

Photo by Robert Carbone

A NATIVE OF LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, JEFF CONSI HAS THAT DISCERNIBLE PHAT POCKET ALL THE GROOVE PLAYERS FROM THE NORTH EASTERN USA SEEM TO HAVE. NOW AN AUSSIE, JEFF'S BACKBEATS POWER THE BADLOVES. WE SPOKE AT WICKS STUDIO A, THE BADLOVES' "OTHER HOME"...

**Jeff, tell us how it all began? What inspired you to become a drummer?**

My father was a drummer. It started with him and then my brother Michael. He would have been my first inspiration. He's a real natural, playing traditional grip. We have photos of him playing on the kit when he was 2 years old.

I started playing when my brother would go to school. I'd get on the kit. I was about 5. There was a lot of listening to music that was handed down from my brother. There was always music in the house, everything from the Eagles to EWF, Doobie Brothers, Sly Stone - it was all that - a lot of Jackson 5. When I think back to it, even before I got into Zeppelin and Hendrix, I was absorbing Sly, EWF, Kool and the Gang. My family had pretty good musical taste.

**Was there a lot of formal training? Or was it grooving and playing to the radio.**

The way I remember it, I played the same beat for a few years: a basic rock beat with ghost notes that Michael taught me. Then, I started discovering Hendrix, Sabbath, Zeppelin and Rush. I loved playing along to those records. My brother outgrew the drums, so I got into his cover band when I was about 12 - doing block parties, schools, and birthdays.

At 15, I started getting more serious about playing and started taking lessons at the Long Island Drum Centre. They had a lot of great drummers teaching there, like Dom Famularo. I chose Joe Franco. He wrote a book on double bass and he had a great Bonham feel. I studied with him for about a year, maybe a year and a half.

He basically got me sight-reading, working on rudiments. We worked a lot out of Syncopation. He was a fantastic teacher and a studio pro. I also played in high school marching and jazz bands.

**You have a very discernible pocket, that feel that a lot of the North East players seem to have. How did you get that together?**

Some musicians have told me that's an American thing, they hear a lot of American drummers do that. I don't know, I just naturally

sit there. I think it may be a combination of what you are exposed to and how you feel a pulse. A connection with your emotions too. I also listened to a lot of funk and bands like Steely Dan. That was music school growing up. When I was 17, I met a brilliant New York drummer named Lee Finkelstein who made my head spin. I was obsessed with his playing. He's currently the drummer in the original Blues Brothers band. He turned me on to Garibaldi and Tower of Power. Sent me on a whole new path.

**What was it like growing up and developing your own thing as a drummer in NYC at a time that was arguably the heyday of the session scene?**

My dad was a recording engineer in Manhattan. I was young, but he'd take me to the studio with him. He wound up building an API console in our basement, it was for a friend in the next town. I started doing sessions there when I was about 12. That was my first 24-track recording. I didn't know what I was doing; I was just playing. I loved it. I knew I wanted to be a session musician. Being in New York, I got to see some of the greats. I saw guys like Steve Ferrone and Anton Fig play small bar gigs. Big influences. I set my drums up like Anton at one point! There was a lot of learning from players and producers that I worked with.

**You also played with some of the cream of New York City musicians, like the great bass player Will Lee ...**

That was because I was sitting in with the China Club house band on Thursday nights. They'd have this monster band. I was playing with a guitar player named Adam Bomb at the time. He was friends with those guys. He vouched for me, and they got me up! It was incredible. I got to play with T.M. Stevens there, (he was very cool), Benny Harrison on keys. Killer players - I couldn't believe I was there!

**Is that what you lead you into a band with the great guitarist Nuno Bettencourt?**

It was around that time, around 1999. I was showing up at these Thursday nights and the band leader mentioned he had another thing on a Wednesday night at Dark Star. And again, they'd have all these killer players. It would chop and change but was really inclusive. You'd think people at that level would look down on you but they were absolutely, "Hey man, c'mon get up and play!" - really inviting and encouraging. It builds a lot of confidence. Around that time my ex-girlfriend called me and said, "Someone from Nuno Bettencourt's band put up an ad in Manny's Music..." she was like, "they're looking for a drummer - you should send something in." I fluffed about. I didn't know.

They asked for an audition tape. Simple to most complex beats. So, I sent it in. I told no one. I mentioned it briefly to a roadie friend of mine. Then I forgot about it. A couple of weeks go by, phone rings, and it's Nuno. I

almost hung up - I thought it was my friend Carl pranking me!

Nuno started laughing. He had to prove he wasn't Carl by reading the letter I sent with the tape. Then my heart drops. I was flipping.

He'd left Extreme, done a solo record and now wanted to do a band thing. He had Mike Mangini with Donovan Bettencourt on bass - a 3-piece. They did a gig together but Mike got offered the gig with Steve Vai. Nuno wanted a fresh player, not a big pro name. They looked around Berklee but it just wasn't happening. So, he flew me up to Boston and I did the audition and that was that. Next day I get a message on my phone saying welcome to the family. Just amazing. Our first rehearsals were in Melbourne because Suze (DeMarchi) was rehearsing for her 'Telelove' tour here. They were married at the time. It was a whirlwind. **What led you to move Down Under?** After September 11, Nuno was moving to LA, and Donovan moved to Portugal. I was married to an Australian and we decided to move back here in 2002.

**How did you find your way into the scene in Australia?**

Well this is something I've chatted to other drummers about because it's happened about two or three times in my life. I've moved to a new city and had to start from scratch. I did it in New York: doing gigs on Long Island, then moved into Queens and then I'm doing gigs in Manhattan then all up and down the East Coast. I did the same thing in Boston: when I was playing with Nuno, I was still trying to get out there and do other things. When I got

to Melbourne, I thought, "Well, I've done this before..."

I took a year off. I didn't really touch the drums that much. It was actually the first time since I started playing drums that I took some time off. Eventually, I wound up getting a gig with David Franj. Nuno was producing Franj when we first came here. He was promoting his new record and his drummer left. So, he called and said, "Hey, come and play!" I started doing gigs with him, but then I also started trying to network again. It's just one of those things. You have to get out there and start meeting people.

**How much does the environment differ in Australia from what you saw in the New York area?**

The drumming community here is a testament to Frank (Corniola). When I first came here with Nuno, the first drummer I saw was Dave Beck with Suze's band. Immediately I was thinking, "What are they putting in the water down here? What are they feeding these guys?" Then I realised quickly that Frank was feeding everyone. It's a real honour to be a part of the whole scene.

I did find it more difficult to break into the scene here, though. New York was more open. It took a long time to start getting steady gigs in Melbourne. I just kept at it.

I have to say, there's a lot of inspiration to draw on here. Players like Davey Porter, Peter Maslen and Wato (John Watson). Maz is one of the best songwriter drummers, best studio sound ever. Wato is just a magnificent drummer to listen to and watch. Then there're



# JEFF CONSI

By Dan Steedman



The Badloves Live

Photo by Robert Miles

all the greats like Carlo Parisi, Marcus Ryan, Dave Matthews, (Johnny) Salerno, Adrian Violi, Spyda, Karl Lewis, Haydn Meggitt, Gerry (Pantazis) and both Farrugas! So many greasy players here in Melbourne. I'm inspired by all of them.

**Let's talk about your approach to sessions and recording...**

Every session is different. I really listen to the songwriter, what they say and watch their body language to see how they are feeling the music. You're there to capture the feel and sound they are after. It's important to know how to get sounds quickly.

With the Badloves we go in cold. Literally hash it out as we're recording it. No click. There are other artists where I've just showed up and played. They play me the song on acoustic and then we go in and play.

If I get the music beforehand, I have a way of cheat sheeting. It's funny, I see a lot of other drummers have a similar system. It's always good to share those approaches too because you get better ideas about how you can do it

more efficiently. I find that I need to write the intro for each song. I'll learn it by memory, but I need the intro and the tempo. I click track everything, the BPM of every song, and that goes into my iPad and iPhone. I have back up of everything when I'm doing a gig or session.

**What about the choice of gear you use in the studio. Does it vary a great deal from project to project?**

I used to bring heaps of gear. Now, I show up committed to the 20, 12, 14 set-up. I find you can get most of what you need from a 20" bass drum, plus, you get the 20" punch. So, I usually bring that. I used to have a 24, and would use that depending on the session. But, for the most part, a 20" will do a lot of what you need. So, I'll bring that and a wood snare, an aluminum snare and maybe a steel or extra aluminum snare.

I always bring that one (a custom made aluminum 14" x 6.5"), and an Acrolite (Ludwig): Acrolites just record beautifully.

**What have been some of the memorable sessions that come to mind?**

Oh, man. I guess Leo Sayer - that wasn't a session it was a gig. We played shows in Melbourne and Sydney. To me, that was, 'I have to call Mom' for this one. As far as memorable sessions, that would be the Comedy Central radio commercial when I was about 19. It was national. First time I felt like a real session musician.

**You've since worked with the who's who of the Australian music scene...**

Yeah, I'd say that I'm a ... what is it? ... 'always the bridesmaid, never the bride!' I'm always subbing for someone. I enjoy it because I get to play with a lot of great musos. Some great bands and Australian solo artists. I think Leo Sayer was the one, because we'd be driving in Mom's car and Leo was on the radio. Such great tunes and Gadd!

**What is your live rig?**

I left Yamaha recently after 15 years with their great team. I'm still with Paiste but now I'm back to Gretsch. That drum set (pictured) is the one I learned on. It's a 1958 Broadcaster. It was my Dad's, then my brother's and I



Photo by Denise Torrance

Jeff Consi & Michael Spiby recording "Soulbrothertruckinsong"

inherited it from there. It was refurbished and sent over from New York by my dear friend Pete Lazos at Rukus Drums. It's lovely to still be playing it.

**Tell us about your monitor mix. What do you like to hear?**

I've been in a lot of situations where we use in-ears but with the Badloves we use wedges. It's old school. I usually have the kick and snare in my mix, bass and a bit of vocal. Every-thing else I get off the stage. The band makes a particular sound and I'm so familiar with it now. Obviously the kick, because I like to dig into the bass drum; the snare and bass gui-tar if I'm not close enough to Irish (Stephen O'Prey).

**How did you become a Badlove?**

A few years back, I was actually contemplating whether to go back to New York or LA. I was gonna try to do a few months just to see what happens. I found that I was subbing a lot here but getting a permanent gig in Australia is quite difficult. All those guys have been doing those gigs for years. They're great at it, and I come in to sub, and then that's it. You're gone.

Then, I get a message from Tony Featherstone, the Hammond player for the Badloves. We had played together before, and he thought I would be a good fit for the band. He messaged me and said, "Michael Spiby's gonna call you." I wound up chatting to Michael and we just hit it off. I love the band and I adore the music. Michael's a great songwriter and a great vocalist too. He's an artist and a craftsman when you watch him work. It's an amazing thing to watch someone that has that level of understanding of

arrangement, orchestration and groove. When I got in the band I wanted to honour Chris Tabone's drum parts, he's a masterful player. I listen to those drum tracks, pre-Pro Tools, and I'm floored at how incredible they are. Meticulous, with a great feel.

So, I told Michael I wanted to honour those parts but he was like, "You're here, do your thing." He's very open and free about his approach to music. It's been a fantastic 4 years.

**What's next for the Badloves? Do you have other projects you're working on?**

The Badloves is my main gig. At the moment we're recording a record, we have two songs mixed and one just came out called "Soulbrothertruckinsong." That's out on Spotify and Apple and all that. The next one is coming out hopefully in the next few weeks. Nearly an album's worth of material has been recorded, so we're almost there.

**And then out on the road?**

That's all starting to pick up at the end of January; our manager is booking gigs for

that. At the moment Michael is doing radio promo. That's about two or three interviews a week for the next few weeks. We'll get a groundswell happening and then try to get on another tour or we'll book our own again.

**What's the secret to the pocket that is so fundamental to the Badloves sound?**

When I joined, Michael told me they were getting the original bass player, Irish, back into the band. Immediately from the first rehearsal, we had a beautiful rhythmic relationship. Our feels really match together. So every time we play we share these cheeky grins. I really love playing with him; it's a magical thing.

**What advice would you give to aspiring younger players who wanted to make a living from being a professional drummer, be it here in Australia, or maybe the USA or Europe?**

That's a great question. I have an opinion on this: a lot of times, what I see is a lot of 'chopping out' on social media. I don't think that helps get gigs. I do these "soundcheck noodle" videos on YouTube because it's a great way to kill the "hurry up and wait" time.



Photo by Denise Torrance

Full band recording together. Adam Rigley, Jeff Consi, Micheal Spiby, and Stephen O'Prey.



Leo Sayer & Jeff Consi 2013

Jeff Consi & Nuno Bettencourt Tokyo 1999

They're always grooves and usually 30 to 60 seconds long. I figure you can tell after 30 seconds whether someone can keep time or not. They've actually helped get gigs.

I find that a lot of younger players are obsessed with chops. We all go through it. In my 30s, I chilled out a bit more. In my 40s, it was time to calm down. I started doing wedding gigs to force myself to play in time at a low volume, and that's not easy, to develop your touch. I developed this all late.

**Like playing low volume backbeat rim shots...**

Exactly, I was just doing it this week: a blues gig in a small place. It's hard to make something at low volume have intensity. Your Gadd, Vinnies, Keltners - all these guys can do that. I've really forced myself these last few years to play at whisper dynamics. If you wanna get ahead of the game, I suggest having straight grooves that feel good and keep good time. That's the job. It's not too much to digest, you know.

Having big ears is important: the ability to listen to the conversation going on on-stage. Not just drummers. I've seen guitar players, when the band is just simmering, and the guitar player is railroading over the top of everything. Learn to mix yourself. There's no right or wrong, but there is a way to have a musical conversation. To make fine music, to me, you need to listen to the conversation. I thrive on it.

At the end of the gig, when that conversation has gone on, you feel like you accomplished something. I get a great feeling from that, listening to what's happening and reacting in real-time.

**And looking after your ears is important too...**

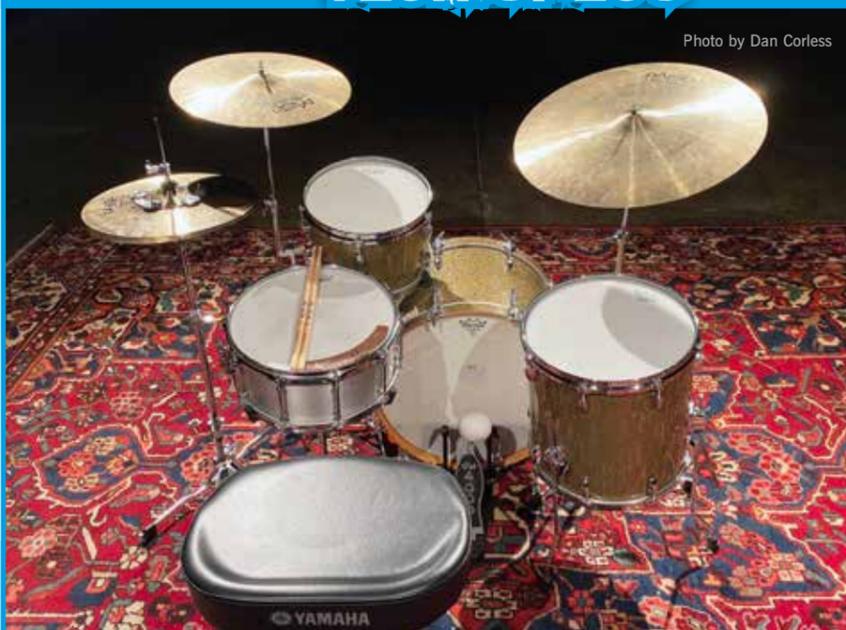
I really want to convey this. I have hearing issues from years of not wearing protection. I have tinnitus. The constant ringing is not fun. And, to anyone who is reading this, I'd say you should get your ears tested at least every two years.

When you get past 30 or 40 it starts to kick in. I'm not one of these guys who doesn't listen to music outside the gig. I listen all the time when I'm not playing, and it's not as enjoyable. It is so important to look after your ears.

JEFF CONSI

# TECH SPECS

Photo by Dan Corless



**1958 GRETSCH BROADKASTER DRUMS:**

- 4x14" Max Roach Progressive Snare (not pictured)
- 8x12" Rack Tom
- 14x14" Floor Tom
- 14x20" Bass Drum

**SNARE DRUMS:**

- 6.5x14" Rukus Drums USA Aluminum (pictured)
- 5x14" 1970's Ludwig Acrolite

**AROUND TOWN KIT:**

- Gretsch Catalina Club 20/12/14 in Satin Walnut Glaze

**DRUM WORKSHOP HARDWARE:**

- DW 6000 Ultralight Series Hardware Pack
- DW 4000 Bass Drum Pedal
- Remo Quick Lock Hi-Hat Clutch
- Remo Quicktech Drum Key

**PAISTE CYMBALS:**

- 15" Paiste Masters Dark Hi-Hats
- 17" Paiste Masters Dark Crash
- 22" Paiste Masters Thin Crash/Ride

**REMO DRUMHEADS:**

- 20" Ambassador Coated (Bass Drum)
- 14" Ambassador Coated (Snare Drum)
- 12" Ambassador Vintage Coated (Rack Tom)
- 14" Ambassador Vintage Coated (Floor Tom)
- 20" External Sub Muff'1 Bass Drum System

**VIC FIRTH STICKS:**

- American Classic Extreme 5A
- Vic Firth Jazz Wire Brushes
- VicKick Fleece-Covered Felt Beater VKB3

**HEARING PROTECTION:**

- Vic Firth Ear Plugs (Live)
- Vic Firth Isolation Headphones (Studio)
- Ultimate Ears UE7 Custom In-ear Monitors
- KZ ZSX In-ear Monitors



Artist set-ups may change depending on the playing situation

## NOTABLE RECORDINGS

