

MIKE BORDIN:

Metalhead with an open Mind

Mike plays a Yamaha Birch Custom Absolute kit, with a Roy Haynes Signature Snare Drum.

He plays them very loud.

IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT BORDIN, WHO has pounded skins for ironic metallists Faith No More, classic metallist Ozzy Osbourne, and millennial metallists Korn, draws from many sources. “The drummers I worship as gods among man are guys like Art Blakey, Tony Williams, John Bonham. But I don’t try to be some of the drummers I look up to. I just take them with me wherever I go.”

With Faith No More, Bordin pioneered an innovative style that emphasized full-kit, tom-driven grooves over tight kick-and-snare patterns — an approach, he says, that was a direct outgrowth of his studies with West African master drummer C.K. Lapzekpo. Many other heavy drummers gravitated toward a similar style during the '90s. Does Bordin ever feel they jumped on his bandwagon? “It’s not my bandwagon,” he shrugs. “I jump on somebody else’s bandwagon, and somebody else jumps on mine. It’s a continuum.”

Bordin, 37, says he didn’t consciously modify his style when he started performing with Ozzy in the wake of Faith No More’s 1996 dissolution, but that some mental adjustments were required: “Faith No More had heavy songs, but we weren’t comfortable being a straight metal band. But playing ‘Goodbye to Romance’ and ‘Crazy Train’ with Ozzy had none of that irony. It’s just straight-up, white-boy metal. My challenges were to play it faithfully and make it interesting. You’ve got to be open to doing whatever you have to do to make the music work, rather than saying, ‘I’m going to do it my way or else.’”

Does Korn, with whom Bordin has toured for the last year, triangulate between those two attitudes? “To some extent, yes,” he says. “When I joined Korn, I definitely perceived common starting points, so I felt pretty comfortable. But Korn takes everything to greater extremes. It’s like the difference between a Model A Ford and a Porsche Turbo Carrera. It was an exciting time to play with those guys, because they were a little vibed about playing in front of 70,000 people each gig opening for Metallica. But they stepped up to the plate, and they were amazing.”

One unvarying aspect of Bordin’s style is his unconventional setup. “I’m left-handed,” he says,

“but I use my right foot and play with the hi-hat on the left like a right-handed person would. But my ride and China cymbals are also on the left, while the toms are arranged right-handed.”

Another constant is Yamaha drums. “I’m a good Yamaha boy,” grins Bordin. “I’ve always played them. All Yamaha drums are totally hand-made. Most other companies start with pre-made shells and Taiwanese hardware, but Yamaha makes the shells and hardware themselves. It’s quality stuff.”

Live, Bordin usually uses a large Birch Custom Absolute kit, but he strips things down in the studio. “I usually use just one 24” kick, one 15” rack tom, and a 16” as a second rack or floor tom,”

Asked about his influences,

drummer Mike Bordin mimics

Marlon Brando in *The Wild Ones*: “Influences?”

Whaddaya got?”

he says. “Yamaha has also been making me other drums I sometimes use, like a 22” kick and 12” and 13” toms. And I love their 13” x 7” Akira Jimbo snare, a big beech drum with an open sound. It’s as loud as a handgun, even though I don’t think it was originally designed to be a big rock snare.”

Bordin’s next project is a new group with former Alice in Chains guitarist Jerry Cantrell and Ozzy/Suicidal Tendencies bassist Robert Trujillo. The trio has already tracked 25 of Cantrell’s songs. “It’s like hillbilly soul,” says Bordin. “It’s heavy rock, but it’s also got country ballads and waltzes. It’s a very bold statement that’s totally different from anything I’ve ever done.”

And what does Bordin make of the fact that his nickname of 20-plus years, “Puffy,” has been appropriated by a certain high-profile hip-hop entrepreneur? “I just hope he manages to do more with the name than I did,” he laughs. “Ozzy really hated that name anyway. He said, ‘If I hear anyone call you Puffy, I’ll hit them!’”