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## Johnny Rabb Interview

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Welcome to our monthly 'in the hotseat' feature where we get drummers to interview other drummers, chew the cud and generally talk about drums and the music industry in general. This month: the amazing Johnny Rabb is interrogated by Craig Blundell. Johnny and Craig spent some time together at the NAMM Show in LA this January at the launch of the new flagship TD-30KV V-Drums: Craig had the questions and Johnny had the answers - this is what came out...

By Craig Blundell



**Craig Blundell:** Hey Johnny, after spending some time with you at NAMM Show and watching you work, I'm completely floored by your technique. What work do you put in to your own playing on a day to day basis?

**Johnny Rabb:** First of all, THANKS CRAIG! I think yours is absolutely on fire. Regarding practice, I did work a lot while in college at Berklee on a pad. I really just tried to see how far I could take my hands. Nowadays, I try to practice as much as possible on singles, doubles and standard rudiments. Lately, I have been working on my weaker side. This is a never- ending and lifelong approach to getting better. I still believe that we can do whatever we set our mind to and should always remember that starting out slowly and precisely will eventually get our technique at the level we desire.

**CB:** Do you ever hit a wall with your own playing?

**JR:** I feel like I hit a wall almost daily. The biggest thing for me is to just try to work on something new when I sit down at the drums. For example, I have been going back to basic independence under a standard jazz ride pattern. I have totally been enjoying getting all permutations to become second nature again. Then, I try to make one exercise become musical by voicing it between kick, snare and toms. Since my focus is on a lot of groove and electronic music, I find going back to my jazz studies always refreshing. Don't be afraid to oil up the rusty parts of your playing. Whenever I go back to jazz independence, I am always amazed at how great it feels when all the parts lock in. It reminds me not to be so hard on myself and that there will always be room for improvement.

**CB:** You were one of the first guys I saw on a Roland set up that blew me away, how did this relationship with Roland start?

**JR:** My relationship began with Steve Fisher. I was working on my book Jungle/Drum 'n' Bass for the Acoustic Drum Set and I was using a HandSonic and SPD-20 for some examples. I met Steve through a colleague and let him know that I was working on the book. From there, he asked me to do the first ever V-Drums Expo in Pasadena, CA. I did a clinic utilising both acoustic drums and the HandSonic. It was there that I also met my very good friend Mike Snyder who has been an incredible inspiration for V-Drums and drumming in general. From there, the relationship grew from a few clinics per year to having the privilege of performing internationally as a V-Drum artist. Steve gave me a chance to share my drumming with the world by having me joining the Roland US Drum Team. Both Mike and Steve helped me learn what I know about V-Drums. Since that introduction, the relationship has grown in to what it is today. I am very honoured to work with Roland on this level.

**CB:** What are your three most memorable moments in your career so far?

**JR:** That is a tough question to answer, but I will do my best. I think off of the top of my head it would be performing festivals such as Montreal Drum Fest, MEINL festival in Germany and V-Drums in Japan. The other would be playing with Maynard Ferguson on the road for a small tour. Lastly, I have enjoyed performing original electronic music with Clay Parnell in our band BioDiesel.

**CB:** What are you currently working on?

**JR:** I am still finishing the editing for my Freehand Technique DVD. We are also writing a lot for BioDiesel. Roland is keeping me busy with some workshops this year and I'm also putting the final touches on [www.DRUM365.com](http://www.DRUM365.com) which is our online lesson website. There are some other random projects that I am working on, but these are the main focus so far this year.

**CB:** What do you do to relax?

**JR:** I am very happily married and have a wonderful daughter that I enjoy spending my time with. My main hobby is fishing, so I do that whenever I can. This year, I am trying to get back to playing soccer, but so far there are no leagues that like my travel schedule. Listening to music and practicing the drums is also relaxing to me. I love sleeping and coffee too.

**CB:** What are the three "must haves" on your iPod?

**JR:**

1. 1: At least some sort of House mix
2. 2: 80s Pop
3. 3: Drum n Bass mix

Sorry that I cannot get down to the artists. There are way too many!

**CB:** What are your future plans and goals?

**JR:** I would like to get [www.DRUM365.com](http://www.DRUM365.com) to where it has endless content for subscribers. BioDiesel is also a group that I want to see take it to the next level and be my main musical focus. There are a series of educational DVDs and books that I would like to complete. Getting my stick company back on the map and improving as a musician are also huge goals for me.

**CB:** I know you have created some amazing kits for Roland over the years, do you always have something in mind when it comes down to starting to make a new kit or is it a case of see what happens?

**JR:** I usually start to play a preset kit and then change instruments and edit from there. Of course there are times when I am thinking about making a kit from scratch. When I am making an electronic kit, such as DNB, house, or techno, I will search for the right bass drum and snare/clap sound to start with. Then, I will tune, effect, and make it my own. Many times, there are happy accidents where I will be working on one idea that turns into a completely different kit. In this case, I will copy the initial kit and move on with where

I left off. The idea of copying allows me to go back and finish the first initial thought if I get lost in a new direction. It is really an endless process.

**CB:** Describe the thoughts and the process that put Biodiesel together?

**JR:** BioDiesel is me and Clay Parnell. We both write and produce electronic music and use Ableton Live for our performances. When we perform shows, my setup is an acoustic kit with an SPD-SX controlling Ableton and another SPD-SX for individual drum sounds. We are a duo that stays busy touring the US and abroad playing real-time electronic music. The first show we did was in New York City, as an improvisational set. We still do a lot of improvisation, but we have written some very complex arrangements for our 90 minute set of music. The idea was to be a live and interactive group using live instruments to create intelligent dance music. We are now releasing a live album entitled TWO-ONE-LIVE and that can be checked out on our website - [www.biodieselband.com](http://www.biodieselband.com) To see what we are up to, please check out our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/biodieselband](http://www.facebook.com/biodieselband)

**CB:** I know you're working on your own stick-line (which is amazing by the way). How is that progressing?

**JR:** I am very happy to be able to get my stick company back up and running again. We will be offering all the original models we originally offered. The sticks are available online at [www.johnnyrabbdrumsticks.com](http://www.johnnyrabbdrumsticks.com) and ship directly to drummers. The sticks come in two different tapers (Traditional and Straightneck) and 7A, 5A, 5B, and 2B sizes. You then decide which tip suits your playing style. We have Acorn, Olive, Ball and Barrel. Finally, I am proud to offer the RhythmSaw which is online now.

**CB:** Where can people find out more about all things JR?

[www.johnnyrabb.com](http://www.johnnyrabb.com)  
[www.facebook.com/johnnyrabbdrums](http://www.facebook.com/johnnyrabbdrums)  
[www.biodieselband.com](http://www.biodieselband.com)  
[www.johnnyrabbdrumsticks.com](http://www.johnnyrabbdrumsticks.com)  
[www.DRUM365.com](http://www.DRUM365.com)

#### **Closing thoughts from Craig**

It's quite interesting over the years to watch drummers come and go and everyone's practice routines change to match various trends. The emphasis nowadays is to go for that 'harder, faster' approach which doesn't always work, but above all I get the feeling, when I watch my students, that everyone wants to run before they walk. I've been a fan on Johnny's for a long, long time now and I feel very lucky that we are friends but one thing struck me when I was watching him perform this year: here is a player that is at the very top of his game, with a perfect technique but who still wants to practice to address his weaknesses and still hits the wall. There is NO substitution for dedication and hard work and all this ability won't always land on a plate in front of you. My advice to you guys out there is to practice hard and when you think you've nailed that part, practice it harder.....

Until next month, happy drumming.