Chapter 5: The Rehearsal

Rehearsal and preparation are tests of who you are as a musician. **The practice, repetition, and mastering of the craft is what makes you a professional musician.** Rehearsal is where you begin to test all that you have prepared until this point. I always come prepared with:

- all my charts
- an iPod with all the songs for reference
- a set list (if there's one provided)

Rehearsal is also a great place for you to get comfortable with the other musicians. If you do not play with other musicians on a regular basis, then rehearsal is the place to understand the feel of everyone else playing around you. **I call rehearsal "a psychological preparation" as much as it's a musical preparation.** You have been preparing and working on your music up to this point. Now you have to get the feel of the artist, other musicians, and implement what you have been learning.

Rehearsal Before Rehearsal

It seems redundant but it's worth it. Your rehearsal before rehearsal can be the very key in understanding the parts in relation to the kit instead of air drumming and visualizing.

One thing that I do, if my home surroundings provide for it, is to set up a drum kit and rehearse the given material with my iPod or mp3 player, charts or handwritten charts. I try to set up a feel for my future rehearsal and performance as much as possible. There is no better preparation than actually getting to play through the parts you are memorizing. The first time you get a feel for the songs will be in your own private rehearsal time. This is one of the last things you can do to fully prepare before rehearsal. It's a tried and true way of making sure you are on your "A" game before you play the tunes with everyone else.

In my house in Dallas, Texas I had a big open area in the back of my house. It was perfect to leave my drums set up and rehearse there. I had to memorize a lengthy set for an artist before I arrived in Nashville to rehearse, then fly to Rhode Island for a show. I prepared for a week at the back of the house with my drum kit to really get the feel of the parts, beginnings, and endings. They were very groove involved songs.

The practice proved very helpful just to get the parts solid and memorized before I flew to Nashville. I flew to Nashville and nailed everything without any confusion or hang-ups. **The rehearsal before rehearsal is a proven recipe for success.** I highly suggest it if your home has space for your drum kit. If not, look for a rehearsal space in your area. Most rehearsal spaces, especially in New York, Nashville, or Los Angeles will have a drum kit you can use. Just bring a set of cymbals and other items like a pedal, snare and drum throne.

No matter what, it's crucial that you get some time to work out the parts of a lengthy set to let your body and mind memorize everything on the drum kit. And if you're given the opportunity always have your kit available in the same space as you. It can never hurt to rehearse anything and everything that comes your way just to get the songs into your muscles the way you will be playing them live. And that's on your respective drum set.

For the Gigging Drummer: The Rehearsal and The Rehearsal Space Drum Kit

I had to touch on a subject you might or might not deal with: the rehearsal and the rehearsal space drum kit.

Assume one of your rehearsals might happen in a rehearsal space. You might be wary about rehearsal space drum kits. They usually are not the best quality and you might end up playing drums that are barely usable. I always come prepared with my own snare, cymbals, kick pedal, drum throne, tuning key and sticks. Come prepared and be either amazed or completely horrified. I believe that under the circumstances most artists or musicians will understand that it will sound bad anyway. When you have your own gear put it over the top and show you are a professional. It will not only make you sound good but you’ll also look good.

You might not have experienced any of the things I mentioned because you only use your own drum kit, which is always a plus. It's always paramount to sound your best. So do your homework before your rehearsal. Find out what you need and bring a kit where you will be most comfortable. I know from experience the relief of showing up to a rehearsal space knowing you don't have to set up your own drums because the space has a kit. This can sometimes turn into a real bum deal when the drum kit has been beaten to shreds by the scores of previous drummers who've used it. Not many artists you play with will know the difference of what sounds or looks bad. But they will certainly know if you are not comfortable and sounding bad. As drummers we definitely know that being comfortable behind a kit is the key to having a great rehearsal or performance. So do your homework on your rehearsal space!

I recently experienced this when rehearsing for an artist at a rehearsal space around Los Angeles. We had three consecutive rehearsals in three different rooms at two different rehearsal spaces. I was on three different drum kits that were definitely sub par. I've learned over the years to be prepared when I walk into a rehearsal space. So I've started making a rehearsal and rehearsal space gear checklist. Since you cannot really throw your own drums in most of these spaces, it's a matter of give and take. I will always make do with the kick drum, cymbal stands, snare stand, high hat stand, drum throne, rack tom, and floor tom. You can count on me to bring these items on my checklist:

Tuning Key: You will most definitely need a tuning key.

Snare: I believe your sound as a drummer comes from the snare. Make sure you always have a high quality sound from your snare. Don't get stuck with a snare that you will be tweaking during the whole rehearsal just to make it work. Believe me, bring your snare!

Cymbals: I always check out the cymbals to see if anything might be usable. More often than not they cannot be used. At the very least I carry a 20" ride, 14' pair of hats and an 18" crash cymbal for rehearsals.

Kick Pedal: Unless you like the sound of a squeaky Ludwig Speed King Kick Pedal then you should have your own kick pedal. This is really a 50/50 thing. I realized that I use the rehearsal space drum kit kick pedal a lot more than I care to admit.

Drum Throne: This is a personal preference. But for my unusual backside size, I really enjoy my drum throne at a long three hour rehearsal. Believe me, unless you like sitting on the equivalent of a banana bike seat for three hours in a rehearsal space, then do not bring your drum throne. Just in case, I've got it covered in this handy checklist.

Sticks and Stick Bag: This is an essential item that you cannot do without. In all the madness of trying to get to rehearsal, guess what is left behind the most? Yes, you're. We will not go into it.

Metronome: You will certainly want to rehearse with the metronome! It's a plus for establishing the foundation early on with the artist and band. It will let them know you're a serious solid foundation to rely on. Don't forget it!

iPod with Songs: It's always nice to reference a section of a song that you might have forgotten. It definitely comes in handy!

Charts and Set List: So you have created all those charts and you have a set list. Just don't forget to bring them to your rehearsal! It'd be a travesty to get all the way to rehearsal after spending time to make them, only to discover you've left all your charts with tempos and arrangements behind. Believe me I've done it before. And that's why I make a checklist now.

The rest is up to you! But I always take all the items listed above with me. I hope this spares you from headaches. Soon enough you will know what I am talking about or you already know this by heart. **You can never be prepared enough for the rehearsal and the rehearsal space drum kit.**

It's always best to be at least 10 minutes early for any rehearsal, especially as a drummer! We have many things to set up and we might also have to set up a click track or backing tracks, which could take longer than expected. This can be very annoying to the musicians and the artist. It's also even of more importance when you are a newbie on the gig to be as early as possible. It's important to get to the venue early, establish that you have prepared and that you are a professional. It sends a big signal to your fellow musicians around you that you are professional, respectful and serious about your time and theirs.

Make All Your Mistakes In the Rehearsal

I coined this phrase years ago: **“Make all your mistakes in the rehearsal, and nail the show.”** This means you are rehearsing to work out the kinks and flaws so that your performance or worship service go as smoothly as possible.

Your role, as a drummer, is to hold together the band and artist throughout the show. Working out every part of your performance or worship service in the rehearsal is the key to success. Just like I said earlier in the preparation portion of this e-book, **your preparation is your key to your success in rehearsal and your performance.** Knowing all the tempos and arrangements of the given songs will help you have a smooth rehearsal. It will put the artist and the band at ease and they will be very comfortable in playing the set with you.

I have formulated a plan of action on how to be as successful as possible for a performance or worship service. Though I might portray myself as a perfect, polished drummer, I’ve had my share of imperfection. I have had many rehearsals where I’ve definitely fumbled through the songs and wondered "Oh man! Am I gonna blow this when it comes stage time?" I can honestly say my record is pretty clear, though, when it comes stage time and I usually have all my ducks in a row. I think the gigs where you are given very little time to prepare and rehearse are some of the most nerve-wracking gigs ever. I have to honestly say I do and I do not like them. Why do I like them? Well, I like a challenge every now and then. It keeps my charting and instinctual skills sharp.

I was asked by the drummer of Casting Crowns to fill in for him on a date on the Lifesong Tour in 2006. I had about one week of notice to learn 16 songs to play in front of over 8 to 10,000 people. I also had to play for the opening act on two songs plus the full 35 minute Nichole Nordeman set after the opener and before Casting Crown's 2 1/2 hour set. It placed me on stage for about 3 1/2 hours! Was I scared? NO!!! Of course not!! I was so excited to be onstage that long doing what I love! But it was definitely a lot of homework.

The only time I got to ask questions about any of the Casting Crowns songs were at sound checks and at shows before the event I had to play with them. At the very least it was a relief to have some of my questions answered before the performance. I definitely made my share of mistakes because many of the

arrangements were changed to fit the live show and cut down time. To make this long story short, I played the shows and they went off without a hitch except for a longer outro on a CC tune that I only rehearsed once and forgot to play longer. I had basically improvised until the end and nobody could tell the difference. The show ended up a blast. All the mistakes I made in rehearsal ended there, with the exception of one small mental error. Overall, everyone was happy and I made Mr. Andy Williams proud. It was an event that will forever be in my mind: having little time to prepare for a big show and making a few mistakes with little rehearsal.

Where's the One?

The "One" means the downbeat. On a drum kit you commonly play the downbeat or "One" on a kick drum, Earlier on I described it as one of the biggest jobs we have as a drummer. The downbeat when counted is 1 and 3 in 4/4 time. But the "One" is the most important downbeat and it's also universal in any time signature as the start of a new bar or new section of the music. The "One" is like a warm bath to most artists and worship leaders. If you can always do a tasty fill that gives the band a great feel of the next downbeat, then you will win a vote of confidence from everyone.

The biggest enemy to the downbeat is overplaying. I love to play creative fills as a drummer. When a fill substitutes for the song and the bands then you might as well plan on not getting called back. Believe me I hear it all the time from artists and worship leaders. The comments about not finding the "One" are not a new thing. If you value the "One" more than you value your fills then you win a silent battle for yourself and everyone else every time.

Where's 2 and 4?

Your “2 and 4” is just as important as the “One.” The “2 and 4” are commonly known as the back beat. In 4/4 time you always play “2 and 4” unlike in the down beat where you always have the “One.” The backbeat can change in every time signature. But the point in any time signature, with the backbeat and the downbeat, is to make sure you play it as consistent as possible and build the best possible foundation for the artist and band you are playing with.

The combination of a solid “One” and an equally solid “2 and 4” has kept me working in the music business today. I believe in playing great and tasty fills. I have grown as a player and **I have seen that it's what you do as a solid timekeeper that keeps you in the buzz of being a drummer who artists, worship leaders and other musicians can depend on.** As a drummer that dependability always start with the “One” and the “2 and 4.” I believe that is a winning combination every time you play your instrument.