

TAMA DRUM NEWS



BILLY COBHAM



TAMA SUPERSTAR BILLY COBHAM

The following excerpts were taken from an interview conducted by Yoshi Hoshino with Billy Cobham. Subjects discussed include Billy's childhood influences, early musical development, style, professional contacts, and a review of his solo albums.

Transcribed and edited 3/31/78
by Michael Agazarian



BILLY COBHAM:

I was born in the Republic of Panama, May 16, 1944 and came to America with my family at the age of 3. My cousins in Panama first kindled my interest in drumming because they not only played, but built their own steel drums and congas. Both my parents were musicians. Dad played piano and my mother sang and also played the piano. My only brother was also a musician. He played the trumpet. As for myself I've been playing drums ever since I can remember.

YOSHI HOSHINO:

It seems that your family was very influential in your early musical development. What percussion musicians in later years stimulated you the most musically?

BILLY COBHAM:

I guess the main ones would have to be Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Jimmy Cobb, Max Roach and Art Blakey.

YOSHI HOSHINO: Art Blakey?

BILLY COBHAM:

Oh sure, whenever I play a shuffle I sort of think about Art, he really influenced me playing the shuffle beat. Probably the strongest influence would have to be Tony Williams. When I was around 20 Tony was doing very well playing with Miles Davis, I think it was around 63-64. Tony at that time was only 17 or 18 and I could relate to him because we were of the same generation and it was nice to hear someone my age playing and doing the same kinds of things I was leaning towards. He had developed a better feel for playing with people because he had the opportunity to play with people like Miles on a daily basis, which is like going to a school of higher education. On the other hand I was playing rudimentarily, but because of Tony's influence I began to experience a turning point in my own playing and I felt I could now move on and do something new. Tony was 3 years younger than me and he was already receiving critical acclaim for his playing abilities and records. Tony's success became a catalyst for me in that I set up goals for myself, something to work for and achieve.



YOSHI HOSHINO:

What other musicians have been influential in your development?

BILLY COBHAM:

Two people fall into this category, John Coltrane and Miles Davis. Unfortunately, I never got the chance to work with Coltrane, but his music and style were very important to my development. I have worked with Miles and he gave me a wide range of things to do and let me play anyway I wanted as long as I did what he needed. This became very important because through this kind of disciplined freedom I was able to develop my own style of playing.

YOSHI HOSHINO:

How would you then characterize your particular style of drumming?

BILLY COBHAM:

I lean towards a heavy rudimental way of playing which I developed participating in drum and bugle corps in this country. Organizations such as the Sunrises and the Skylighters maintain a high level of standards amongst their own players because only the best participate on the field, they only have 3 places for snare drums and 3 places for tenor drums. Since I tended to be a little unorthodox in my playing I usually played tenor or rudimental bass drum rather than snare. I also wrote many of the

total drum lines for the corps and as result of writing and playing this type of music, it became the foundation of my style. Therefore all things considered, my style is highly rudimental with a strong Latin influence.

YOSHI HOSHINO:

What career developments led to your becoming more of a solo artist?

BILLY COBHAM:

Originally I wanted to play with big bands or do mainly studio sessions but other circumstances developed and I found myself playing in bands like Dreams, Mahavishnu Orchestra and my own band. These experiences made me want to play on my own more, write my own music and basically do my thing. I also had a desire to get more involved in drum design and development of new percussion concepts. To a certain degree I have done this already by combining various components from different sets and putting them together to sound the way I want them to and at the same time be comfortable with the equipment.



YOSHI HOSHINO:

Can you briefly mention a little bit about each of your albums?

BILLY COBHAM:

I'm presently recording for CBS in New York City, actually it's CBS International, and have put out my first album for CBS entitled "Magic". Prior to this some of the albums I recorded are: "Spectrum" recorded in 1973, "Crosswinds" recorded in February of 74, "Shabazz" a live album recorded in the summer of 74, "Total Eclipse" recorded in September 74 and "A Funky Goddess Sings" recorded in Europe. On the sixth album "Life and Times" there's a picture of me playing the ukulele, I think I was about 7 years old when it was taken. Then in 1976 I recorded a live album in collaboration with George Duke, who now records for Epic. Following the album with George I signed with CBS. All albums mentioned prior to CBS were on Atlantic, I think it would be Warner Brothers in Japan, W.E.A.



YOSHI HOSHINO:

How would you classify your own particular sound?

BILLY COBHAM:

It's now called contemporary music, or contemporary Jazz. I tend to label it "music of my life style", because it's subject to change depending on the way I feel.

I realize people need labels to enable them to relate, but for me, the artist-musician it's difficult to label my music because it does change continually and represents my varied feelings.

YOSHI HOSHINO:

So you're leaving the interpretation and classification of your music to your audience?

BILLY COBHAM:

That's basically it, let them feel whatever they feel. Many times in a jazz magazine like *Downbeat* they call me a rock-n-roll drummer yet in *Rolling Stone* a rock newspaper they call me a jazz drummer. When I see that sort of contradiction I just laugh deep down inside.

The following excerpts were taken from an interview conducted by Yoshi Hoshino with Billy Cobham regarding today's percussion market and how Tama Drums fit into the overall picture.



YOSHI HOSHINO:

Today's percussion market offers the consumer a vast supply of equipment from varied manufacturers such as Ludwig, Camco, Tama, Rogers, Pearl, etc. What concepts and features do you feel are important to consumers when they compare the percussion products of the various "Brand Names"?

BILLY COBHAM:

One of the most basic and most important factors is durability. A drum set should be designed and constructed so that it has minimum breakdowns in comparison with its cost. Even if your equipment sounds great, it's virtually useless if it continually falls apart. I think that

most drummers are prepared to pay for quality equipment if they can be sure it will hold up over the years.

So, for a company to succeed, it must establish a reputation for durability as well as tone. For me, buying drum sets is like buying a fine automobile—I don't care how much it costs if I know it's dependable and won't break down.

How a set is made is also very important. There are things that can be done with wood that haven't been done with drums yet. I saw a drum set made in Japan for Santana's drummer which gave me some ideas and told me someone else was way ahead of me. I think experimentation with new concepts, both in construction and visual appeal, is a primary responsibility of any drum company. Unfortunately, many companies have settled back into selling the "tried and true" standard drum set. The percussionist in search of new ideas gets very little satisfaction from companies like these.

I'm currently experimenting with the engineers from Tama on many new products. We're working on a viable triple bass/triple snare set, new and unique shell depths, and a versatile hardware system that encourages individual experimentation by drummers. As the role of the drummer and percussionist changes, his equipment must be able to keep up with him. It's up to drum companies to recognize this and to develop new products.

The important thing is to offer the drummer a chance to exercise his own individuality in choosing his equipment.

The drum set is the only instrument that can be added to and subtracted from and still remain a complete instrument.

It's important that the drummer be able to exercise this freedom in the most liberal way. And in addition to different sizes, the sound can be altered on a good set by using different sticks, heads, tuning, etc., providing of course, that the shells are well made in the first place. Each drummer has a unique character and his drum set should be capable of enhancing that character.

YOSHI HOSHINO:

Percentage wise, of the various instrumental categories there are less drummers on today's music scene, compared with the number of bass, guitar and keyboard players. What can we do, as a drum company, to generate and educate more young people to the importance and necessity of percussion instruments?

BILLY COBHAM:

In order to really get out into the field and reach a vast audience, I feel that video tape can be a most useful tool. In order to fully demonstrate the art of playing, soloing, playing with others, and playing in the studio should all be shown. This can be effectively covered in a mini clinic on video tape. Since video playback equipment is quite easily available these days, video clinics can be used on a wide scale.

There is a list of "standard questions" that always come up at the clinics that I do, and I feel that a great deal of information can be covered on tape. Of course, one of your field reps should be present to demonstrate the sound and construction features of the drums up close. In this way, I feel that we could bring an effective and complete educational experience to a greater number of people. My touring schedule limits my clinic schedule to larger cities, but even smaller towns would be able to hold an effective clinic on video tape.

YOSHI HOSHINO:

How have our new Octobans effected your direction of playing?

BILLY COBHAM:

The Octobans will enable me to utilize drums in a more melodic sense enabling me to play one octave melody lines within the realm of the musical situation on stage and maybe even along with the other musicians especially as I'm keeping the rhythms going elsewhere. I feel this is something that's going to become more apparent in the future. Octobans elevate the drummers importance by giving him more creative depth and range, and free him from his solo image of rhythm keeper.

NEW TAMA GONG BASS DRUMS

The new Tama Gong Bass Drum was developed in cooperation with Billy Cobham to extend the melodic range of his Tama set. This unique drum has a very deep, but very clear and resonant tone. Single headed in construction, the Gong Bass uses a head 2 inches larger in diameter than the shell. This allows for maximum freedom of vibration.

The Gong principle would not be possible without the development of a new stand, so the new Tama Rollaway Stand was born. This stand will locate the Gong Bass in any desired position, while taking up a minimum of floor space. The casters are lockable, making the Rollaway Stand stable and immovable.

Available in either Natural Maple or Custom Mahogany lacquer finishes.

9650 Gong Bass Drum—20" shell & 22" head

9652 Gong Bass Drum—22" shell & 24" head

Tama Gong Bass Drums are sold complete with Tama Rollaway stand.



TAMA GONG TOMS

Tama has also applied the Gong Bass principle to smaller diameter toms, offering yet another advancement in sound.

Gong Toms feature heads that are one inch larger in diameter than the drum shell. This design gives the heads maximum freedom of vibration for excellent response, extra volume and brilliance of tone.

Gong Toms come equipped with Tama Key-Lock brackets and are compatible with all Tama tom stands.

| Model No. | Shell Dia. | Head Dia. | Shell Depth |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| 9692 | 12" | 13" | 8" |
| 9693 | 13" | 14" | 9" |
| 9694 | 14" | 15" | 10" |
| 9695 | 15" | 16" | 12" |
| Gong Floor Tom | | | |
| 9696 | 16" | 18" | 16" |
| 9698 | 18" | 20" | 16" |



TAMA ROLLAWAY STANDS

With more drummers demanding a more versatile, stable and professional set up, Tama now introduces the ultimate in drum stands—the Tama Rollaway Stand. This stand features a heavy, high pressure die-cast base with lockable heavy casters. This versatile stand can hold four tom toms, or with optional Tama Multi-Clamps, can support up to eight tom toms or any combination of toms, cymbals and mikes. This represents a true advancement in drum set up, particularly for the touring professional. It can save valuable time, especially during between act change-overs, and you can be sure that your drums and mikes are set up exactly the way they were at sound check.

The Rollaway Stand is fully adjustable, both in height and width, to accommodate any size drums or drum/cymbal combination. It comes complete with two Tama double tom holders, but can accept the upper portion of any Tama Spartan or Titan stand. Combined with the Tama Multi-Clamp system, it's the most versatile drum stand ever offered.

6901 Rollaway Stand, complete with 2 double tom tom holders.



TAMA OCTOBAN 8A OUTFIT NO. 7800

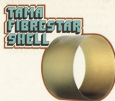
Today's drummer has to know more than just hitting it on the 2 and the 4. The world of drums and percussion has broadened its musical view in the last decade. And this expanding horizon has brought with it many new percussion products, and most importantly, a new drum company, **Tama—the strongest new name in drums.**

And now from Tama—one of the most innovative and exciting drum products of the 70's—Octobans. These melodic drums are designed with a distinctive tonal color and now give the drummer the opportunity to put melody to work. Already, drummers such as the incredible Billy Cobham, and Gary Mulabier of the Steve Miller band are using and praising Octobans. Billy is using his Octobans to add melodic continuity and punctuation to his solos and Gary uses Octobans to add a melodic/percussive texture to several of Steve Miller's finely crafted tunes.



CHEMICAL PRODUCT SHELLS

The most common chemical product shells are fiberglass and acrylic. Since nearly every other wood product was in some way being replaced by fiberglass, sooner or later someone was going to try drums. A fiberglass drum is several times stronger than a wood drum. It is also louder, heavier and brighter sounding than wood. Because fiberglass is much more dense and much harder than wood, sound reflects very well from its surface, without the shell itself resonating to any great degree. For this reason the high frequency vibrations and overtones of the head vibration are accentuated and reinforced, resulting in a brighter tone.



Tama FibreStar shells are made by the "hand lay up" procedure, where fiberglass cloth is placed by hand in a rotating mold. The mold is then spun at a high speed while the resin is poured, resulting in a very uniform thickness. The fiberglass/resin shell is then heat cured in the spinning mold and is removed as a complete shell.

The other common chemical product shell is acrylic. Acrylics are not as hard as fiberglass, but harder than wood. They exhibit a tone that is somewhat between fiberglass and wood, although more towards fiberglass. Their sound is bright and loud, with accentuated highs.

They also have an advantage in that they can be transparent or tinted as well as opaque. This opened a new visual world for drummers. Unfortunately, acrylic shells are quite fragile and are easily split if dropped or subjected to shocks.



Tama FibreStar—for the drummer who needs a louder, brighter and more powerful sound and bulletproof durability. Constructed of hand laid up fiberglass FibreStar shells, a strong beyond comparison.

Tama uses only "Black Fibre" fiberglass (the strongest there is) and a special finishing process that puts a super accurate lathe-finished sound edge on the shell.

FibreStar drums several times stronger and considerably heavier than wood shells. This translates down to incredible durability and a loud, direct tone, rich in upper harmonics.

Tama FibreStar drums are available in **Platina Royal Pewter**, and **Midnight Blue**.



INDIVIDUAL DRUMS AND AVAILABLE SIZES

Bass Drums: include Spurs and Felt Muffler

9222 14" x 22" **9224** 14" x 24"

Tom Toms

9212 8" x 12" **9213** 9" x 13"

9214 10" x 14" **9215** 12" x 15"

Floor Tom Toms: include legs

9234 14" x 14" **9236** 16" x 16"

9238 16" x 18"

Concert Tom Toms

9256 5 1/2" x 6" **9258** 5 1/2" x 8"

9260 6 1/2" x 10" **9262** 8" x 12"

9263 9" x 13" **9264** 10" x 14"

9265 12" x 15" **9266** 14" x 16"