

Chad Szeliga: Breaking Into Breaking Benjamin

DRUMMER CHAD SZELIGA'S ROOTS LIE IN JAZZ AND FUNK, YET HE LOVES HIS NEW gig with the riff-heavy rock band, Breaking Benjamin. "Some jazz players see rock as some downbeat, devil-worshipping thing," he says. "But playing rock has brought more attitude and confidence to my drumming."

Breaking Benjamin broke out of their native Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, with their 2002 Hollywood Records release *Saturate*, and perfected their blend of monster riffs and winning hooks on last year's *We Are Not Alone*. But earlier this year, they parted ways with original drummer Jeremy Hummel and recruited Cleveland-based Szeliga, whom they'd encountered on the road playing with his former band *Switched*.



Szeliga is a dedicated craftsman. When *Switched* shut down, he took a gig playing Top 40 at clubs on Lake Erie. "Playing eight hours a day really got my chops up," he says. "And I still try to practice five hours a day. I work on rudiments, playing time, trading fours and eights with myself. Some days I take off the toms and try to make everything sound great just using rides and hi-hat."

Yet Szeliga isn't a busy, hyper-technical player. He says, "One of the things that makes a mature drummer is knowing when it's time to do your tricks and when it's time to just play. When a rock guitarist is playing a heavy riff, you should know not to do a Dennis Chambers or Carter Beauford lick. You've got to keep it straight in the pocket and let the guitar player breathe."

When he gigs with Breaking Benjamin, Chad replicates the

recordings as closely as possible. "I play almost exactly like Jeremy did on the record, aside from a few tiny things that most people probably never notice. What I add is more the attitude and stage presence. I look out at the crowd and try not to look boring when I play. I try to add fire to the band and make them step it up a notch. Sometimes that means throwing all the technique I practiced out the window. For example, I was trained to play without lifting my shoulders or elbows, just snapping my wrists. But in rock, you've got to put on a show. You've got to look like you're really hitting those drums."

Whether on the road with Breaking Benjamin or honing his skills at home, Szeliga uses Yamaha drums. "On tour I've been playing a blue sparkle Maple Absolute kit with Nouveau lugs. It's my first maple kit. I also have a set of Birch Absolutes. I've always been a fan of the warmer tone of birch, which is great for recording, and I also like beech. But to be honest, every drum Yamaha makes sounds amazing. You can't go wrong."

Chad's maple kit includes a 22"x18" kick, three rack toms sized 12"x8", 10"x7.5", and 8"x7", a 14"x6" floor tom, and a 16" suspended floor tom. His snare is a Steve Jordan signature model. "It has a maple shell, but it's a little thinner than the others," he explains. "It's a 13"x6.5", so it's not as ballsy as a regular 14" snare. But it really cuts, and it's more versatile for me. I can bring down the dynamics and still be heard."

While Chad has yet to make a full-length album with Breaking Benjamin, he ventured into the studio with the group to cut an amped-up alternate version of the song "Rain," a track that first appeared on *We Are Not Alone*. On that session, he used a Yamaha SKRM-100 Subkick. "It's an awesome invention for drummers. You just place it next to your kick drum, and it captures all the low, hit-you-in-the-chest frequencies. It sounds incredible live, too. It gets lower frequencies out to the front of house than you could ordinarily get from a microphone."

Szeliga has advice for drummers who find themselves suddenly inducted into a successful group: "Being a hired gun can be hard. If you don't do your job, you will be replaced instantly. But if you work hard and show the band you're on your game, it's a great opportunity. But you have to be hungry. You have to practice and show that you're dedicated. Go to the extreme. If the drummer before you played perfectly but had bad stage presence, then play even more perfectly and have great stage presence. Don't just do your job and get paid. If you love music, do it 101%."

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