:** To examine the educational experiences, and skill development of a professional drummer in Nashville, Tennessee.

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*Questions*  
*Session 1*  
*The Formative Years*

1. What were your early musical experiences as a child?  
   a. Who were your earliest musical influences?  
   b. What were some of your first school music experiences?  
   c. Did you have any out of school music experiences in your formative years? If so, what, and with whom?  
   d. What teachers, if any influenced your early interest in music?  
   e. What made you decide to play the drums specifically?
2. What were some of your elementary school, high school, and collegiate musical experiences, and important milestones?
   a. Ensemble participation
   b. Peer influences
   c. Professional mentors
   d. Teachers in the school setting

Questions
Session 2
Professional Practice

1. Upon graduation from your Masters program at the University of North Texas you began your professional career in the Dallas area. Please describe your experiences, and any professional practice knowledge you gained in this early stage of your career?
   a. What essential musical knowledge and skills did you find yourself applying in your performance efforts?
   b. What extra-musical knowledge and skills did you utilize, or find yourself needing to enhance in order to be successful in your performance pursuits?
2. Describe your motivations for moving to Nashville:
   
   a. Who were some of the most influential musicians in assisting your early efforts to acquire work opportunities?
   
   b. Identity: How did you differentiate yourself from other professional drummers?
   
   c. What extra-musical skill sets assisted in you establishing your identity as a sideman to national artists?
   
   d. How much have you found yourself calling upon your conservatory training, and graduate school skills in your professional performance, and educational efforts?

Questions
Session 3

1. What benefits have you found from applying your education in professional practice?
   
   a. How has it affected your overall musicianship, both in terms of composition and otherwise (e.g., performance)?
   
   b. How has it affected musical creativity?

2. What motivated your efforts to serve as a national music clinician?
   
   a. Has your participation in educating a new generation of performers changed the way you think about teaching and music education in general?
b. Has it affected your musical creativity?

c. What benefits, if any, have you derived from serving as a mentor via your clinician efforts?

Thank you for participating in the interview. Your confidentiality will be respected in any application of the content from your interview sessions.