

## ADDING ELECTRONICS TO MY DRUM SET PETE LOCKETT

It would not be unreasonable to sit back and look at contemporary musicians of forty years ago with some envy. Not because of the music they played or the fashion of the day but because life as a musician seemed to be a lot more transparent back then, if not a good deal easier and more relaxed in some respects.

When I started drumming, if someone asked for a bit of electronics you would pop a Dr rhythm drum box in your bag and be done with it. Now it is a whole different story, samplers, triggers, pads, laptops you name it, not to mention drum programming and software editing applications. All this on top of lugging your drum set around. It does not end with gear. Musical styles and genres of playing are whizzing by faster than you can roll round the toms. It is highly likely that the rhythms you learn when you start playing won't be in vogue by the time you have become competent. The question remains, 'is all this rapid change and development good or bad? Does it help one to feel more secure as a musician or feeling desperately inadequate and lagging behind the times? Many people will be out there asking "Where does it leave me" and "which way should I turn with it".

This is a more pertinent question for those who play acoustic instruments such as drums and percussion. Keyboard players and guitarists have been taking on technology for substantially longer so we have a bit of catching up to do. I'm sure the same debate lingered when the electric guitar came on the scene. Taking new things on board is always a challenge, whether it is a new style, new kit or integration of new technology. You have to be positive about it and look to the benefits and move with the times to give yourself every chance of succeeding in the long term.

You first have to accept three facts;

1. You will need to carry more gear around and spend longer sound checking.

2. You are embracing something that is changing and developing by the month so you need to keep abreast of these changes.
3. You will soon get used to it!

Besides the gear you might need to get to grips with, these developments effect every avenue of music making, from the studio to live. I can't remember the last studio session that I did that was not to a click and it is becoming common in a majority of gigs as well. More and more performers are using sequences or backing which means you often need to play to a click on stage. To make things that little trickier, it is very common that only the drummer has the click in his headphones/in ear monitors. This makes keeping the band in time like walking a mad dog with an elastic lead. It is a whole new challenge that needs to be mastered, especially if some members of the band, (I won't say 'bass player') want to push the beat a little more than they should. There you are, pulling one member of the band back one moment and then pushing another whom is dragging during their solo. It makes you feel like an overworked shunting train! To cap it all, even though the tempos are the same every night, it still does not stop the singers famous after show comment, "wasn't that track a little slow tonight!" Well, unless the hard disk was spinning a little faster, I don't think so.

This all points to one thing, if you can't play with a click, you won't hold down a gig. The simple remedy is to get a metronome and spend a lot, lot, lot of time with it. (See my article last month on practice routines) With a loud instrument like the drum kit you really know when you are exactly on the beat because you can't hear it. It is a weird feeling and it creates the illusion that it has stopped. However, do be sure the batteries have not demised!

If you are fearfully worried about lugging round your electronic and your acoustic kits, there are some lightweight options. If you are not worried about using 'boxed' drum sounds then you could get a drum brain and a few pads. At the barest you could get away with kick and snare added on to your acoustic kit. This is sometimes a good option because you get the live top end, the

power of the toms and the sonic fidelity and contemporary feel of the electronics. It can also fit neatly into your acoustic set up with the snare pad to the left of the snare drum and the kick pad nestled to the right of the bass pedal on the acoustic bass drum. Once you get into adding the electronic hi hat pedal, cymbal and tom pads, you need to really start re designing the whole set up so you can easily switch from acoustic to electronic. Set ups is a whole other story which I will go into in a future article.

If 'boxed' drum sounds burn your whistle as little as they do mine then you will need to add a sampler to that kit list and trigger it via midi from the drum brain, triggered by the pads of course. An S5000 or even S3500 are really bargain basement prices at the moment. Lots of sampled acoustic drum sounds are available for you to stuff into the sampler and sound like Bonham.

There are however some bits of kit emerging at the moment which are making this even easier and more portable. Notably the Roland SPDS sampler/drum pad. It has nine pads and two external trigger options and saves onto Compaq flash so you can really stuff that full of samples. However, even though you can get up to three hours sampling time, you can only get 500 files on there. Ridiculous. It means that 500 decent drum sounds would barely fill twenty minutes! Therefore, get smaller cards, 125meg or so.

It is also smaller than the spd20. Portable is a work I like!

