

TOURING/SESSION DRUMMER

RYAN HOYLE'S HOLLYWOOD DRUM CAVE

Story by Michael Dawson • Photos by Alex Solca

Although he's spent the past five years touring the world with the legendary classic rock frontman Paul Rodgers (Free, Bad Company, Queen) and the alternative rock band Collective Soul, thirty-one-year-old drummer Ryan Hoyle knew he wanted to be a studio musician from the day he got his first drumset. "The drummer in my church gave me a kick and a snare that he wasn't using," Hoyle recalls. "When he came over and gave me the kit, he brought along Steve Gadd's *Up Close* video for me to check out. As I watched Steve in a studio environment with mics on his kit, I thought, *I want to record.*"

Hoyle made his first attempt at setting up a personal studio when he moved to Nashville to try to break into that city's fruitful but highly competitive session scene. "I set up my first Pro Tools rig when I lived there," Ryan says. "But by the time I got my setup really happening, I didn't feel like a drummer anymore. Plus, hearing some of the inadequacies of my drumming was uncomfortable. When you sit in a room by yourself and really start digging around, it's like, *Wow, I can't tune, I can't play quarter notes, and my snare sounds like it's next door.* I learned a lot from that experience. But when I moved to Los Angeles, I sold all my computer gear."

Hoyle's self-imposed five-year hiatus from being a studio owner allowed him to focus more on his drumming, which eventually landed him gigs with Rodgers and Collective Soul. But it wasn't long before fate came knocking again. "About a year and a half ago, I found this wonderful spot," the drummer says from his current home facility—dubbed Cave Studio—in the heart of Hollywood, about five blocks north of the now-defunct Capitol Records building. "I knew as soon as I walked into this room and clapped a few times that this would be great for drums. Some techno-beat-making musicians designed it, so it already had thousands of dollars invested in soundproofing and making it a nice acoustic environment. So I thought, *Here I go, down the road of having a setup again.*"

Cave Studio has an unusual layout that makes it great for drum tracking. "The room is about fourteen feet wide and twenty-six feet long," Hoyle says. "The floor and ceiling aren't parallel; the ceiling gets about three or four feet higher as you move from the drums to the back of the room. And there's a loft in the back that I use as a huge bass



trap. That keeps the sound waves from hitting the wall and flying back into my mics. I also have wood floors that give me a nice live environment."

Ryan discovered that his drum-collecting habit helped to optimize the room acoustics for recording. "I have a lot of drums stacked around in cases," he points out. "The round plastic cases create a nice diffusion that prevents the sound waves from bouncing back and forth symmetrically, which can create standing waves, flutter echo, and comb filtering. All of those things are counterproductive when you're recording drums."

Hoyle also figured out how to take advantage of the room's unusual dimensions to offer a wide variety of sound options. "One side of my room is like a standard drum booth," he explains, calling out the section where some beautiful Ludwig Classic birch drums and Paiste Twenty series cymbals are miked up and ready to roll. "I have a lot of absorption and diffusion materials around the kit, which gives me a tight and somewhat focused drum sound, like what you hear on recordings from the '70s. But when I want a

THE SNARE RACK



"The Ludwig Supra-Phonic line is an archetype," Hoyle says. "It defines what a snare drum sounds like. So if you're looking to build a snare collection, start out with three drums—a 6½x14 Ludwig bronze Black Beauty or Supra-Phonic, a 6½x14 Ludalloy Supra-Phonic, and a 6½x14 brass Black Beauty. Then maybe add a Ludwig 3-ply Jazz Festival and a 4x14 tube-lug Ludwig Standard from the '20s. I also use the new Ludwig maple snares a lot, and I adore the Yamaha Anton Fig and the Slingerland Radio King. But if you want to get really tricky, eliminate everything and get a Tama Bell Brass from the 1980s. You'll never need another snare drum."

GEAR BOX

RECORDING RIG

- MacBook Pro laptop
- Pro Tools Digi 002 interface, modified by Black Lion Audio
- Seagate Barracuda Firewire 400 drives
- Four mono and one stereo channel of Vintech microphone preamps
- Four channels of API microphone preamps
- One stereo channel of Demeter tube preamps for the far room mics

MICROPHONES

Overheads: Large-diaphragm Mojave MA-201 FET mics for a classic full-kit sound or small-diaphragm AKG 451s “if I’m doing something more modern, more produced, or more ‘athletic,’ like modern rock.”

Ride and hi-hats: AKG 451s. “I typically don’t need a ride mic, but a lot of mixing engineers request it. And a lot of video game work requires a mic on every sound source.”

Toms: Audix D6s, Sennheiser 421s, or Beyerdynamic M 201 TGs, placed three fingers’ width from the head and pointed down at a spot about two inches from the bearing edge.

Rooms: A pair of Royer R-121 ribbon mics placed a few feet in front of the kit. “Those capture the body of the kit, the growl of the bottom heads of the toms, and the throw of



the kick drum.” And a pair of Mojave MA-200 tube mics in the back of the room. “I use tube mics with tube mic preamps for the back of the room because I want to capture the beef and the round body of the drums. They also help tame the cymbals and warm everything up.”

Kick: Three mics. A large-diaphragm dynamic mic—like an AKG D 112, Sennheiser 421, Shure

Beta 52A, Heil PR 40, or Audix D6—is placed inside the drum or just inside the porthole. The second mic is a speaker wired out of phase, which turns it into a microphone. “The speaker mic captures the sub-harmonic lows, like a Roland 808 rap kick sound, that you blend in for



extra low end.” The third mic is often a Mojave MA-201 FET placed six to twelve inches from the front head. “It captures an athletic low end that you need to cut through loud guitars.”

Snare: Three mics. A Shure SM57 or an Audix i-5 on top (“I use this to capture the body of the snare”), with an AKG C 451 B condenser placed next to it so that the capsules align. “The condenser gives me a bright ‘crack.’” A Shure SM98 is placed under the snare to capture the wires.

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bigger Bonham-type sound, I open up the mics that I have in the back of the room.”

When it comes to getting drum sounds at Cave Studio, Hoyle’s priority is his instruments rather than effects processors. “I make sure my drums are in top shape,” he says. “I focus on things like the bearing edges, heads, tuning, muffling, and using different hoop combinations in order to get the right sounds for the track. For instance, if I want more attack from the snare, I’ll use a die-cast hoop on top and a brass triple-flange on the bottom to let the drum open up and get some low-end breadth in there. I also have nickel-plated WFL brass hoops from the 1950s, single-flange hoops from the ’20s, big 2.3 mm triple-flange steel hoops, and ’80s Tama brass Mighty Hoops. Hoops have a *huge* effect on a drum’s sound.”

Even though his impressive array of drums is enough to make even the most seasoned collector drool—Ryan has a Leedy kit from the ’40s, Gretsch drums from the ’80s, a ’70s Rototom setup, several vintage and modern Ludwig kits, and many more classic pieces—the drummer emphasizes that it’s not all just for show and tell. “A great bass player friend, who saw all these snares I was bringing to sessions, said to me, ‘Just make sure these snares make you *play*.’ He also told me that it’s better to have one snare that you know inside and out—that you can get five different sounds out of—than it is to have thirty that you don’t know anything about.

“But it’s good to have options,” Hoyle continues. “There are pieces of gear across the history of drums that are defining pieces. Gretsch drums from the ’80s, 3-ply Ludwig drums from the late ’60s and early ’70s, Slingerland Radio Kings, mahogany Leedys, Yamaha Recording Customs from the ’80s... It’s nice to have those flavors available, if you can.”

Ryan is currently recording about five sessions per week at Cave Studio. “I’ve been working on and off with Deborah Gibson on her solo album,” he says. “I’m working on a solo album for Brad Smith, who’s the songwriter and bass player for Blind Melon, plus an album for Collective Soul guitarist Joel Kosche and tracks for David Cook and Carrie Underwood. I also do a lot of video game work. And I did four drum tracks for Greek superstar Anna Vissi. Her record is certified platinum in Greece, so I’m very proud of that one.”

For more on Hoyle and Cave Studio, including sound files of Ryan’s various kits, go to livedrumtracks.com.

