

Hudson Music

Celebrating A Decade At The Top Of The Drum Instructional Market

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DRUM BUSINESS

by Mike Haid

When Drummers Collective proprietors Paul Siegel and Rob Wallis began videotaping master classes with high-profile drummers at their New York City music school in 1982, they had no idea that this bold move into the modern age of VHS tape recording would spiral into an internationally successful multimedia business, establishing them as the pre-eminent drum-video gurus of the industry. One could argue that this dynamic duo of drumming education is just as responsible for the advancement of the art of drumming as many of the innovative players they've painstakingly archived over their nearly thirty-year partnership.

In 2000, *Modern Drummer* magazine honored Siegel and Wallis with an Editors' Achievement Award, "in recognition of outstanding contribution to the drum/percussion community." In 2001, the Percussive Arts Society presented them with the President's Achievement Award. In 2009, they celebrated ten years at the helm of their most recent successful venture, the award-winning drum instructional multimedia company Hudson Music.

AN IDEA TAKES SHAPE

Siegel and Wallis were students at a small underground music school in Manhattan called Drummers Collective when they sat down for lunch one day and discussed the possibilities of buying the school, which was coming up for sale by founder Rick Kravitz. They had known each other maybe a total of three hours prior to the now-historic meeting. Pulling their resources together, they purchased Drummers Collective in 1980. Wallis and Siegel, along with John Castellano, still own the Collective, which has grown into a world-renowned and accredited music school.

When the pair began filming master classes at the Collective in the early '80s, VCRs had barely begun to surface on the market; neither Siegel nor Wallis owned one. They borrowed some recording equipment and shot their first video with drumming icon Bernard Purdie. Other early high-profile videos from the Collective include ones with guitarist John Scofield and with drumming greats such as Ed Thigpen, Lenny White, and Yogi Horton. "Everything Paul and I have done has been by many years of just putting one foot in front of the other and trying not to fall into every hole imaginable," Wallis says.

Siegel and Wallis credit former late-night TV drumming hero/educator Ed Shaughnessy from the *Tonight Show* band, who advertised his clinic videos in *Modern Drummer*, for giving them the idea to try marketing the videos to the public. "The concept was to record the icons of the industry that would be influential for many years," Siegel says, "and produce a video to sell to those who were not able to see this level of player on such an up-close and personal level."

Wallis recalls, "We put a classified ad in the back of *Modern Drummer* for the first videos,



Hudson's Rob Wallis and Paul Siegel have collaborated with many of the greatest drummers of our time. Clockwise from top left: Steve Gadd, Neil Peart, Gregg Bissonette, Jason Bittner.



HudsonMusic.com features podcasts, interviews, DVD previews, and educational material.

which were \$79.95. A few days after the magazine came out, several checks arrived in the mail. At that point, we thought this could actually be the start of a business." After stalking drum legend Steve Gadd for several weeks, Siegel and Wallis were able to get him into the studio to film the *Up Close* video, which helped launch the DCI video business in 1983. "As we began to roll the cameras," Siegel remembers, "Steve said to Rob, 'Come and sit down next to me; I want this to be a conversation between us.'" This is how the interview format began for Siegel and Wallis.

Another important artist that Siegel and Wallis were able to document on video, helping to strengthen their business and reputation, was the great electric bassist Jaco Pastorius. Soon the DCI video company began to take on a life of its own. Many high-profile players, including Chick Corea's Elektric Band, did videos for DCI. As the company began building a strong catalog, the home video market was growing. DCI then began working with *Modern Drummer* in filming the magazine's highly successful festivals and partnered with Cathy Rich and Steve Arnold to shoot several Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship concerts.

"Our process refined itself over the years," Siegel says. "During the time when we built a large catalog of videos for DCI, we also started the Manhattan Music publishing company and began releasing books as well, beginning with the now-classic Frankie Malabe instructional package *Afro-Cuban Rhythms For Drumset*.

A PERIOD OF GROWTH

DCI began gaining international momentum in the instructional video market in the mid-'80s, with the help of European distribution from Ron Fry, head of International Music Publications, the European distributor for the music branch of Warner Bros. Publications. By 1992, DCI was growing rapidly. CPP/Belwin president Sandy Feldstein, who was a good friend and advisor to Siegel and Wallis, was distributing DCI products and Manhattan Music books with CPP/Belwin.

"Sandy made the proposal for us to sell DCI to CPP/Belwin, which we did," Siegel recalls. "Then CPP was bought by Warner Bros. Publications. We established employment contracts with them for five years and continued to produce a lot more material. We released a lot of beginner products that Sandy had encouraged us to produce, which became very effective, as well as producing many additional artists. When our contract was up, we started Hudson Music in 1998. Our strategy for Hudson remained similar, but with further production developments than the DCI format."

THE RISE OF DVD

Hudson Music staged its first instructional video production in 1999. The biggest development in the new business was the advent of DVD. With VHS, there was a time limit to each video before the tape ran out, and ninety minutes was considered a lengthy running time in those days. With DVD, the options and limits expanded significantly.

"I believe the first Steve Smith video was the first thing we released exclusively on DVD," Siegel says. "Now, with DVD technology, we have the option of presenting three hours of footage or releasing a double disc of material in

one package that can offer up to seven hours of information. The DVD format opened a lot of opportunities for us, including an instant-access format that allows viewers to go immediately where they want. Because the DVD format is menu driven, it becomes much more effective as an educational tool. Overall, it's been a positive step forward.

"Joe Bergamini, who came on board a couple of years ago as senior drum editor, is a very talented book editor, teacher, and player," Siegel adds. "He's been extremely helpful in organizing each project and figuring out the best way to plan out the project to have transcriptions set up as PDF files and e-books, which adds a whole new element of educational value to the video production. Not only has the product evolved, but the market has also evolved to the point of more instructional informational content.

"Hudson is much more focused on instructional content than simply performance footage. Great examples are the Tommy Igoe releases and the Jojo Mayer video, *Secret Weapons For The Modern Drummer*. We've also got a fantastic new video with Stanton Moore focusing on developing R&B grooves.

"Our approach and strategy have evolved. It's all about the artist, the subject matter, and developing a plan to get the most value and information from a given artist, depending on their personality. Artists like Peter Erskine, Dave Weckl, and Steve Smith, who are so experienced at clinics and master classes and can verbalize and express the creative process eloquently, is one situation. The other is artists who haven't done many clinics or aren't as verbal. In those instances, an interview format can work much better. Most recently we did a video with Aaron Spears that has two facets. One is a small master class with students asking questions; the other involves Jojo Mayer interviewing Aaron. In this case, both formats worked great."

The lengthy DVD production time includes several months of preproduction, a few days in the studio, and then several months of postproduction. "You need serious energy and a strong work ethic to sustain the long days of filming with heavy concentration on dialogue and performance," Wallis says. "It gets intense for the artist when the cameras are rolling and you've got ten to twelve people in the room, with cameramen and audio technicians and sometimes a small live audience. We spend hours upon hours before each project discussing the content with the artist to focus on and capture the essence of what this artist brings to the art of drumming.

"From the initial discussions with the artist to the time the product actually hits the store shelf is close to a year," Wallis continues. "It's always a great experience, but never an easy one. After four days in the studio with Neil Peart, finishing up the production of *Anatomy Of A Drum Solo*, as Neil was pulling away on his motorcycle, he said, 'This was probably the hardest I've ever worked on any project in my entire life.'"

THE ARTISTS

"Deciding which artist to work with is a gut feeling about whose impact on the drumming community will be felt for years to come," Siegel

says. "When we look at guys like Keith Carlock or Aaron Spears, these are drummers who have found their own unique voice on the instrument, and their contributions will be felt over the long term. It's never based on who has the best technique, but on who is the most complete musician. I feel we've helped spread the teaching philosophies of many great musicians, and in doing that we've helped these musicians in organizing their thoughts and maximizing the spread of information. Our hope is that in doing this, the art of drumming has been elevated.

"To some extent," Siegel goes on, "I feel a responsibility on our part to communicate certain basic truths that are important to us. For instance, the truth that playing the drums needs to be a musical exercise. The drumset is a musical instrument and needs to be approached that way. Too many young drummers look at drumming as more of an athletic exercise, or at creating things on the drums that are not necessarily musical. In recent years I've felt more responsibility to work against that, to present the drumset in a fashion that is musical, and to feature the artists that show a true commitment to the music. Steve Gadd once said, 'It's the music that makes me want to play the drums; it's not the drums that make me want to play music.' It comes down to what the music requires.

"My first inspiration on the drumset was Al Jackson Jr., who still epitomizes simplicity and has amazing nuance to his playing. He orchestrated his drum parts in a way that stands in a class by itself. Jim Keltner, who's another favorite of mine, had a great description of Al, saying, 'Al Jackson's playing was sublime.' Ultimately, it's all about the music." Wallis adds, "Our focus, when we start a new project, is: How is this going to help someone become a better musician?"

EDUCATION OVER ENTERTAINMENT

When it comes to Hudson's most popular videos, Wallis says, "The bestsellers include the Neil Peart releases because he and his band, Rush, have such a huge fan base. Another big seller is Jojo Mayer's *Secret Weapons For The Modern Drummer*. Jojo really put an enormous amount of work and research into unlocking the mysteries of hand technique and the various applications involved in developing a strong vocabulary with these techniques. Tommy Igoe's *Groove Essentials* packages are also big sellers. We get a tremendous amount of email from teachers and students regarding the benefits they have obtained from that material.

"Sales can be driven either by a drummer's fan base or by teachers and students seeking valuable learning tools," Wallis continues. "What we've discovered over the past couple of years is that people really want educational material. We used to try to mix up the content with entertainment, performance, and education. What we focus on now is the educational value that will sustain the products' longevity. Years ago, before the Internet, the performance factor was more valuable. But now people can watch performances on YouTube all day long."

Wallis adds that there are also projects that are not sales driven but that have great merit to the drumming community. "We did a project, *The Art*

Of *Playing With Brushes*, where we featured seven different drummers playing along to the same pre-recorded music tracks. We knew this release wouldn't produce big numbers, but we felt it was an important part of drumming to archive and preserve for the community.

"And recording the drum festivals is a huge project for us. The production aspect is monumental. It usually takes about five months to edit and complete the festival productions. We have a core crew that we've been working with for many years who are key members of our production staff. They make our jobs much easier with the care and dedication that they put into each project. It's a very valuable piece of the puzzle that we do not take for granted.

"I really hope viewers take advantage of the educational aspects of the recent *Modern Drummer Festival 2008* package, with the artist-on-artist interviews and the downloadable PDF files that are transcriptions from the video performances. We also made a huge and highly successful leap in technology at the 2008 MD Festival, streaming live video clips to the Internet from our Web site to help promote the event on an immediate international level. We had a huge amount of traffic to the Web site with a staggering number of viewers."

HUDSON IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In 2007, the company created the Hudson Limited label as a subsidiary to Hudson Music, with the purpose of bringing new ideas to young musicians and a fresh approach to contemporary music education by distributing a variety of high-quality, independently produced DVDs and multi-media featuring international players and educators. In 2009 Hudson launched Hudson Digital, a site where video lessons, audio, and play-along tracks can be purchased and downloaded from the extensive catalog.

When asked about the challenge of Hudson video content being pirated online, Siegel says, "Our job is to maximize our opportunity on the positive side. We work hard to minimize the negatives. We hire a company that searches the Internet and removes unauthorized content. We do our best to use the Internet to help develop our business in a way that's commercially viable for us. In terms of audio content, we're working with iTunes to distribute our products, which will be followed by offering our videos on iTunes as well. Our feeling is that if we continue to produce products that we consider valuable to the consumer and offer them at a fair price, whether it's a lesson-by-lesson download or an entire DVD that they can conveniently buy online, enough people will understand that it's better to help companies like us stay in business rather than to steal the material and trade it, which ultimately makes it impossible for artists to do projects like this and also makes it impossible for our company to stay in business.

"We are embracing the digital download technology and have recently become familiar with a video platform that works beautifully for offering instructional video content via the Internet," Siegel adds. "We're in the beginning stages to adopt that technology and use it in a positive way for our company, the drum community, and the artist. It's more and more about content and less about format. Convenience becomes more important, and younger people are becoming less attached to the physical medium. I believe that once we can establish the correct model for digital downloads, we will be successful with it. It's a work in progress and will ultimately become an important part of our business."

Wallis adds, "Hudson Digital is really a test case to see what type of support and interest people have in the content we're offering online. We're trying play-along tracks with charts, and a few videos. We also have to be aware of not try-

ing to compete with the drum shops and dealers who are selling our DVDs. As long as the dealers are committed to stocking Hudson products, we would never sell our products as mail order at a cheaper price. We will never compete with our dealers; we'll only augment the dealer by offering clips that will also serve as great promotions for the full-length products. The Internet is an amazing promotional tool, if used the right way. It has greatly sped up the communication process with our audience and our customers."

The Hudson Web site features tons of video previews, free play-alongs, podcasts, interviews, and such educational programs as the Teacher Integration Program (TIP), which is designed to help drum and percussion educators integrate new media and technology into their everyday teaching routines and repertoire. TIP is guided by a hand-selected advisory board, which includes Carl Allen, Skip Hadden, Ed Soph, Steve Houghton, and Rod Morgenstein, who were chosen for their prominence in the education world as well as their dedication to exploring new teaching methods. The entire Hudson catalog is available for purchase from the Web site as well.

Siegel concludes, "The most rewarding aspect for Rob and me has always been the opportunity to work with so many extraordinary people. The artists that we have been privileged to work with over the years have been inspiring to us and are the reason we continue to do this. They've all been such a pleasure to work with. That goes for the entire drumming community as well. We're very lucky to work in a community of such extraordinary people and to have the gratification of looking back at the many projects that Rob and I have been able to bring to the drumming community and see the impact they've made."

For more information, go to www.hudsonmusic.com.

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