

CHRIS HAYDEN FLORENCE & THE MACHINE

*“Louder than sirens, louder than bells, sweeter than heaven and hotter than hell.”
Florence And The Machine’s ‘Drumming Song’ lyric
describes Chris Hayden to the proverbial ‘T’...*

WORDS & PHOTOS: SAYRE JOAN BERMAN

About five years ago Chris Hayden was asked by his friend Rob Ackroyd to come into the studio to record a song with Florence Welch. At that time, Ackroyd and Welch, relative unknowns in the world of popular music, were a duo – Florence handled the vocals, Rob played guitar. “Before I met Rob I was working as a drum tech for Razorlight and I was also playing a bit of percussion for them on the side of the stage,” explains Chris. “Razorlight’s drummer Andy Burrows was best friends with Rob.” Before too long, Chris and Rob formed their own strong friendship. “I would always say to Rob, ‘Call me if you need a drummer,’ or, ‘Call me *when* you need a drummer.” Persistence paid off – one day Chris did get the call. Florence and Rob were going into the studio the following day and they wanted Chris to record a song with them.

Chris had one day to learn the song. The next day the threesome recorded ‘Kiss With a Fist’, the song that would become the first single on Florence And The Machine’s debut album, *Lungs*. “That was the first thing that I ever did with them and it wound up getting on the album. I wasn’t expecting it this way,” smiles Chris, commenting on his good fortune.

Prior to joining Florence And The Machine and a brief stint touring with Razorlight, Chris was in two bands, each meeting with a modicum of success. When only 16 years old, he was in a heavy metal band called Killkus. Within two years of forming, Killkus was signed to the label Visible Noise. Subsequently, Chris joined Gourami, a three-piece rock’n’roll band. “We did some recordings, had a single released but nothing ever really developed. That was a lot of fun though. Also a lot of drinking!”

Chris first became interested in music when he was about nine or 10 years old. “I watched a



INTERVIEW

CHRIS HAYDEN

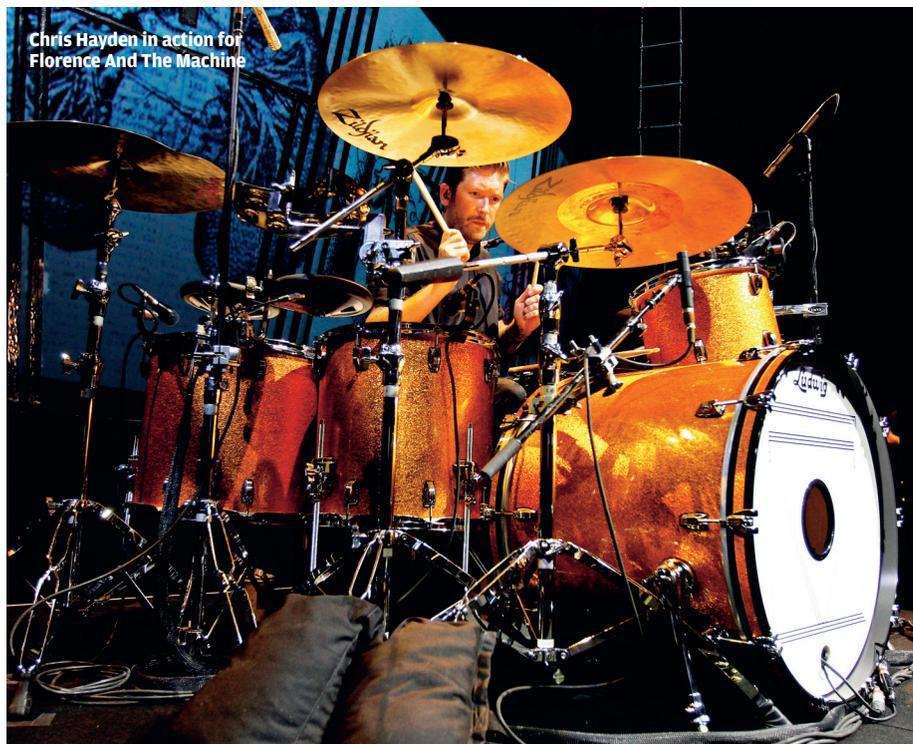
film called *Crossroads* - Steve Vai was in it. I decided I wanted to be a guitarist," says Chris. His dad bought him a guitar but after two or three years of struggling to learn the instrument, he admitted to himself that the guitar wasn't his future. Barry Johnson, Chris' uncle and the drummer with the '60s band The Rapiers, introduced Chris to the drums. "My uncle had a couple of kits locked away so he gave me one. Sitting behind the kit immediately felt a thousand times more natural to me than holding a guitar. I was 13 at the time." He's never looked back.

Chris was heavily influenced by an eclectic group of bands - everything from metal to grunge to hip-hop. "When I was first learning to play I started off with Nirvana and Beastie Boys. Rage Against The Machine's first album was a big hit with me too. Then I got massively into Korn. I was always trying to play along with David Silveria. He had a very different sound for the time. I found that to be quite inspirational. I was about 14 years old when I first heard Korn so I spent the next several years trying to emulate those sounds. Groove-wise though," Chris admits, "it was Dave Grohl and Brad Wilk."

Chris never had formal drum lessons. He did go to a music college, but due to the number of drummers already in his class, he devoted more time to developing his vocal abilities and learning how to read music. This served him well, given the multiple roles that he has in Florence And The Machine. Chris is not only the band's drummer he is also Florence's back up vocalist and the band's MD.

CARRYING MORE THAN A TUNE

As musical director, Chris oversees everything from the music itself to interpersonal relationships between band members and crew. The job's complexities have grown exponentially along with the growth of the band itself and their soaring worldwide popularity. "If you're a band member you just concentrate on your own parts. As the musical director I need to make sure that everyone is comfortable with what's going on, if anyone needs to run through songs. Often, when we tour in the UK, we'll use strings and a local choir, so I will look after those arrangements and make sure that everyone has their cues. Finding sounds is an important responsibility as well, making sure that the band is finding the right sounds to use to replicate the album during live events. For example, on 'Shake It Out' we used a pump organ that was in the studio for the



main organ sound. Rather than use a church organ live, I had to make sure that we found something that we can use to recreate this very particular pump organ sound. I try to get it as close as possible."

Chris' responsibilities aren't limited to what happens on stage, he also must ensure that the interaction between the crew and the band is functioning well and that the equipment is being looked after. Chris is also responsible for preparing song edits for their live television performances. FATM have been in demand on the early morning and late night television show circuit. "TV stations might ask for a three-minute version of a song so I'll make the edit. Once Flo approves what I've done, I'll make the band aware of the edit." The band's success has made Chris a very busy man. "I have more responsibilities now than I did five years ago when I was running around festival fields with no clothes on... but that's another story," he laughs.

After recording 'Kiss With A Fist' and becoming part of the newly-formed band, Chris was in for a bit of a surprise. Florence had very definite ideas about

drum sounds. "One of the first things that Flo said to me," recalls Chris "is that she doesn't like cymbals and doesn't like the snare drum. 'I don't like that one in the middle,' she told me. 'What, the snare drum?' I asked. 'I don't like the cymbal sounds, get rid of them. I do like the toms and I like the kick.'"

So what does a rock drummer, brought up on the stylings of David Silveria, Dave Grohl and Brad Wilk, do without a snare drum and cymbals? He creates some of the most imaginative and musically memorable drum parts. "The heavy reliance on toms and the bass drum gives the music a dark, rich quality. The harp gives it that classical element, Florence's vocals are almost operatic but the overall sound is what I'd call epic pop-rock," he explains.

Lungs, a very drum-heavy album, was largely a collaboration between Florence and several producers including James Ford, Paul Epworth, Steve Mackey and Charlie Hugall. Unlike some negative experiences that other drummers have had while working with producers in the studio, Chris had no issues. "It was an easy thing to do because they knew how to talk to me as a drummer - in some cases, drummer to drummer: James Ford and Paul Epworth are both drummers." The other producers, Steve Mackey and Charlie Hugall, played the musical parts on the songs that they worked on. Producer/drummer Paul Epworth broke his ankle just as work started on *Lungs*, so Chris played the drum parts. "Paul enjoyed experimenting with different sounds and different beat placements. When we worked on 'Hurricane Drunk' and 'Rabbit Heart' we tried moving the kick drum beat around and developing either more, or less, of a groove. Steve Mackey was quite pleased with the beats that I put together on the songs that we worked on: 'Kiss With A Fist' and 'Swimming'. Likewise, Charlie Hugall was immediately happy with what I did on 'You've Got the Love' and 'My Boy Builds Coffins'. Sometimes when

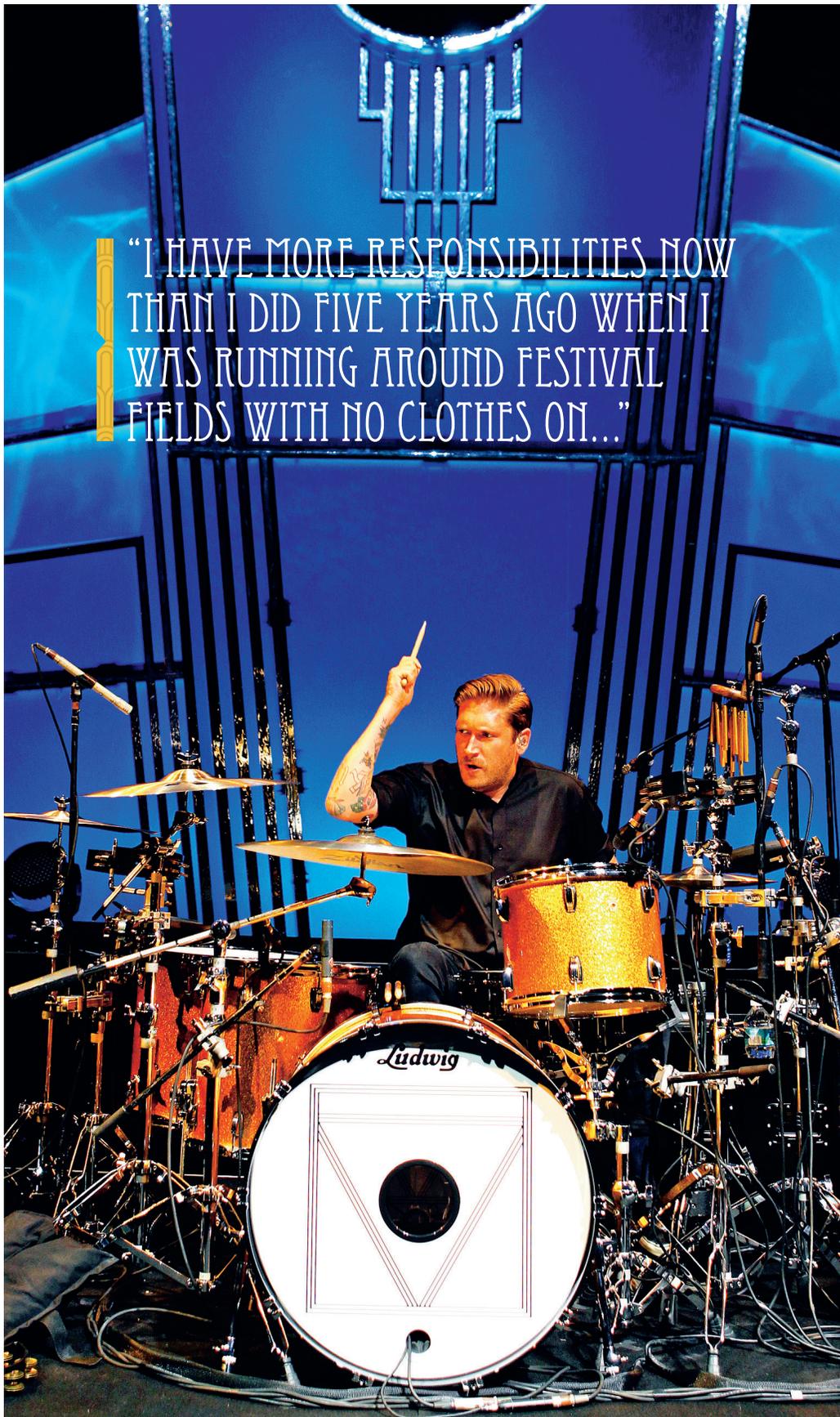
RETHINKING THE DRUM KIT

Chris didn't learn of Florence's aversion to the snare drum and cymbals until after work was completed on 'Kiss With A Fist'. "We were rehearsing and arranging songs, that's when Flo made it clear that she didn't like blinking every time I hit the snare drum," Chris explains, referring to Florence's tendency to wince every time he attacked the snare. She didn't care for cymbals either. How did he handle the challenge of devising drum parts without using the traditional key kit components?

"At first I'd just ignore the snare and cymbals. Then I started experimenting with beaters on the

snare and playing the snare without the snare wires. I just opened my mind and did the opposite of what I'd been doing for the last 15 years. When I first started playing professionally I would try to put as much into a song as possible. It took some time to realise that what you *don't* play is as important as what you do play. With *this* music, the patterns are quite basic, not too busy, but each pattern is different and that's what makes it all so interesting. For example, 'Dog Days Are Over' has the simplest of patterns but listen for the placement of the kick drum. I put the kick drum on the down beat to drive the song along to the end and to give it a bit more urgency."

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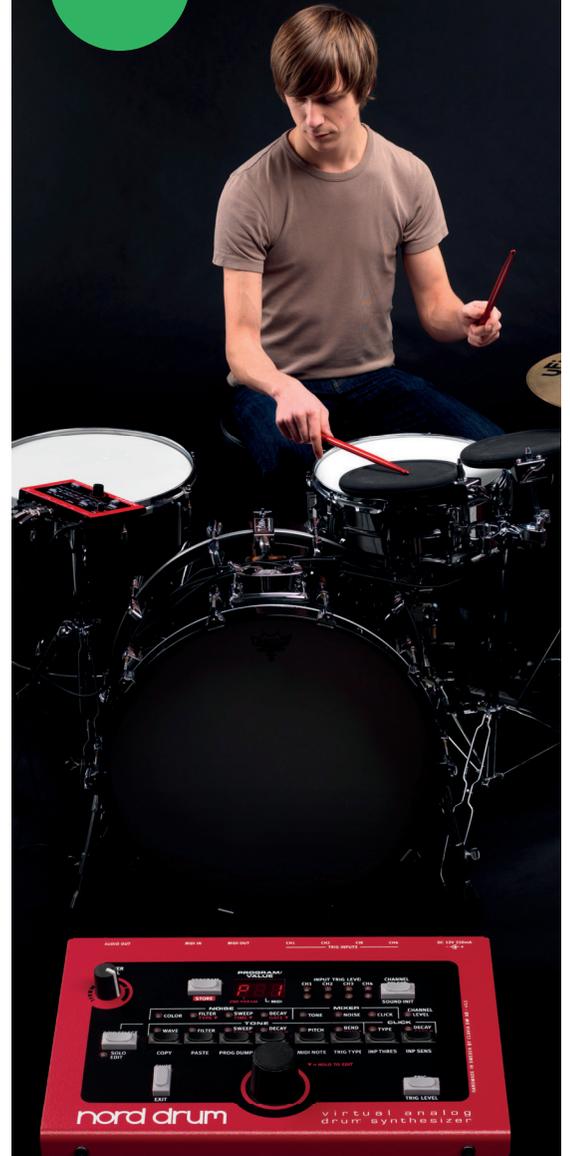
the producers play every instrument, things can fall a bit flat." Another problem that can arise is the inherent difficulty in playing an overly complex recorded song live. "On the first album there are a couple of songs where I had long conversations with producers while we were trying to work out the drum patterns for the songs. They had a drum beat here doing one thing, a percussion part playing something else, and then another drum beat playing something entirely different. 'I can't play three drum beats at once,' I'd tell the producers," Chris laughs. "But once we started touring, we as a band decided how these songs *should* sound. After two and a half years of performing the songs live, we listened back

to the album and we realised how much we had changed the songs. The vocals were the same, the lyrics were the same, but the arrangements had become quite different."

LET THE SONGS SIMMER

For *Ceremonials*, FATM's second album, the approach to songwriting and recording was modified. Florence had been working on new songs and preparing demos for about a year but when it came down to it, she chose to have her band around her in the studio for a more collaborative creative process. "Once the songs were written the whole band spent about a month in the rehearsal studio

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INTERVIEW CHRIS HAYDEN

CHRIS' GEAR

DRUMS

Ludwig Legacy Gold Sparkle with classic lugs, keystone badge and keystone leg brackets; 24"x20" bass drum, 13"x10" tom, 16"x16" Black Magic snare

CYMBALS

Zildjian 14" K Custom Dark hi-hats; 19" K Dark Thin crash;

20" Oriental Crash of Doom; 21" K Custom Hybrid ride

ELECTRONICS

Roland PD8 pads; Roland R-10K (kick); Roland RT-10S (snare); Roland TMC6 trigger to midi converter; Ableton Launch Pad (which fires off Ableton Live software on a Mac)

PLUS

Vic Firth American Classic 5a wood tip sticks (custom Chris

Hayden signature); Vic Firth American Classic T1 general mallets; Mapex hardware; Tama Iron Cobra hi-hat stand and bass drum pedal; Roc'n'Soc drum throne; Remo & Ludwig heads (with custom designed front printed onto bass drum head by custom skins); Rhythm Tech DST brass jingled tambourines (mountable); Meinl hand chimes; Nino Percussion Energy chime; Meinl Clam shaker; Stageworks Rimma stick holder

working with Paul Epworth to break down the demo songs, try a variety of things, and then build the songs back up again. We had time to rehearse the demos for a while, play around with beats and write our own individual parts. I was able to learn so much working directly with Paul. I was going from the rock'n'roll style of drumming to what Flo wanted, which was a more toneful and musical sound. That was one of the main things that Flo wanted to experiment with so for me that was a bit of a dream come true... saying that you want to do mainly vocals and drums for the second album. Most of the first album was pretty much all tom work. On *Ceremonials* I've introduced more of the other

components of the drum kit." Also, Mark Saunders, percussionist and bass player had come on board, adding yet another level of sonic texture to the band's arrangements. Not only was the band fully involved with writing the second album, but they also had the luxury of time. "We would write the songs and then mould them into the way we thought we would be playing them in two and a half years' time." It was a much more organic process, the songs remained in production until each band member was confident that the song was as it should be and, more importantly, as it would be in the future after being played hundreds of times over the course of an extensive tour. "When we were ready to start

recording we did about a song every couple of days. All told, we took three months to record the second album. It was definitely a good process, albeit an unusual one. By the end of it we all knew what we were doing. We're just about a year into it now and we're sounding pretty similar to how we started," says Chris, referring to their current tour in support of *Ceremonials*. "It's good to know that we haven't diverted from our mission," says Chris with a big grin. "The sets never feel boring because each song has a different beat, different tempo, different rhythms with different patterns. That keeps the interest alive and I think it also makes the set more exciting for people to watch."

After this current tour is over, Florence, Chris and the rest of the band will have a year off. There is no pressure to rush to get a third album done. "I've just bought a house in London with my girlfriend. I'd like to enjoy the house while I can before I go out on another tour. I'm already excited for the next album, but I'm also very excited for this next year off."

Chris won't be just sitting idle in his new home though. When he isn't working with FATM he is producing for other artists.

"Earlier this year I did a few bits and pieces for Rubeen Bullock and his band Rubeen And The Dark. I've also produced a single for Violet, Pixie Geldof's band. During the year off, I'll still be playing but I'll be keeping it local. We've been out for five years, now is the time to reap the benefits of it all and enjoy a bit of me time." **R**

SEARCHING FOR SOUNDS



Chris and his drum tech Mark 'Wiff' Smith are diligent in their search for the best way to bring the sounds heard on the albums to the live stage. Attention to detail is of paramount importance. Chris explains the challenges he had when trying to replicate the sounds heard on 'What The Water Gave Me' on *Ceremonials*. "We spent a while trying to find the right sound for that one. I tried putting coins in a bag, that didn't work; I tried putting spoon heads in a bag, that didn't work either. I tried them

together, no success. We spent hours with the coins and the spoons but it sounded awful, nothing like what I thought it would sound like. Then Wiff found something for me, a percussive disk called a Spark Shaker from Meinl. You can hold it one way for a very loud, chime-type sound but if you hold it more in the palm of your hand it has a completely different sound, a quieter chick-chick sound rather than a clang-clang sound. If you hold it with just two fingers you get a very metallic sound, if you hold it with four fingers it becomes more of a shaker sound. Holding it lightly produces the perfect jangling sound that I use on the snare beat."