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CD audio examples performed by Rich Lackowski. Tracks 5, 17, 18, 24, 27, 33, and 36 performed by John O'Reilly Jr.

The Path

I vividly remember the first time I heard Neil Peart's monstrous fill in Rush's "Tom Sawyer." I was just 10 years old, but at that moment, something magical happened that was unlike anything I had ever experienced in my life. I felt the magic and the power of extraordinary drumming reach out through the speakers and grab a firm hold of me. Every hair on my body was standing at attention and I had chills as each successive note poured out. I internalized that musical passage in some primal kind of way; it was such an exciting and invigorating moment in my life. From that instant it was clear; I knew I had to play the drums.

Thanks to my incredibly supportive parents, I was fortunate enough to get my hands on an old 4-piece Ludwig kit that was gathering dust in the attic of one of my dad's co-workers, and hook up with one of the best teachers in town. The lessons provided an important, structured way of learning to play the drums, and I hung on to every word my teacher said, learning all I could over the many years of lessons that followed. But much of the unspoken and—maybe—the *real* learning happened when I got home, threw down those books, and tossed on the headphones to play along with my progressive rock drumming heroes.

It didn't take long for me and my close friend down the street, who was also learning to play the drums, to combine our kits to create one "monster drumset" that approached the arsenal of sounds we needed to emulate the drummers of bands we listened to. We would get together every chance we had and take turns playing along with tracks from the drumming gods. This continued for years.

One album at a time, year after year, and often by complete luck, I discovered band after band with an incredibly inspirational drummer. They belted out new and exciting grooves and solos that kept me chained to my drumset until I could at least fake my way through the more interesting parts. I remember thinking each time I made one of these musical discoveries how lucky I was to stumble onto such exciting drumming. And it made me wonder how much else was out there that I was missing.

This book structures and accelerates this process of discovering and learning from the legends of progressive rock drumming. It provides a roadmap of the progressive rock path, or style, that's labeled with vital landmarks, or drummers, along the way. I hope it allows you to spend more time listening and learning, and less time wondering where to find more insight and guidance into the progressive rock genre.

Two of the greatest gifts of our drumming community are the ever-growing pool of inspired musicians who inject new innovations into our craft, and the ongoing discovery of the legends that shaped our collective drumming history. It's impossible in the scope of just one book to cover every musician that has made an important contribution to prog rock drumming, so if you see some of your favorite drummers missing know that I have favorites missing too, and I plan to explore them in upcoming writing endeavors. But what you will find on the following pages is a vital exploration of a dozen legendary drummers analyzed in detail, complete with lessons that will teach you how to play their most defining drum grooves and solos. So, get ready to turn the page and start your journey on the beaten path!

One more thing: As you read through this book, know that it's impossible to perfectly emulate another drummer. The drummers in this book were chosen because each is a legendary artist with a unique gift. Their playing is constantly evolving, fueled by the things they've heard, the things they've seen, the things they've felt, and the experiences they've lived through. Rather than learning a few of each artist's unique licks, really try to absorb the bigger picture of what's happening. Listen to the beats in their original context. Go out and buy the songs if you don't already have them, and listen to *how* these masters play as much as to *what* they are playing. By internalizing their "thing," you will add it to *your* unique set of circumstances and use it to develop your own individual style. Then, when you play, play it honest, and make a statement by channeling all you've learned from the masters of the drums, process it through your unique set of circumstances, and play with a voice that is uniquely you.

Vinnie Colaiuta

(Frank Zappa)

Although he recorded and toured with an enormous number of artists in every genre including Jeff Beck, Chick Corea, Josh Groban, Herbie Hancock, Alan Holdsworth, Faith Hill, Megadeth, Joni Mitchell, Sting, Gino Vannelli, and literally hundreds of others, Vinnie Colaiuta is included in the pages of this progressive rock book primarily for his contributions with Frank Zappa. The collaboration between these creative giants put drummers around the globe on high alert and redefined the limits of the drums and their rhythmic possibilities.

Vinnie Colaiuta was born on February 5, 1956, in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. He played on pots and pans as a kid, then toy sets before receiving his first “real” drum kit at age 14. Colaiuta’s drumming hero was the great Tony Williams, but he also cites Buddy Rich, Billy Cobham, Elvin Jones, John Bonham, Roy Haynes, Steve Gadd, David Garibaldi, Peter Erskine, Harvey Mason, and Jack DeJohnette as major influences. Vinnie studied privately and played in school bands, summer camps, and other local bands before eventually moving to Boston where he attended the Berklee College of Music for two semesters. Colaiuta, in due course, moved to Los Angeles in January 1978 with only his drums, some clothes, and a mere \$80 in his pocket. A few months later, in April 1978, he auditioned for Frank Zappa, and on Terry Bozzio’s kit, he played double bass for the first time. During the audition, Vinnie perfectly demonstrated his sight reading skills on an insanely complex piece, improvised with Zappa in $\frac{21}{16}$ time, and performed “The Black Page, No. 1” flawlessly and completely from memory. Hundreds of other drummers lasted only 15 seconds in their auditions with Zappa, but Vinnie, after 15 minutes of intense auditioning, got the highly coveted and life-altering gig. Colaiuta earned high praise and great respect from his playing on the legendary Zappa albums *Joe’s Garage, Acts I, II, and III; Tinseltown Rebellion; and Shut Up ‘N Play Yer Guitar*. In fact, *Modern Drummer* named *Joe’s Garage* as one of the top 25 greatest drumming performances of all time and cited Vinnie Colaiuta as “the most technically advanced drummer ever.”

Colaiuta is known for playing complex polyrhythms (à la his grouping of quintuplets played over the dotted quarter note pulse in $\frac{3}{4}$ time at 3:06 into “Packard Goose”), and difficult time signatures (à la $\frac{19}{16}$ and $\frac{21}{16}$ time signatures in “Keep It Greasy”), with impeccable feel. Rick Mattingly may have best described Vinnie’s style in a 1995 *Percussive Notes* story: “Most people don’t even bother trying to describe it in technical terms. They just call it ‘Vinnie stuff’—those licks and fills that defy analysis. One can throw words like ‘polyrhythms’ and ‘multi-meters’ at it, but the mathematical approach those terms imply seems at odds with the pure feel and animal aggressiveness that permeate Vinnie Colaiuta’s drumming.” So true! An attempt at describing some other “Vinnie stuff” is over-the-top playing, a deep solid groove, impeccable sight reading, improvisational wizardry, perfect technique, dynamic playing, and the innate ability to grasp and progress insanely difficult rhythmic concepts.

Colaiuta left Zappa after two and a half years, in December 1980, in order to do more studio recording work, which, 30-plus years and thousands of album credits later, he has done quite successfully. The accolades have surrounded Colaiuta throughout his career, with no fewer than 18 *Modern Drummer* “Reader’s Poll” awards, and an induction into the magazine’s prestigious “Hall of Fame” among his public recognitions. Vinnie is truly an inspiration and well deserving of the appointment as “the greatest drummer of our time.”

“VINNIE IS THE GREATEST DRUMMER OF OUR TIME.”

—*Modern Drummer*

"Keep It Greasy"


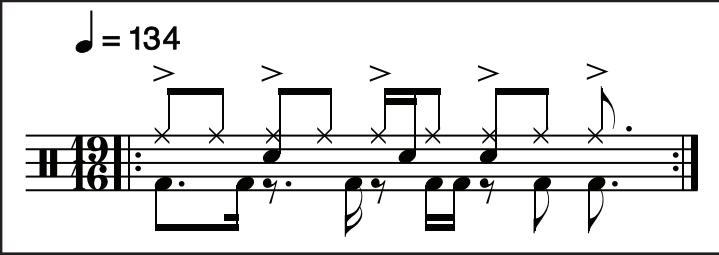
from *Joe's Garage* (1979)

Level: Advanced

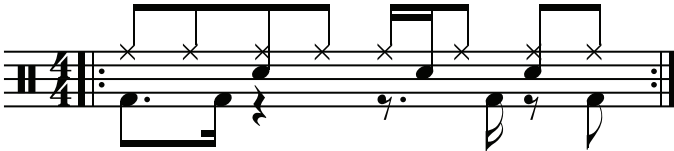
Colaiuta states that *Joe's Garage* was one of the most challenging recording experiences of his career. The session originally was intended to last only a day, and produce a single tune, but the session went on for a month and yielded a double album. No doubt one of the most difficult songs on the album, and probably the one considered to be the "holy grail" of Vinnie's recordings among drumming fans, is "Keep It Greasy." The tune alternates between $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{19}{16}$, and $\frac{21}{16}$ time signatures. Amazingly, the tune was recorded in its entirety in one live take, with no punch-ins or overdubs! The following transcription is from the guitar solo passage, which is played in $\frac{19}{16}$ time and starts at 3:18.

Original transcription (3:18):

Track 21

Let's start by locking in to the general tempo with this simplified groove in $\frac{4}{4}$.



Next, add the rest of the kick drum hits, but still keep the groove in $\frac{4}{4}$ for now.



Orchestral Favorites

While with Zappa circa 1976/'77, Bozzio played a double kick, five-tom black Gretsch drum kit. The kit can be seen on the "Baby Snakes" film, and is the setup for which Zappa wrote "The Black Page, No. 1." Bozzio switched to a Slingerland set with rototoms while playing with U.K., and went into electronics heavily while playing with Missing Persons. Ludwig, Tama, Remo, and Mapex setups followed before Bozzio started playing DW drums in 1995. His kit grew to a massive ensemble of drums, cymbals, and other sounds, some of which he invented, including beater ball enhancer instruments and piccolo toms.

One of Bozzio's signature sounds comes from stacking a crash cymbal inside of a China cymbal. The resulting sound is a short and trashy but distinctive tone. Terry has several combinations of these China/crash stacks, which allow him to play various notes to compose melodies and harmonies. Other signature sounds include his selection of bell chimes of various tones that he sets up in front of the kit, just above the rack toms, and a gong that he uses as a ride cymbal off to the right of the kit. This schematic represents the setup Terry has used more recently for his solo tours.

Circa 2006

