

## A Tale of Two Drummers

### Beat Instrumental - July 1975

Peer beneath the freaked-out psychedelia of Hawkwind and you'll find a solid core of rhythm.

Listen to any gig, any of the band's albums, and you'll realize what it is that sets them apart from other fringe-rock groups - that difference is an ability to rock.

As any musician will tell you, that knack in itself is almost entirely dependent on having a good drummer, a feature which has been a strong point, whether in the band's first incarnation with Terry Ollis or later with the current percussionist Simon King. Now the Hawklords have gone one stage further and added Alan Powell, ex-Chicken Shack, ex-Del Shannon and a crowd of others, a total all-rounder whose work on the band's recent UK tour and album will certainly have convinced Hawk-freaks of his ability to contribute something fresh to their music.

Beat met both drummers shortly before they left for the band's current U.S. tour to find out what led them to include a second drummer and how the set-up was working out. Firstly, though, we talked about the new album *Warrior On The Edge Of Time*. Was Simon happy with it?

"I suppose I'm two-thirds happy with this one," was his reply. "For me that's not bad as I was only half happy with the last one! *Warriors* is a different musical thing because it's Simon House's™ first real contribution: on *Mountain Grill* he was too new to be able to have that much influence, and now, of course we've got Allen as a second drummer, which has meant a lot of changes."

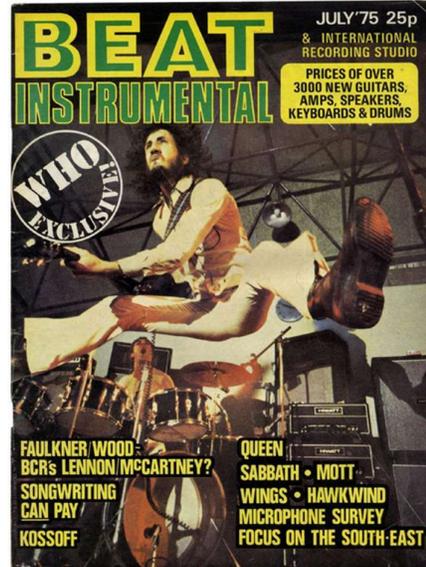
#### Substitute

Why had Hawkwind taken on Alan? "I'd wanted a couple of drummers for quite a while. We'd been doing two-hour sets which was becoming hard work for me because it was nearly all up-tempo rock and roll, with me just sitting there like a machine pumping it out. What finally decided it was our last Scandinavian tour when I was ill, and Al, who was with Vinegar Joe at the time, came in as a substitute. I eventually got a bit better and went over for the last three Dutch gigs where we began playing together."

One of the most difficult situations for any band where bass players or drummers double is the tension created not by competition, as in the case of two guitarists, but by the inevitable duplication of effort. How did Simon feel that it was working in his case?

"Well, with our way of working you can have one drummer and a percussionist, two drummers or two percussionists, but there's no point in having two drummers doing exactly the same things at the same time. I think the only time we do that is when we are playing a straight rock thing. There, one of us will start the number off and the other will come in say half way through; that steaming in over the top of a good rhythm will add a lot of dynamics that wouldn't be there with just one drummer. There really are so many things you can do with two drummers: our main way is for one of us to hold the basics down while the other does things over the top swapping from his kit to percussion and back where necessary."

There are, however, rather obvious dangers in two drummers bashing away for all they're worth, as Al explained. "The only problem is that you have to be very careful that you don't become just a mass of



banging and crashing."

Having two drummers poses problems of equipment, and the band now find that it can take up to three hours just to set-up the two kits and massive array of percussion instruments which are lined-up in a semi-circle facing the audience.

Simon's kit is a custom-built Hayman outfit comprising a 26 inch bass drum with the front head left in place and a lot of foam padding inside to dampen the sound. Tom toms comprise two 16 x 16 floor drums and a 13 x 9 top tom tom; cymbals are 24 inch and 22 inch Paiste and Avedis. Simon has a choice of snares depending on the acoustics of the hall, using either a wooden Hayman or a metal Ludwig.

### **Cymbals**

Al's line-up makes use of a Ludwig kit with a smaller 22 inch bass drum, two floor and one top tom tom, and two 18 inch cymbals. The choice of cymbals for any drummer is an entirely personal thing, as Simon confirmed. "If you want to go out and buy cymbals you've got to go out and buy them yourself. It's not the sort of thing where you can send someone out to do it for you, because every cymbal sounds different. It's not even that there are good and bad cymbals, just that they all sound different and you've got to find the ones that suit your tastes."

### **Boredom**

Simon's motivation behind becoming a drummer in the first place was boredom. "I'd just moved from the City and I was thirteen and bored. For some reason I got it into my head that I wanted to become a drummer and got some really old kit for about £15." From then on his career followed a typical rural rocker's pattern. Scout and Village Hall gigs paid 30/- [£1.50!] which was then just enough to cover your petrol and a bag of chips each, and then he moved on through a succession of bands, finally coming to rest in the hot seat of Hawkwind, where he has contributed so much over the last few years.

For any musician the question which must inevitably raise its head is the one about tuition. Neither Simon nor Al are particularly keen, as Al outlined. "I honestly think it must be much better if you don't have lessons. If you're taught to do it then you'll just find your personality becomes lost from your playing."

At this stage of the interview we paused to listen to a master of Warrior, while the two drummers pointed out the sections where each had put in complementary work to the other one's playing: one listen proves that the idea works if only in that it enables them to reproduce their studio sound live. The preview over, we moved on to talk about the various ways in which Hawkwind itself was progressing.

### **Chaotic**

Ever since Hawkwind began they have had a reputation for chaotic scenes, both around and inside the group. Members have left (since the interview, bass player Lemmy has departed in the middle of the tour) and some have rejoined. Tales of heavy dope scenes and financial peril have been printed, denied, but printed again. According to Simon, Hawkwind aren't broke. Album sales are healthy and the band regularly draw capacity crowds on tours. Certainly some of their troubles have been exploded out of all proportion, but there has been trouble.

## **Exhaustion**

The last American tour was only a limited success due to under-promotion, and physical exhaustion forced the band to pull out towards the end of their recent British tour, lopping two weeks off the schedule. Affairs, though, seem to become exaggerated around the group. Neither Simon nor Alan seemed to be particularly untogether -on the contrary- so one must conclude that rumours seem to fit the band's image, if not the individual members.

Now signed in the U.S.A. to Atlantic Records, better organized for an American tour and with a new and particularly good album, Hawkwind look ready to make things a success in the States. How far the departure of Lemmy will affect them is difficult, at this stage, to guess, but there is an air of stability about the anchor men that inspires confidence.

However, to get back to the subject of two drummers, it would seem that both Simon and Alan have the situation well in hand. Both profess a deal of respect for the other's abilities and both have contributed much to the success of Hawkwind, both live and on record. Whether the lesson that they've learned will be applicable to other hard-driving bands remain to be seen, but it's certainly worth noting that 10 c.c. (who can blow up quite a storm of rhythms when live) are also employing the talents of a second drummer / percussionist. If the trend were to catch on it could put a whole new slant on a drummer's role in a rock band and that can only be good for drumming, with individual musicians expanding their capability to include a wide variety of instruments.

The last word on the subject though should go to the newest recruit to the band, Al, whose grinning comment was "When all's said and done it's so much fun with two drummers!"

-Gary Cooper