

Matt Cameron: The Pulse of Seattle

WHEN LEGENDARY GRUNGE-ERA GROUP SOUNDGARDEN disbanded in 1997, drummer Matt Cameron was out of a job—for about five minutes. Matt's own band, Wellwater Conspiracy (with Monster Magnet guitarist John McBain and keyboardist Glen Slater from the Walkabouts), recently released its fourth album. He's appeared on solo records from such rock icons as Rush bassist Geddy Lee and Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi. And, most visibly, Matt has served as Pearl Jam's drummer since 1998.

It came as no surprise that Pearl Jam called Cameron after previous drummer Jack Irons bowed out due to health problems. "I've known those guys for a long time," says Matt. "When Stone and Jeff and Mike first started writing all the material that became *Ten*, we did some demos at Reciprocal Studios—you know, 'grunge ground zero.' And I'd see them around at parties and stuff."

But despite Matt's familiarity with the band, becoming part of Pearl Jam required some adjustment. "I listen to some of the old live tapes I recorded with them," says Cameron, "and the tempos are really fast. I was playing a little too full-bore. In Soundgarden, [vocalist] Chris Cornell and I would accent off each other a lot. But Pearl Jam is more straight-ahead rock music, and the vocal needs to be the main element. I definitely adjusted what I was doing, and tried not to play over the vocal as much as I used to."

Cameron cites some of the same musical heroes as many hard-rock drummers—plus several that

might surprise a few fans. "I always loved the Zeppelin/Black Sabbath/Deep Purple triumvirate of bands," he says. "But when I was a teenager, I got turned onto progressive rock and jazz by some of my older friends that I was in bands with. You know what I just downloaded on my iPod? Return to Forever's *Romantic Warrior!* That record blew my mind when I was 17. I loved drummers like Narada Michael Walden and Billy Cobham. That style of drumming was the most interesting I'd ever heard."

Some of these influences weren't exactly fashionable during the glory days of grunge, but Cameron insists he never downplayed his prog influences. "I wasn't really trying to 'conceal' anything. Soundgarden was the type of band where we all played full-blast all the time, so I'd try to pull off some stuff in that context. But I was never really that good. I sure wasn't as good as Lenny White! As far as being in bands, it was always rock music first. Soundgarden was just a bitchin' band—just a kick-ass live rock band."

Cameron couldn't be happier about endorsing Yamaha drums. "I was crawling on my knees, begging!" he laughs. "And they finally accepted, after all the roses and candy. I'm playing an Absolute Birch kit with a Vintage Natural finish, which is just a real light stain. The shells are actually aging really nicely. I've taken it on one big world/US tour this last year, and everything held up great. The birch has a different attack note, a little more high-end than the maple, but the mid-and-low range are just the same. I take my hat off to Yamaha for using a lot of different types of wood: bamboo, oak, and some other really cool woods. I think everyone's used to hearing the sound of maple over the years, but it's nice to have different options."

In addition to his default kit, which includes a 24" x 16" kick drum, 12" x 8" and 13" x 9" rack toms, and a 16" x 16" floor tom, Cameron uses a 14" x 6" Yamaha brass snare, which he describes as "extremely loud and wide-open." And when he recently toured the Yamaha factory in Japan, he created his own snare. "That's something they let endorsees do," he explains. "It was a total blast! It's a 14 x 6-1/2" maple eight-ply, and it came out really great. I use that all the time."

Helping to make his own Yamaha snare was the icing on the cake for Cameron. "You go through all the steps of putting together all the plies with this big gluing machine—it's like this big microwave that cooks it," he recalls. "A lot of the workers at that factory have been doing the same jobs for years, and they're complete pros, man. I got to hammer a couple things here and glue a couple things there, stain it a little bit, pick out all the hardware. It was pretty cool."



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