



# Matt Flynn Confidence Man

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Drummer Matt Flynn is backstage at *The Tonight Show* with his Maroon 5 bandmates, preparing to perform a song from their second album, *It Won't Be Soon Before Long*, which is scheduled for release the following day.

Exciting as this may be, it's nothing new for Flynn, who joined Maroon 5 three years ago after touring with the B-52's and Gavin DeGraw, among others. "I've played this show lots of times," he shrugs. "But it's always fun!"


Flynn's professional ascent reads like a rock-and-roll fairy tale. "I was playing at a club called Arlene's Grocery in New York with a million different bands," he says. "The soundman was also the B-52's guitar tech, and he asked if I'd ever consider being a drum tech. I said, 'Well I'd rather be a *drummer*,' but I agreed to do it for a weekend here and there. So I was teching for Zachary Alford and Sterling Campbell, but Sterling went out with David Bowie, and Zach went out with someone else huge, and the band needed someone. I mentioned that I played, and they let me start playing with them. So I worked my way up through the crew!"

Matt is grateful for the break, but remains relatively unfazed by his success. "All those years I was playing in the clubs in New York, I used to wonder what the difference was between a professional and someone who was really clawing away," he notes. "And the truth is, there aren't that many differences! What I realized from being the tech and watching Sterling and Zach was that I could totally do it! That gave me more confidence."

In fact, Flynn says, confidence is often the biggest distinction between striving and successful musicians: "When you play gigs like *The Tonight Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, or the *GRAMMYS*®, that's where the professional part comes in. Those gigs can be really nerve-racking, and the only way to get through it is with experience. I actually left the B-52's to play with Gavin DeGraw for far less money, because I knew I had to play with other people. You have to play yourself into the spot you want to be. One day, by nature of being out in front of people and getting your name out there, your gig will come up. That won't happen if you're sitting at home being too cool to play with people!"

Though Flynn has toured and recorded for years, the new Maroon 5 release was his first experience tracking a big-budget studio album. "I learned a lot," he reflects. "I knew we had to make a pop record that was very accessible. But I have demos of us playing everything live as a band, without all the doodads and production techniques, and I actually prefer it that way. Sometimes your mistakes are the best part of the record. I definitely like things more raw. Hopefully down the road we'll be able to make a record that way."

Over the years, Flynn has also learned some essential lessons about keeping it



simple onstage. "The longer I've played drums, the more I realize it's important to clean up your lines," he says. "Some of the little syncopated stuff just doesn't translate live, especially at larger venues. You can't really hear it. You have to hit the kick and the snare hard every time. In a club you can be a little busier, but in a huge place, it just gets lost. It's better just to kick a four-on-the-floor groove."

To provide that punch, Flynn relies on Yamaha drums. "Every drum I've ever gotten from Yamaha has sounded great," he says. "I have a Yamaha Absolute Maple kit with a mirror wrap. It looks awesome! We were worried the finish would change the sound, but it doesn't—it sounds fantastic. We're very, very happy. I was going to get a birch kit so it would be more like rockets when you hit the drum, but I wanted the mirror finish, which works better on the maple. I love the liveness of the birch, though, and I'll definitely be using a set of those at some point. Both birch and maple sound great for what I'm doing."

Simplicity and confidence remain at the center of Flynn's approach to drums. "When I was a kid," he recalls, "I'd listen obsessively to bands like Rush, and it was all about those crazy drum fills. But when you're working, you can't do that too much. Your job is to make sure the song sounds good. My very first drum teacher played me a simple 2-and-4 beat and said, 'That's a groove you will never master.' And he was right! That's the whole thing. Knowing how to work