

Amandla's 'Laughing Hearts' draws from a range of influences and experience

Posted on [April 24, 2018](#) by [Bill Kopp](#)



FOLLOW YOUR HEART: Ween drummer Claude Coleman Jr. makes his own music under the moniker Amandla. The varied yet highly accessible songs on 'Laughing Hearts' reflect the life experiences that eventually led Coleman to settle in Asheville. Photo by Edwin Lora

Laughing Hearts is the third album from Amandla, the project of Asheville-based musician **Claude Coleman Jr.** Though the album was [quietly issued in digital form a year ago](#), Coleman is now overseeing a vinyl launch of *Laughing Hearts* and scheduling select live dates to celebrate that release. As part of a fundraiser for the SoundSpace initiative (a nonprofit started by Coleman and **Brett Spivey**, designed to help provide low-cost rehearsal space for local musicians), Amandla plays at Isis Music Hall on Friday, April 27.

Even though he's best-known as the longtime drummer for eclectic rock band Ween — he's been with the band since 1994 — Coleman is a songwriter and multi-instrumentalist who plays all of the instruments on his albums. For Amandla's live gigs, he sings and plays guitar. His onstage band includes **Ram Mandelkorn** on rhythm guitar, keyboardist **Simon Thomas George** and drummer **Jaze Uries** (all from The Digs, a local outfit with which Coleman also performs as an alternate drummer).

Coleman's melodic sense is on full display on all 11 of *Laughing Hearts*' songs. And, like Amandla's previous releases, 2001's *Falling Alone* and *The Full Catastrophe* from 2006, it's a kind of document of where Coleman is emotionally.

Amandla's 2001 debut has an informal, spontaneous character, one that's a product of the way in which it was made. "It was recorded to tape," Coleman says. "It's as organic as it could have been." He says that he spent very little time "nitpicking, tweaking, editing and so forth." A busy schedule kept Coleman from working on a follow-up for some time.

And when he did get to sessions for the second Amandla album, outside circumstances intruded. "I had a near-fatal car accident in the middle of making that record," Coleman says. "I was hospitalized about 40 days and in rehab about a year. I had to reacquire all of the technical abilities and skills I needed to play music again." He says that the long, drawn-out process of recuperating and completing *The Full Catastrophe* took "the better [part] of 3 1/2 years."

More than a decade passed before Coleman returned with a third Amandla album. The intervening years were filled with Ween touring and recording, but that accounts for only part of the long span between Amandla releases. "A lot of things happened in my life," Coleman says. "There were a lot of breakdowns for me; I picked up and left New Jersey — the place where I was born, and my community, and my network — and tried to find and make a life somewhere else." He describes the making of *Laughing Hearts* as "an epic adventure in its own right."

Coleman says that *Laughing Hearts* is a breakup record, created in the wake of his 14-year marriage ending. "Everything had kind of fallen through the floor," he says, "and I had no tether to where I was."

He says he found himself with no reason to stay in New Jersey: "When things like that happen, it's sort of a life-or-death situation, and that's kind of how it was for me. So, I had to pack it all up, sell everything I had and try to make a life anew."

Coleman landed briefly in Texas, and while there, he recorded *Laughing Hearts*. "Then I came back eastward, stayed in Asheville for a few days and decided to settle here," he says. "That

was the greatest life decision I've ever made for myself. I think this area draws people who are trying to renew, heal or restart."

Looking at the three Amandla albums, Coleman characterizes them as "representative of different places and times in my life. Because of the circumstances surrounding those records, each one has an individualism." *Laughing Hearts'* defining musical quality is that it's all over the map, style-wise.

"That's purely by happenstance," Coleman says. "And that's one of its strengths." He notes that, in modern society, there's less narrow interest in particular genres.

"No one is really a metal head, or a goth head, or a hip-hop head," he says. "Everyone is really kind of across the board, with a lot of different styles, cultures and genres."

While Coleman grew up on a steady diet of KISS and Santana, he was also immersed in the music of Ohio Players and Kool & the Gang. "And I was into a lot of country and folk, too. This stuff just sort of naturally comes out into writing," he says. "There's no plan about it."

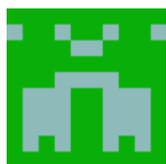
There is, however, a plan as far as future releases are concerned. Coleman has no intention of letting another decade pass before the next Amandla album. "I want to do an Amandla record at least once a year," he says. "I'm a DIY artist, but I'm putting together a team so that I'll be able to focus more on the art."

WHO: Amandla with the Paper Crowns, Brett's Milk, Zin Vetro, the Dirty Badgers and the Styrofoam Turtles

WHERE: Isis Music Hall, 743 Haywood Road, isisasheville.com

WHEN: Friday, April 27, at 8 p.m., \$20 (proceeds go toward funding SoundSpace)

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About Bill Kopp

Author, music journalist, historian, collector, and musician. His first book, "Reinventing Pink Floyd: From Syd Barrett to The Dark Side of the Moon," published by Rowman & Littlefield, is available now. Follow me

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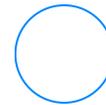
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Claude Coleman Jr. Breaks Down His New Album

Feb
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By: **Finn Turnbull**

Anyone who's ever seen Ween knows that the drummer, Claude Coleman Jr., is one damn talented individual. He's been working with them since *Chocolate and Cheese* (1994), recording, touring, and even helping engineer, like he did with *The Mollusk*. However, what you might not know is that this multi-instrumentalist has also been hard at work for years with other musical projects, the main one being his own band, Amandla.

Amandla has been around officially since about 2000, but it seems that Claude has had the concept in mind for a long time. His first release was *Falling Alone* in 2001, followed by *The Full Catastrophe* in 2006, and now he is finally releasing his third album *Laughing Hearts*.

The music he writes for Amandla is impossible not to like, because there is something there for everyone. The style ranges from hard, distorted rock to heartfelt blues, R&B, funk, even pop, country and rockabilly. *Laughing Hearts* is a perfect example, as it contains all of the above. This album would be appropriate to listen to at any time in any mood. Sweet, memorable lyrics accompany the most refreshing songs; Claude's third album is a masterpiece. The production is outstanding, which is no surprise because Claude performed, recorded and engineered almost everything himself. In addition to the fantastic instrumentation, Claude also has an amazing voice. His soothing tones in both falsetto and natural vocals, are paired perfectly well together in harmonies that bring each song to a new level of solid sound. The record is romantic, charming, spacey, relaxing, upbeat, energizing, trippy, and super soulful all at the same time.

Now that *Laughing Hearts* is ready for release, Claude has assembled himself a full band and they just had their first mini-tour through New Orleans and three towns in Texas with The Dean Ween Group. Live, Claude plays guitar and sings. His other bandmates are friends and musicians he's worked with for years. On guitar and backing vocals is Shareif Hobley who actually recorded additional guitar, vocals, and keys on *Falling Alone* and *The Full Catastrophe*. On keys and synths is Simon Thomas George who plays with Claude in a funk group called The Digs. On bass is Jon Sullivan, who recorded the bass for "In A Lovesong" on the new album. On drums is Kelli Strawbridge.

The group played with Dean Ween Group at Tipitina's this past Wednesday and they simply killed it.

After the show, I had the privilege of sitting down with Claude to discuss *Laughing Hearts* in great detail. Claude has many friends and admirers, so the discussion proved difficult without an appropriate amount of hilarious interruptions from fellow musicians and fans:

What goal or ambition did you have for this album?

ÒI donÕt think I had any ambitions. I donÕt know if anyone ever does. I think youÕre just writing and writing and creating, and youÕre going through all these experiences and filtering them out in music and songs and expression- and you just keep at that. Then before you know it youÕve got a collection of songs and a bunch of music that, you know, seems to comprise a record. Then youÕre like, ÒOh ok, this is a record.Ó Then try to flesh it out with a couple more songs and top it off or complete it somehow. I think itÕs an organic, unknown process that happens on its own. It seems to create itself- with me anyway. Some people go into the studio just to write records and they work like clockwork and stuff, but my process is more organic and it happens as it happens and when it happens, and before I know it I have a record.

The last [album] I did was called *The Full Catastrophe*. And that took me like four years to make just because I went through a near-fatal car accident and I had to relearn and reacquire all my skills to be able to play and write and record and stuff. I had to relearn how to walk, and talk and swallow, memory functions and everything. All of this stuff IÕm still kinda struggling with now. But then, [Laughing Hearts] is sort of the second chapter in a massive breakdown of my life. I had divorced from my wife. 14 years we were married. And Ween had broken up, so the floor in my life just fell from beneath me and I was without a lot of the things that I had been going with for a long time. So, in a sense, it was like another near-fatal car accident. [Laughs] And so this [album] took me just as long to do. When I divorced with my ex, I left New Jersey and I went to Texas and I just sold everything I had. I sold my wifeÕs belongings, my recording studio, my wood shop (IÕm a carpenter), just everything I had, and I just piled my guitars, my hard drives, my computer, and my clothes into my Subaru and lived out of my Subaru for like two years. Then I went to Austin and I stayed with some friends out there, a really wonderful family whom I love dearly. They let me live in their house. So I was just living at their house, making this record. Never had any plans about anything after that. I just had this music and all I knew was that I wanted to record and make this record and that the songs were some of my best songs. I guess I just sort of assumed everything else would fall in line after that, and it kinda did. But, I didnÕt really have any plan or any forethought at all. I was just winging it, just going for it, because I had too, you know? There was just nothing else I could do.Ó



Follow What Brings You

ÒThe chorus line is ÒFollow what brings you here.Ó ThatÕs kind of about my experience with just leaving everything youÕre accustomed to and becoming untethered and having nothing to bind you to where you need to be. Just getting in a car and going and running, on some kind of notion that you just needed to do it. Line by line, it sort of tracks my journey. When you do that kind of thing, when you drop everything, you know what you have and you kind of purge your life. Then you run, you know? And the first line of the tune is ÒRun away to a life in theory.Ó But when you do that, itÕs like, youÕre the first person who meets you when you get to the next place. Because you canÕt escape anything really, even yourself.Ó

(At this moment, Alex McMurray looms out of the green room and proclaims ClaudeÕs wisdom. ÒIf you think that thereÕs some wisdom up there,Ó he says, Òthis is the wisdom, man.Ó We heartily agree that it is here in the stairwell. ÒItÕs in the stairwell of our lives,Ó Claude says, and then Alex disappears singing Ò*This is the stairwell of our lives!*Ó to himself.)

At the same time, it's kind of a call to arms. Talking about that lesson is saying you sometimes have to do that. Maybe in order to have that lesson. You have to follow what brings you to wherever you go. The other thing about this tune is this was a "top-off" tune, where I had a group of songs not quite enough to make a record. Since I was in Austin I really wanted one of my guitar heroes, Kirk Kirkwood to play on something on the record. I had asked him to be on while I was there, we had some Mexican food one day and talked life and he's such an easy dude he was down without hearing anything, and truth be told, I really didn't have the song for him yet. So I literally wrote that song for Kirk Kirkwood to play on, it came out naturally, I'm a Meat Puppets fan big time, it was styled for him. He came in, and just added the most amazing cosmic sounds and slide shreddage that only he does. It was magical.

Summer Road

The woman I was married to was a New Zealander, so we spent a lot of time in New Zealand. In New Zealand and Australia, the seasons are reversed there. Our winter is their summer. So, our Christmas is summer time there. And that's kind of the theme. Like, being there for Christmas in the summer. That's a real fun time. New Years Eve is really fun, too. A lot more fun in the summertime. Of course, New Orleans residents, that doesn't really apply to you. It's kind of warm all the time here. (Yeah *this* is winter, I say) Yeah, like right now it's winter so, you know, I have a long sleeve shirt on outside. [Laughs] But yeah, that's kinda what a lot of that is about. Just my ex and the life we had together and the times we spent in New Zealand. It's a beautiful, magical place. I might want to retire there. If I'm ever going to retire. I don't think that's possible for musicians. It's sort of a foolhardy concept. But yeah, that's what that song's about. It's just happy and joyful. Kind of how it was to be cruisin' around at Christmas in the summer, having cookouts on the beach, driving up and down the coastline, and exchanging gifts with Santa Claus hats on, you know? Jumping in the water. It's fun.

Laughing Hearts

So the title of the record is a reference to a Charles Bukowski poem called "The Laughing Heart." It's a really inspirational poem in its own way. It comes across in the Bukowski way, its kind of edgy and rough and it's slightly obscene, but it's really powerful and really motivates you, and it's really energizing. The laughing heart is basically everyone's soul that should just be joyful and laughing through the process of shit in life. And so The Laughing Heart is everything that my record is about. It's everything that everyone's life should be, I think. You should be a proud laughing heart, full of sunshine, and embracing everything coming your way. That's the tune that defines that record and kind of defines the making of it.

Stay Awake

ÒStay Awake is a song about a friend of mine. It's kind of unrelated to the whole divorce concept record, which this record became sort of. It's about a friend of mine, we dated for a brief period. To be honest, she had an insatiable sexual appetite. It's about how some people make being sexy and dirty really cool and easy and fun and awesome. And you don't have a hang-up about it. Yeah, that's a tribute to her.Ó

Drawdown

ÒThat's kind of a super intense divorce tune. That's written for my ex. She was my muse for nearly 20 years. I wrote that song in Hawaii. It was a particularly rough time for us. It was particularly rough because we were away and we were separated. When you're touring and you're having issues or problems with your partner, it's really really heartbreaking. You can't really sleep well, it's really disruptive to your psyche, and you're just trying to survive and maintain on the road. I wrote that during one of those periods. [Hawaii] is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Watching the sun go down over paradise. Actually a lot of the lines and lyrics in that tune are about that, sunsets over sorrowful places. It's the most beautiful thing in the world, yet I was at the most sorrowful place in my life. So I was writing about that contrast of those emotions.Ó

Talking Sweet

ÒI wrote that about a particular friend of mine who is kind of a prick. And some people are such pricks that when they're being nice and genial, it's actually like a hint that they're actually about to be incredibly horrible and mean. And it's almost like a flag to run. It's like a forewarning, because you know it's full of shit and something evil and destructive and nasty is going to follow.Ó

In A Lovesong

ÒThat's another tune I wrote for my ex, and it's about how I write every song about her. I go to the river and I'm writing music and what am I writing about? I'm writing about her. What is it? It's a love song. One of the chorus lines is [Sings] ÒCould it be a love song? Sounds like a love song...Ó It's just like, I'm always spending my time writing love songs about the woman I love. Which is beautiful, and so

that's what it's about. There were so many more songs back in the day that were so unabashedly about love. "I Just Called to Say I Love You," you know what I mean? Or like "Pardon Me, I Love You." or whatever, you know? Some point along the way, in society, it became unhip or something and I think that's lame. We need to bring that back. I thought, "I'm going to write this song and it's a love song, yes. I'm not going to cloak it with some sort of poetic, figurative metaphor. It's a love song and I'm gonna call it a love song."

Lolina

"Ah.. [Laughs] That tune is another tune that's not so related to all the upheaval and divorce like the rest of the music. That tune was when I was going to the bank in Austin. Mexican woman in Texas, particularly in the southwest, are a bit different than certain other parts of the country where they look almost Indian and Incan sort of. They kind of resemble the women in those calendars like at taquerias. Just tall or statuesque; strong bodies. They're just absolutely stunning. They're these goddesses, really. And I was like cashing a check or something when I'd just got tossed. I saw this woman, and sometimes you just get goofy. Us men, as we are, we can fall in love in like half a millisecond. The end of the chorus of that tune is "This never ever happens all the time." Standing in line, I was just absolutely captivated by this amazing female creature made by, you know, the heavens. [Laughs] I just went into my car, started writing, and I think I finished that tune in a night. I love that tune for some reason. Then a lot of it is about my traveling. Going out there and just driving through the plantations, and driving through the farms. Just on my own, not knowing what I was doing, just driving and driving. But then, you meet Lolina. That's a fictional name, which I think is kinda nice. I don't know if Lolina exists."

Rest of Your Story

"That song is written for my mother, who in a sense, did the same thing I did. She decided to leave New Jersey, which is where we grew up, and before I left, she left. And she was sort of doing the same thing. We followed similar paths in the way that we were just kinda going into the unknown. We didn't really have any certainty about what was going on, but we just knew we needed to leave. So, she sold her house and I remember helping her pack up for like a week. Helping her move, just getting all her things in the truck and stuff. Just taking it in, just feeling that transition and all of that uncertainty. It had a little bit of sadness with it, as well as being kind of exciting. The tune that I wrote is about how it must have been for her when we left for college and moved out. It was a kind of like that experience for me, watching her leave where we had grown up and decide to try live a life anew. And she did an amazing job. She's my hero. Both my parents are my heroes. I felt that I had a really awesome place with

everything that happened to me on that record, and I love her very much, so I wanted to have that song on there. I wrote that song for her.Ó

Forever For Always

Claude's bassist, Jon Sullivan, chimes in with "That joint is tight!" Then offers us some Tito's vodka before incoherently comparing Claude's songwriting depth to something Mike Tyson once said about Muhammad Ali. Something about drinking waters and drowning. Here's the actual quote: Tyson on Muhammad Ali - "No man like him. There just isn't, everything that we have, he supersedes us, even our arrogance and our ego...I'd say from a boxing perspective, Ali is a fucking animal. He looks more like a model than a fighter, but what he is, he's like a tyrannosaurus rex with a pretty face. He's just mean and evil, and he'll take you to deep water and drown you. He's very special, the best in the world." Now, if that's not a shining testament to Claude's music, I don't know what is.

"Yeah, that's totally about my ex. The idea that she'll always be my wife and she'll always be the only wife I'll ever have, no matter how many times I get married. [Laughs] She was sort of my queen and I think that however it ends, even when you separate it's just sort of said and done like that. That's not to say that I won't fall in love or anything like that, but just "forever for always," you know? She'll always have that place in my life. I spent nearly a quarter of my life with her, so you know, unless I do that again, which I guess is possible, for the interim that's the way it always be with her. I wanted to close the record out with it. It's kinda dark and sad, but I think there's some beauty to it that everyone can relate to. That helps deal with the sadness. It's darkly beautiful.Ó

(Bonus Track) I Get Around

"Yeah, that's just a bonus track. The last record I did, I had a bonus track. We did it tonight, it was called "Back Down." Kind of a swingin' rock tune. So, I decided to write another similar tune and have it as a bonus track. I think I just might keep that. I'll just put a bonus track on every record that's like a rockabilly tune. Maybe I'll do a record that's just that kind of shit, but I just wanted a bonus track. And actually, the guitar player in Dean Ween Group tonight, Joe Kramer, does the solo on that tune. You can tell because he just shreds. He's just a ripper, man. He's funny. He's a mild-mannered guy, a rep for Yamaha, but he's just one of the greatest guitar players we know. He just shreds. He's a flawless, amazing player. I gave [I Get Around] to him and he gave it back to me in like an hour or something like that. [Laughs] That's just a fun tune to escape the malaise of fucking seriousness and shit, you know what I mean? I do think I kinda need to do a record or two of just like light-hearted stuff. No more *Full Catastrophe*'s. So that's my way of kind of lightening the load, especially after Forever For Always.Ó

Claude says the album comes out February 14th, Valentine's Day.



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Album Review: Amandla's 'Laughing Hearts'

Posted on February 25, 2017 by Bill Kopp



FOLLOW WHAT BRINGS YOU: On his third album as Amandla, Claude Coleman Jr. presents 11 deeply inviting tunes that range from hard-driving to dreamy and back again. The release party for "Laughing Hearts" is March 2 at The Salvage Station. Album cover photo by Claude Coleman Jr.

Amandla is a studio creation of **Claude Coleman Jr.**, an Asheville multi-instrumentalist best-known as the drummer for Ween. But unlike the decidedly acquired-taste music made by Ween, Amandla makes pure ear candy. Released Feb. 14, *Laughing Hearts* (Marshall Hotel Records) is the third album using the Amandla name. An album release party is scheduled for Thursday, March 2, at The Salvage Station.

There's a kinetic undercurrent to many of *Laughing Hearts'* 11 songs, one that persists even on the more dreamy, downtempo numbers. Coleman's keen sense of rhythm makes even relatively simple and straightforward chord changes feel full of texture.

The fuzzed-out bassline that forms the basis of "Stay Awake" gives the song a vaguely malevolent feel that's eventually lightened by Coleman's inviting vocals. Subtle touches of tuned percussion on "In a Lovesong" takes the song to a higher level.

Elsewhere, rubbery basslines are executed in an assertive manner that provides the songs with a deep groove. "Follow What Brings You" is built upon a countrified foundation, but once the full instrumentation kicks in, it's anything but country. Distorted, wah-wah guitar makes an appearance deep in the mix in the song's second half.

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Smart bets: Amandla

Posted on November 11, 2014 by Kat McReynolds



Power, or "Amandla," exists in "every fiber of the living experience," according to Claude Coleman Jr. (formerly of Ween), who christened his band with the Zulu word. In live format, the psych-soul rocker takes on frontman and guitar duties alongside fellow Ashevilleans Jon Lauterer (drums), Rachel Waterhouse (keys, vocals) and Dave Gilbert (guitar, vocals). In the recording studio, Coleman morphs into a one-man band, playing all instruments, engineering and producing his own songs. In anticipation of Amandla's upcoming album release, Coleman and company will perform *Laughing Hearts* in its entirety for the first time ever. Local bands [The Toothe](#) (psychedelic folk) and [Press](#) (guitar-driven rock) open the show at The Mothlight on Saturday, Nov. 15, at 9:30 p.m. \$10/12. themothlight.com. Photo courtesy of Coleman

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About Kat McReynolds
 Kat studied entrepreneurship and music business at the University of Miami and earned her MBA at Appalachian State University. Follow me @katmAVL
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The album's title track may be *Laughing Hearts'* most inviting number, but all of the songs are memorable. "Summer Road" rocks at a speedy tempo, with sinewy lead guitar lines weaving in and out of the mix. All of the tunes here reward repeated listens; the songs seem to reveal their charms coyly.

Throughout the album, Coleman's vocals exude a perfect balance of silky, expressive soulfulness and edginess. The slide and pedal steel guitars that weave in and out of *Laughing Hearts'* hypnotic songs may remind some listeners of post-Beatles George Harrison or even classic country.

Coleman's songwriting walks a tightrope between the heady vibe of jam/electronica and the indelible hooks of '70s soul and even '80s power pop. His judicious use of synthesizers and other sonic textures are always applied in service of the songs.

A staggeringly gifted artist, Coleman handles all singing, writing and playing on *Laughing Hearts*. Live onstage, he plays guitar and fronts a band assembled to play Amandla's music. The accessible, swirling vibe of *Laughing Hearts* should translate well to the concert stage.

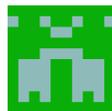
WHO: Amandla album release party for *Laughing Hearts*

WHERE: Salvage Station, 466 Riverside Drive, www.salvagestation.com

WHEN: Thursday, March 2, 9 p.m.



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About Bill Kopp

Music journalist, historian, collector, and musician. In that order? Perhaps. My book, "Reinventing Pink Floyd: From Syd Barrett to The Dark Side of the Moon," will be published in 2018 by Rowman & Littlefield. Follow me @the_musoscribe

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Ween's Claude Coleman Jr releasing a new Amandla album (stream a track)

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Former **Ween** drummer **Claude Coleman Jr** (who's also worked with Eagles of Death Metal, Butthole Surfers, Jeff Pinkus, John Medeski and more) is set to release a new album with his solo band **Amandla** later this year. It's called *Laughing Hearts* and follows his 2006 sophomore album *The Full Catastrophe*. Its newest single, the title track, pulls a bit from classic soul, jazz guitar and alternative rock, the kind of diverse mix you probably expect from a Ween member. It premieres here and can be streamed below. Live dates are TBA too, so stay tuned to see if he hits NYC.

Meanwhile, his former bandmate Geen Ween (or Aaron Freeman) will be in NYC this week when his band **FREEMAN**'s tour hits **Bowery Ballroom on Saturday (10/4)** with **Arc Iris**. [Tickets](#) for that show are still available.

The **Dean Ween Group** are also touring, hitting NJ and NYC right around Halloween time.

Stream the new Amandla song below:

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Ween Drummer Claude Coleman Jr. Unveils Solo Project Amandla's Shimmering New Single "Summer Road"

Mike Mehalick September 9, 2014 News No Comments



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No stranger to the Asbury Park scene, the endlessly talented Claude Coleman Jr. made his name behind the kit with the genre-defying Ween. Since Gene Ween went off to pursue solo interests, Claude has been seen playing with Little Dickman Records' **TV Tramps** and NJ's **Kid Is Qual**.

Gestating over that period of time has been the forthcoming 3rd LP under his Amandla moniker which sees Claude wearing the hats of singer-songwriter, engineer/producer, and performer of all the instruments. Not unlike the creative output of Ween, the artist paints drawing from a large palette of soul/folk/rock/psych influences.

The first exciting tease of what to expect when *Laughing Hearts* drops later this year comes in the form of single "Summer Road". On the track, Coleman Jr. establishes a shimmering, buoyant sound driven by propulsive percussion, winding keys, and churning pop rock guitars.

If for some reason you haven't already started listening to "Summer Road" below, stop wasting time and do so.


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Singled Out: amandla's Talking Sweet (Ween)

12/30/2014

Long-time Ween drummer Claude Coleman Jr.'s solo project amandla have just released the single "Talking Sweet" from their forthcoming album, "Laughing Hearts" and today Claude tells us about the track. Here is the story:

I'm a big Lindsey Buckingham fan, and fingerpicky, gangly Buckingham guitar bits have ended up in all my songs since about forever. I had been playing the front end of the chorus on guitar for a while before any other part of the song was written. It was nice to play; the energy of it was sweet but kind beat up and sad.

Originally, the tempo was twice as fast and I cut the track live with a band at this faster tempo. I experimented and brought it way back and found the pace there. It felt more stumbling to me, like the person in the tune and better matched the anger of the verses. It was less sun - more grease and dirt. Also, it fattened up Peter Kaufmann's drums.

"Friends will laugh like lovers, then war like gangs in the heat" is something everyone can probably relate to. "So duck or run for covers, before he's talking sweet" is all about when someone acting nice becomes a signal for you to run for the hills. And it must be noted that I say "run for 'covers' not "cover" because it felt really ridiculous to sing that and mean the blankets, like "run for covers!"

Hearing is believing. Now that you know the story behind the song, listen for yourself [here](#) and learn more about the project and the album [right here!](#)

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Westword

"COMMON-FUCKING-SENSE TRUMPS EGO": EXCLUSIVE WITH CLAUDE COLEMAN OF WEEN

BY ADAM PERRY

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2016 | 8 DAYS AGO



Drummer Claude Coleman says fans should “expect a bloodletting” at Ween’s reunion shows.

Ween, the ever-experimental and edgy Philadelphia rock band, is back. With frontman **Gene Ween** (born Aaron Freeman) in recovery from substance abuse, the brilliantly oddball group will play three shows this weekend at **1STBANK Center**, and the list of subsequent dates is growing. Other than a statement last fall and a recent Facebook post from **Dean Ween** (né Mickey Melchiondo), which promised that the three Broomfield shows will include 94 songs and no repeats, Ween’s reunion – according to its management company – has been interview-free.

Unless, of course, you ask the drummer.

Claude Coleman Jr., Ween’s drummer since 1993 and the singer of such refined classics as “Put the Coke on My Dick” and “Deez Nutz,” experienced a near-fatal car accident in 2002, and despite that obstacle and his previous intimations that life in Ween might not be all “Chocolate and Cheese,” he seems more than ready to perform with the band again.

When Coleman is asked if he was more surprised by the upcoming reunion than he was by

Freeman announcing his retirement in 2012, he replies, “Boognish almightily rose through the smoldering, smoking cracks of subterranean Earth and into the sky, and slapped Gene and Dean upside their heads with 25 feet of flaccid penis and told them to get their shit together. In other words, the universe more or less initiated the return of Ween.”

And off we go.

“I think everyone felt the return was an inevitability,” Coleman continues. “If you’ve got a business and people are lining up for miles and miles, waiting year after year on the street for you to just open and sell to them, eventually common-fucking-sense trumps ego, and you open the door to...make the world happy while feeding your family in the process. Musicians can be so self-important and uptight. There’s an old joke: ‘How do you make a musician complain? Get him a gig!’”

Denver fans aren’t complaining that these reunion gigs are happening here, but the question persists among Ween’s audience: What’s the connection between the band and Colorado?

“Colorado has always had big love for Ween,” Coleman says. “I would bet we could pull off a residency at **Red Rocks**. As far as why Denver – well, our last shows as a band were at the Fillmore, so it seems a fitting place to pick back up, I reckon. That, and you have awesome edible medicinals for stress.”

Coleman adds that “the band as players are in the best form of our lives,” and he urges fans to “expect a bloodletting.” No new Ween album is in the works just yet, as “everyone’s easing back into things.”

Easing back into playing together includes figuring out the balance of having fun and staying healthy physically and mentally.

“I can’t speak for anyone else’s mental and physical well-being,” he says. “For me, I’ll be in recovery for the rest of my life trying to reclaim feeling on the lost side of my body, working to overcome chronic pain and paralysis. It took a painful while to re-acclimate to playing three-hour Ween shows again, so while I’ve sort of figured it out, I’m still trying to get another .03 percent more control of my body so as not to smash my knuckles open into everything from the loss of sensation. It’s a challenge I’m down for.”





Asked about the anticipation that the bandmembers and their fans are feeling, Coleman gushes, imagining those first moments back on stage.

“We’re doing so much rehearsal work, overcoming a lot of emotional strife, drama...wading through a pond of poo to get to the flowery meadow under a blue sky and open sun. That moment when we’ll walk out, everything will be love and magic, and, yeah, I imagine there’ll be an ovation for like twenty minutes. Which will be intense. It’ll bury all the bullshit; it’ll squash everything and anything else there is, and we’ll be under a roar of love and appreciation that you can’t walk away from or pretend to be unaffected by.”

Despite the talk of standing ovations, Coleman ultimately focuses on the fans: “It should be powerfully humbling, an acknowledgement that no one of us is more important than the music, than any music, and how it serves people’s lives. It’s the kind of lesson and moment you receive once in a lifetime.”

Ween

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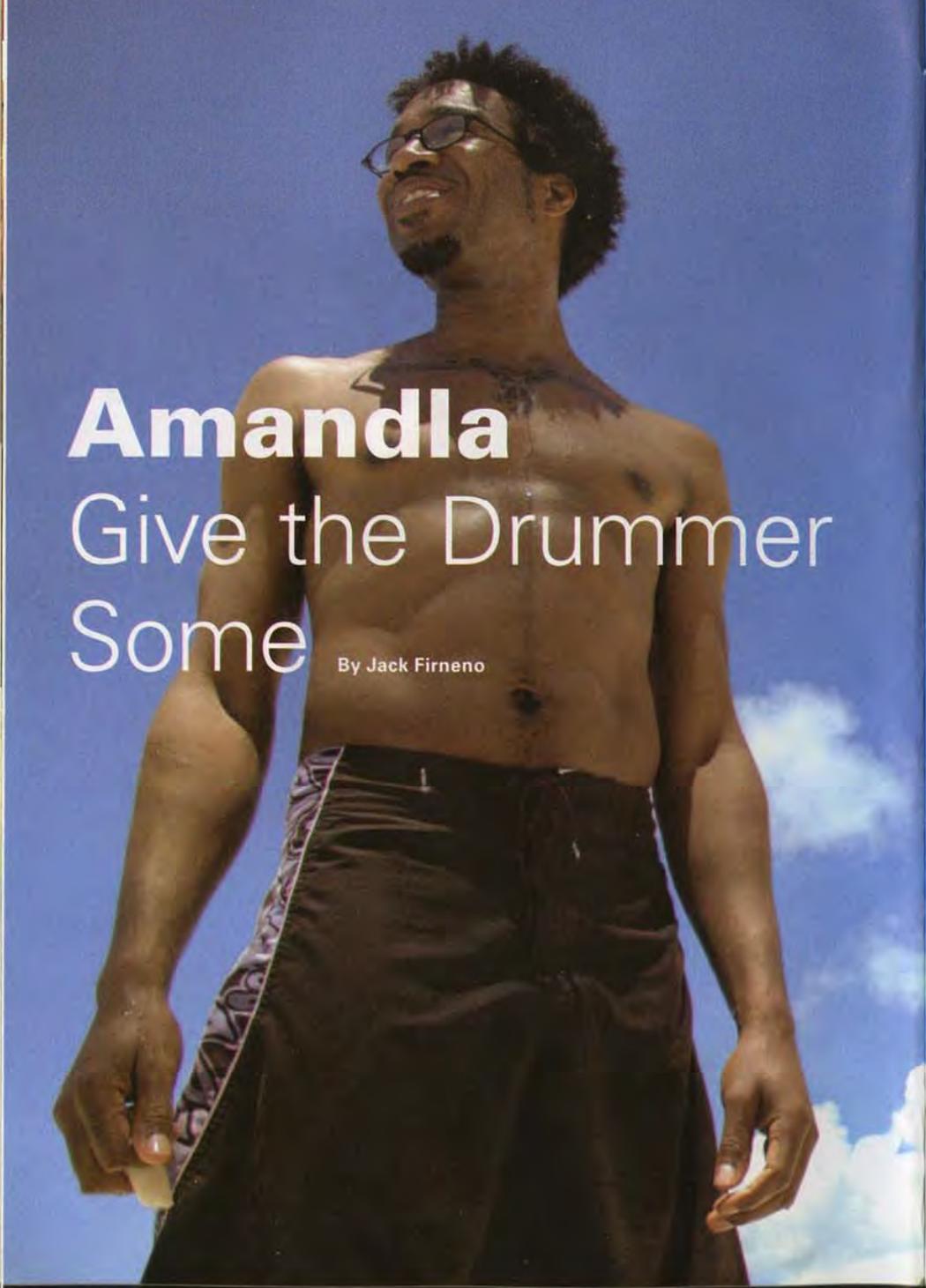
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Amandla

Give the Drummer Some

By Jack Firreno

"It can get a bit schizo, trying to figure out your identity. I just take the easy route and look at myself as a musician before anything."

— Claude Coleman Jr.

Photos Courtesy of Ila Couch and Jesse Lirola

Claude Coleman Jr.'s nearly 20-year tenure as the drummer of Ween may be the most prolific aspect of his career, but it's hardly the whole story. With the upcoming release of his third solo album under the name Amandla, he plans to bring the full scope of his talents to as many people as he can. "I'm feeling really great about the music I've been writing, more than I ever have before in terms of making music," says Coleman, who is currently shopping the album to record labels rather than releasing it independently as he did with his first two offerings. "Now is my time to really get it out there."

Trading in the playful, sardonic rock of Ween for ethereal, jazz-influenced singer-songwriter fare, Coleman not only writes all the songs for Amandla but also plays nearly every instrument on the records. "I've been writing and recording music since I was 16," he explains. "It was a matter of practicality. I didn't know many musicians, so it was easier for me to write, arrange and record everything myself on a four-track cassette recorder in my basement. It was great self-education."

Although his first instrument is the drums, Coleman became versatile on guitar and bass in a series of bands early in his career. "It can get a bit schizo, trying to figure out your identity," he admits. "I just take the easy route and look at myself as a musician before anything. I'm a drummer primarily, but I play for the sake of the music. I like to embellish songs with elements that come out on the drums, but ultimately, it's about what fits the song."



Armed with a renaissance man's mentality and the skills to match, Coleman's career has also found him behind the kit for acts ranging from the jazz-and jam-band-minded John Medeski to the blaring rock of the Eagles of Death Metal. He's also composed music for MTV and the Sundance Channel and ran a few recording studios.

His first Amandla album, *Falling Alone*, was released in 2001. Its follow-up, *The Full Catastrophe*, was delayed for nearly five years after Coleman was involved in a near-fatal car accident during its production in 2002. "I was rear-ended by a truck and hospitalized for about 40 days," he recalls. "It was a crazy situation. I literally had to re-learn everything: how to talk, swallow, speech patterns and how to play music."

As derailing as the accident was, it also forced Coleman to rethink his career. "Up until then, I was writing and making the Amandla records for fun. But after the accident, I turned my

attention deeper toward what I was writing. I wanted to do it more – while I still had legs to walk on," he says.

Coleman, who was playing drums and singing onstage with Amandla to that point, took to a new instrument. "I used the opportunity to make it an ongoing therapy session for me," he explains. "I realized I'd reacquire my skills faster if I was the front-person and playing guitar. Now it's addictive. I put on the guitar and can't take it off. I'll walk around with it for hours, ready to play. Plus, you get to showcase your fine threads, which you can't do behind the drums," he adds, with a laugh.

Still gigging and touring with Ween, Coleman is looking forward to his next chance to take Amandla on the road. "Every single time I play in front of people I can feel the reaction from people listening to it," he says. "It keeps me going and adds fuel to my passion." **dit**

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Amandla

A Drummer Takes Center Stage



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PHOTO BY TOM GRIMES

Claude Coleman

You can't get much closer to the concept of music as life than Ween's longtime drummer Claude Coleman, who came back from a near-fatal auto accident in 2002 that caused multiple pelvic fractures and traumatic brain injuries resulting in paralysis of the left side of his body. After a 35-day hospitalization, two months of wheelchair confinement, and full-time cognitive and physical therapy, he was playing again, and now he's doing it all: carpenter and composer, singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, studio owner, engineer, producer, teacher, writer, web designer. How real is music? "It's soul nutrition and soul expression," says Coleman, who has a tattoo of 'f-holes' on his back that make his body the symbolic "conduit for all the music and creative energy" flowing through him, whether with Ween or his own group Amandla. Of Amandla's second release, *The Full Catastrophe*, which reflects his recovery, he says "it's about the enormity of being alive."

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A Second Chance to Rock

CLAUDE COLEMAN JR. OF WEEN
PERFORMS WITH AMANDLA

Andy Lassiter
Contributing Writer

Though he's usually playing music in sold-out arenas, Claude Coleman Jr., drummer from bizarre rock band Ween, is coming to the Pour House this Friday, June 18. Many rock fans know Ween as a sometimes outrageous, often off-color underground rock band from Pennsylvania. For this gig however, fresh off the stage from this weekend's Bonnaroo Festival, Coleman will take center stage as front man and lead guitarist to present his unique blend of psychedelic indy-rock improvisation and soulful songwriting.

Though Coleman is also known for his instrumental work with Eagles of Death Metal, Chocolate Genius, and **continued on pg. 9**



LIFEunscripted



By
Katie Wells

Wear Sunscreen & Other Advice

Dear 2010 Graduates,

Welcome to your future! Congratulations on your achievement, now get ready for reality. The celebratory moment doesn't last long before your parents and other folks start to ask the inevitable question, "What are you going to do with your life?" The day I graduated college my parents hugged me, then said, "I hope you've got a job because you are on your own now." That was pretty scary. But the experience helped shape me and determine the course of my future. I went out and got a job I hated to pay the bills. You can learn a lot from a job you hate. It builds character and teaches you what you don't want to do. It makes you appreciate doing a job you love and it teaches you the difference. My best advice for your future is to figure out what will make you happy every day. The time you spend doing it

is so much more precious than the paycheck you will take home. Stuff is just stuff. It fills our storage closets and takes up space, but your experiences will last a lifetime. Other than that, I share with you one of my favorite poems filled with sage advice. Good luck out there!

Some of the most practical advice I have ever heard comes from the poem, "Wear Sunscreen," by Mary Schmich. Here's an abridged version. If I could offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it. The long-term benefits of sunscreen have been proved by scientists. Whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own meandering experience. I will dispense this advice now.

Enjoy the power and beauty of your youth. You will not understand the power and beauty of your youth until they've faded. But trust me, in 20 years, you'll look back at photos of yourself and recall in a way you can't grasp now how much possibility lay before you and how fabulous you really looked.

Don't worry about the future. OK worry, but know that worrying is as effective as trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubble gum. The real troubles in your life are apt to be things that never crossed your worried mind, the kind that blindsides you at 4 p.m. on some idle Tuesday.

Do one thing every day that scares you. Sing. Don't be reckless with other people's hearts. Don't put up with people who are reckless with yours. Floss. Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and, in the end, it's only with yourself.

Stretch. Don't feel guilty if you don't know what you want to do with your life. The most interesting people I know didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting 40-year-olds I know still don't.

Enjoy your body. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or of what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own. Get to know your parents. You never know when they'll be gone for good. Be nice to your siblings. They're your best link to your past and the people most likely to stick with you in the future.

Understand that friends come and go, but with a precious few you should hold on. Work hard to bridge the gaps in geography and lifestyle, because the older you get, the more you need the people who knew you when you were young.

Don't expect anyone else to support you. Maybe you have a trust fund. Maybe you'll have a wealthy spouse. But you never know when either one might run out. Don't mess too much with your hair or by the time you're 40 it will look 85.

Be careful whose advice you buy, but be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of nostalgia. Dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it's worth.

But trust me on the sunscreen. ☁️

Katie Wells is a national speaker and owner of K.E.W. Solutions, Inc. www.kewsolutionsinc.com. Follow her on Twitter at [katieEwells](https://twitter.com/katieEwells) or email her at Katie@kewsolutionsinc.com.

A SECOND CHANCE TO ROCK CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Elysian Fields, in his latest side project, Amandla, Coleman departs from his percussive roots as Ween's drummer to focus on a different style of music. Named after the African word from the Zulu language meaning "the power," Amandla is a bold shift toward his more meaningful songs and virtuoso level of guitar play. As the main songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer, Coleman is the guiding force behind the melodic roots-rock sound of the band and their albums.

Joined by Dave Gilbert (guitar), Chip Moore (bass, vocals), Peter Kaufman (drums), and Zenon Zadavec (keys), Coleman has been performing with Amandla for nearly ten years. Their latest release, *The Full Catastrophe* (2006), came in the wake of a devastating car accident, which proved nearly fatal for Coleman. Coleman produced and performed on the tracks while recovering from broken bones, a shattered pelvis, and multiple brain injuries. The *Full Catastrophe* has received great reviews and been acclaimed a "minor masterpiece."

His recovery has come out nothing short of amazing. After being told by a neurologist he would have to work twice as hard to regain the specialized motor skills needed for playing, he has done just that. Coleman has made a powerful comeback after nearly ten years of rehab and relearning instruments. These days, in spite of the obstacles, he's on the road with Ween and touring with Amandla in support of their third release, *Laughing Hearts*, to be released late this summer.

Be sure and catch this highly regarded touring act as they come through Charleston this Friday at the Pour House. In addition, Amandla will be supported by two other nationally touring rock bands, True Widow from Dallas, Texas, and Bad Dream from Brooklyn, New York.

The show starts at 10 p.m. The Pour House is located at 1977 Maybank Hwy. Tickets are \$8 and can be purchased at the door.

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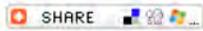
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On Tour And On Stage: 9 Lives (+9, +9 More)
(January 2010 Issue)



On Tour And On Stage: 9 Lives (+9, +9 More). MD's editors just can't keep a list of their favorite albums short--even in service of a can't-resist pun. Twenty-seven live albums you gotta have.

The classic live album can cement a drummer's reputation, boost a band's career--even define a musical style. We planned to give you nine classics of the genre, but we had so much fun we couldn't stop there...

1. **Clifford Brown And Max Roach** At Basin Street (Max Roach)
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3. **John Coltrane** Live At The Village Vanguard (Elvin Jones)
4. **The Who** Live At Leeds (Keith Moon)
5. **James Brown** Sex Machine Live (Clyde Stubblefield, John "Jabo" Starks, Melvin Parker)
6. **Emerson Lake & Palmer** Welcome Back My Friends To The Show That Never Ends, Ladies And Gentlemen (Carl Palmer)
7. **Bob Marley** Babylon By Bus (Carlton Barrett)
8. **Led Zeppelin** How The West Was Won (John Bonham)
9. **Deep Purple** Made In Japan (Ian Paice)

Second Set

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18. **Slipknot** 9.0: Live (Joey Jordison)

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Rocking on Two Fronts After a Near-Fatal Crash

By TAMMY LA GORCE

JERSEY CITY

THE last thing he remembers is this: it was a hot day, and he was in a Hoboken nightclub hanging fliers to promote a gig by his band Amandia. He looked out a window and saw a parking-meter reader heading for his car. To avoid a ticket, he scrambled out the door, ready to call it a day. The next morning he would be heading out on a cross-country tour with his other, better-known band, Ween.

When Claude Coleman Jr. woke up four days later, he was in a Newark hospital's critical-care unit with partial paralysis, a pelvis fractured in six places and brain damage. A truck had struck his car on I-78 West, sending it careening across the median and through several lanes of traffic; his wife and parents were unable to locate him for two days.

That was in 2002, and Mr. Coleman, 37, still feels a tingling numbness through his left side, he said recently at a cafe near his home in Jersey City. The truck driver who struck his car four years ago, Dimitrios S. Tseperkas, was involved last month in an accident on the New Jersey Turnpike that killed four people and injured four others. He was charged with careless driving and equipment violations.

Mr. Coleman received a settle-

ment of \$850,000 in a civil suit after his accident. Even after years of rehabilitation, he said, "my balance is affected, so when I'm walking I still have to focus on every step."

Still, he was out of commission as a musician for only six months. "After what I went through, the music has greater importance to me," he said. "I know I have to push it, to follow through, to play it and get it out there."

While he continues to drum for Ween (and was touring with them earlier this month), Amandia, which was formed in 1999, is his vehicle of choice, the four-piece band he leads as singer-guitarist with Dan Green on bass, Peter Kaufman on drums and Francis Pisani on guitar; all are from Jersey City. This month, he is releasing "The Full Catastrophe," its second record and the first since Mr. Coleman's accident.

"I'm all over the map," said Mr. Coleman, tall and athletic looking. "There's some Curtis Mayfield-type stuff in there, some Sabbath-y stuff, some folky-dirty Fleetwood Mac," he said. "I call it soul-folky-rock-psychedelia. The way I approach making music, everything gets regurgitated."

It is a concept not unfamiliar to Ween fans. In its 22-year history, the experimental act has consistently offended purists and tested the faithful

with its leaps from pop to classic rock to glam to R & B and hard core. But Ween's deliberately snarky side does not translate to Amandia, a name Mr. Coleman chose, he said, because it means power in Zulu.

After 12 years of drumming, "Ween is my job, what pays the bills, even though those guys are like family and I love playing the music," he said. With Amandia, which will be touring later this fall, "I get to be a charmer — I'm good with people, I'm a social animal, and I like that part of it."

The playing, he admitted, doesn't come as easily, especially since the accident. "With the guitar, there's a fine dexterity required between your fingers and your wrists," he said. "The individual finger stuff has been the most difficult for me."

Nevertheless, Mr. Coleman considers himself "a really strong rhythm guitarist, if I don't say so myself."

But having had his outlook permanently rewired, he harbors no illusions.

"Everybody thinks I'm a rock star and that people are going to show up by the masses when I play, like I'm Prince or something," he said reflectively. "Much to the chagrin of promoters, that doesn't happen. We've had some supersleeper shows. But building myself up is what it's all about."



DUAL ROLE
Claude Coleman Jr. drums with Ween and fronts Amandia.

Jim Cummins for The New York Times

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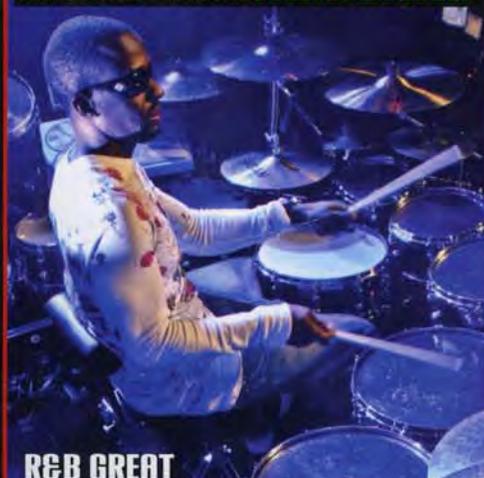
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CLAUDE COLEMAN JR. Ween

My time spent when I'm touring is best described as a veritable tsunami of creative, industrial, and life-oriented pursuits, mostly having little to do specifically with playing drums and more to do with the grand art of living, and having an unquenchable thirst for its experiences.

In between full-time everyday renovation of my 200-year-old colonial home in rural Hunterdon County, New Jersey, of which I'm doing all the carpentry and construction work for, I'm constantly writing and recording new music on every instrument for my group Amandla, doing Web/graphic design for myself and others, teaching rock to the whiz kids at the School Of Rock in New York, continuing physical therapy and bodywork from a near-fatal car accident I had six years ago, and taking as many trips as possible with my beautiful wife, Ila, back to New Zealand, the place of her birth and home of my extended family.

The drumset is a musical instrument dictated by its inherent physicality, and is similar to wind instruments like sax or trumpet, where the body and soul is the sound, the voice, and the character of the music you create. I am a firm believer in having a wide range of skills, talents, and life experiences to incorporate into the voice of my drumming. Get all your fingers dipped in many pies!





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Features

Amandla - The Songs of Claude Coleman Jr.

By Shane Handler-
April 28, 2008

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Although most music fans are only familiar with **Claude Coleman Jr.**, as the drummer for Ween. Little do they know that he's created an intriguing body of work with his soul-rock group Amandla. The band's sophomore release, *The Full Catastrophe*, is the result of a four year journey for Coleman following a 2002 horrific car accident that left him having to reacquire his abilities and motor skills to play instruments again.

However, the drums are only part of Coleman's musical resume, as Coleman plays every instrument on *The Full Catastrophe*. The album's title is inspired by both the words from Zorba the Greek and meditation teachings of Dr. Jon-Kabat Zinn for living with stress caused by pain and illness. Coleman has battled back from the brink, while incorporating a record full of limitless emotions.

Coleman is an extraordinary drummer for Ween, as his beat keeping form the backbone of the band's diverse styles and compositions. Amandla is a broader reflection of that – both lyrically powerful and stylistically adventurous. Coleman recently spoke with *Glide* about his multi-instrumental prowess, playing with Dean and Gene and tacking the road to recovery.

Most people who only know you from your work with Ween, would be surprised to hear that in Amandla, you play various other instruments besides drums. Can you talk about your background as a vocalist and multi-instrumentalist and which other instruments are you most adapt at?

I've been playing around with guitar and bass pretty much from my first moments of banging around on the pawn shop drum kit my parents got me for Christmas at the age of 9. My childhood friends and I all became obsessed with music, and we all had different instruments that became interchangeable as we spent our lives together, hanging out and jamming out to Kiss & Rush in the basement. So technically, I've been playing other instruments exactly as long as I've been drumming.

I've played in bands on all those instruments, but drums have always gotten the most stage time and professional work. I started writing songs when I was 15. When I was in college I started to write and record obsessively on four track, creating a terminally eclectic stock of silly tunes that spanned all styles of music. In this regard, Ween and I were living parallel lives.

It was during these years I sort of refined my skills those other instruments, as well as my approach to recording and arranging, and the songs became progressively more serious and thoughtful.

With the exception of keys, guitar bass, vocals & drums were instruments I performed on in working, touring bands. I had a long run with a group called The Wooden Soldiers on bass, and we did several records and a few tours. During that time I was in at least 5 bands playing drums, bass, guitar and singing.

I don't play any other instruments but I can play a bunch of percussion including a little bit of vibes and marimba, which was actually my official music major for my first year of college at Kean University, because they didn't have a drumset major. I've also been built several studios and managed them as an engineer/producer for hire for at least 10 years, and I've always treated the studio as instrument - the conduit for the expression of the song.

I think for most people it's a shortcut to thinking and easier on the brain to just be presumptuous about it; they see me onstage drumming and close the book. Even friends close to me have narrow perceptions of who I am and what I can do. It takes effort and energy to try and understand the complexity of people's lives and who they really are I guess, and it's been a lifelong struggle to break out of the shell; to modify people's perceptions. Amandla will hopefully play a role in redefining all of that; what can I do, who I am, and where I can go.

***The Full Catastrophe* is very peaceful listen that seems to radiate a sense of hope. Can you describe the song-writing process for the record and was there any particular theme or sound in your mind that was involved in its creation?**

Most of the songs on *Catastrophe* were actually written well before the accident, and were half recorded by the time the accident occurred. I also had a new studio that was half-built in my home in West Amwell, NJ. The accident happened, I was thrown into a world of trauma, pain and intensive rehabilitation, so finishing the songs as well as finishing wiring the studio became an instrumental part of regaining and reclaiming my self, soul and motor skills, as best as I could to finish the recording.

It was a conscious decision on my part to include all of these songs, and with the newer material I added to them there was a conspicuous absence of direct references to everything that had happened. I wanted - and needed - a record that gave me joy, hope as well as the pain and the longing that makes any great collection of songs a great record: a celebration of the living experience that could give me escape and take me away from my reality, so perhaps that was the 'theme'. Life as it is; the enormity and emotional range of being alive; *The Full Catastrophe*. The last thing I wanted was to make a record of moping, despondent music to kill yourself to. I wanted something



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that I could play and listen to that be recuperative in the sense that it was almost entirely outside the reality I was dealing with.

And when I play the music it works perfectly to serve that purpose: I still have all this chronic pain and the various disabilities associated with the brain damage, so when I'm performing the tunes become this glorious artistic panacea, eradicating it all, taking me away from it. The music heals me on a nightly basis, and it's beautiful.

So the songs have nothing and everything to do with that accident. The newest song is the title track and first song on the record, and that's the only one that explicitly addressing the experience from a lyrical and emotional standpoint.

Which songs on the album are you most proud of and why?

The title track is special to me because I wrote it at my mum-law's in New Zealand. That country has such a powerfully creative energy everywhere. It's also a tune I wrote completely in my head, without any instrument at all - just out of the ether. I only had just the ideas of what it should be completely in my head, and then pressed record and recorded a drum track, writing down the sections to give this imaginative song in my mind some kind of form. When I had that down, I wrote the lyrics as a poem, and then wrote the music to go with it all. I usually at least have a song written before I attempt to record it, but this was kind of a magical process.

"Before Tomorrow" I'm extremely proud of. I was going for this Beach Boys/Manhattan Transfer thing. I read in Mojo once that Brain Wilson recorded songs like "God Only Knows" for like six months straight, so I spent about 2 weeks on the vocals alone. "

I'm also really happy about "Down By The Way," which is unlike anything I've ever done, taking on an almost jungle feel at the end. It was shaped and created completely on its own terms; it sort of created itself. Then, having the chance to put a legend like Art Barron on slide trombone who's played on Stevie Wonder's *Music of my Mind* was a tremendous experience. I felt like he transferred that Stevie-in-studio mojo my way; it was so honorable to have his presence, and he just killed the solo, just beautiful.



The title - *The Full Catastrophe* is inspired by both the words from Zorba the Greek and meditation teachings of Dr. John Kabat-Zinn for living with stress caused by pain and illness. How did these two inspirations get you through this period of your life?

My sister gave me this book while I was in rehab, and it immediately moved me, but the strength of his teachings has taken greater meaning and influence the more the years go on as I contend with the residual agony of what I've survived through.

Kabat-Zinn (as well as the hapless but hopelessly affable Zorba) teaches us lessons on acceptance as well as courage with grace. We need to accept all the crap along with the positive; it's all the essence of the living experience that makes being alive so precious. In studying his teachings, my already pretty high threshold of pain and discomfort has become limitless. The struggles, tribulations and trials of being alive are exactly the same as life's joys, gifts accomplishments, and with this understanding comes a reduction of the soaring stress on the body that the pain causes, which is great and without rest. I haven't had a day without pain in five years; perhaps for the rest of life I'll be dealing with it, but in accepting and processing the pain I've still found tremendous enjoyment in everything I do.

How difficult was it regaining your motor skills to play drums again and was there a particular rhythm or genre that you drummed to that helped in getting your groove back?

It took about seven months to get to place where drumming wasn't a thought process. For the first few tours with Ween I was smashing my left hand into the drums and cymbals, because the left side of my body is deprived of proper feeling and suffering from paralysis, so my depth perception with the left arm was a guessing game, so every night there was blood everywhere and deep abrasions all over my hand and knuckles, which wasn't that uncommon even before I lost sensation on that side. It wasn't so bad until you smash an open gash about a dozen times a night for a week straight. It goes from an annoying disability to torture, plain and simple.

There was nothing specific that was helpful other than just doing it and doing it as much as possible. Because play just about every style of music the only way reacquire the skills for whichever genre was to just play that genre, that's it.

I'm still working to regain all the finer dexterity that was lost. In a major way, everything single moment of every day is rehab, and continues to be so, until I can get to near 100%.

I'm a strong-minded person, so the whole time when I couldn't move anything or swallow or even talk, I was just biding my time, patiently waiting for the chance to do it again. So it was never for a second an issue of can I, or will I, or how can I. For me it was a matter of time and having to wait - an issue of when.

I hired a trainer during my rehabilitation, so I would do 5 days straight of therapy from 9-3pm, then after that go straight to a gym to work until 8, three days a week. I understood that it was only me that going to determine how long it was going to take to get back to the stage. So if it's up to me, I'm going to be extreme and disciplined about it, and make it happen, period. Victimhood isn't my style.



Your drumming style has been described by fans as acrobatic. Who are your primary drumming influences and is there anything in the drumming/percussion realm you still hope to learn or accomplish?

Drumming influences...Well I started playing drums because of Stewart Copeland - he's wildly energetic, creative and musical which makes for some of my favorite type of drummers. But I'm, also very much a song person, so my favorites are also drummers pulse-makes like Russ Kunkel or Ringo. There are just too many favorites of mine to fit here; we'd have to go genre by genre or something. I draw inspiration from everyone.

I'm still learning from others and everything around me, and I'm an

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information junkie. If I were to say what it might be that I hope to accomplish, it might be to raise my profile as a drummer, because there are a lot of artists I would love to be involved with and share musical experiences with. I'm getting a little weary of the 'best drummer you've never heard' concept. It's creatively stifling.

This, in and of itself is a skill I reckon - to be able to put yourself out there and make people realize your accessibility. The combination of having done this for 20 years and being a bit of homebody works against me; I'm pretty weary of scenesters and networking: I'm more interested in creating scenes rather than trying to be a part of one.

You've been drumming in Ween for over ten years now, how vital do you feel your drumming is to the Ween sound and is there a particular Ween track(s) that feel you had a significant role (more than others) in the song's development?

Over the course of my friendship with the bros I've fell into writing and producer roles just because I was around. Songs like "Mutilated Lips" and "Flutes of the Chi" are songs that Aaron and I recorded alone together at first, with him literally telling me he wanted an "Amandla" production, whatever that means. There may be others I'm forgetting about - those guys have about 7,000,000 songs. But generally the bros operate in a very self-sufficient manner with occasional major assistance here and there.

Again, I'm modest, so I never have felt my drumming was particularly vital to the 'Ween sound' - I play drums, big deal. I just know a lot of brilliant, talented players out there. I've had three fantastic drummers in Amandla. But I do realize that live, its part of the driving musical force that along with the other members make the live shows special. I play with a lot of passion for better or worse, and that seems to affect the shows, who knows.

How did you come up with the band name Amandla or does it mean anything?

I came across the word from the Miles Davis record. It's an attractive word to me with a beautiful melodicism to it. A nice name for a daughter. Then after some research, discovered the word is from the Zulu language meaning "power", and part of the political uprising chant of the African National Congress, and then it took on huge importance to me and to who I am. It was like, right on! I'm all about empowerment as well as uprising. It's a huge name to live up to - kind of like Metallica. You can't really suck with that kind of name. In fact Metallica need to rename themselves and give the name to some deserving band from Sayerville, NJ.



Is Amandla going to be doing any future touring and who can we expect playing in the band?

I'm going to continue touring and touring again until I drop dead on stage at age 94 on a beer-encrusted stage in Lincoln, Nebraska. Post accident I take nothing for granted, and treat each moment like it's my last. I'm just about incapable at this point of not treating each day as if it might be my last.

I'm very committed to Amandla and spreading it out across the land. I won't stop until intergalactic superstardom. I'm having too good a time playing guitar up front, and the reactions have been strong and encouraging. The band is made up of members from New York City, Carversville, PA, Madison, WI and Chapel Hill, NC. They're a group of beautiful players and even more beautiful people. No one that anyone would have heard of, but here are their names: Dave Gilbert, Eli Ward, John Hadfield and Greg Davis. You may have heard of David Lee Roth. He's agreed to rock the glockenspiel.

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- ★★★★☆ Excellent
- ★★★☆☆ Good
- ★★☆☆☆ Fair
- ★☆☆☆☆ Poor



AMANDLA THE FULL CATASTROPHE

★★★★★

Boy, if beat keepers keep putting out albums like this one, there isn't going to be *anybody* left who finds drummer jokes funny anymore. **CLAUDE COLEMAN JR.**, kit man for the magnificent Ween, is the brains, voice, and damn near every sound behind *The Full Catastrophe*, and you can practically feel his total commitment to serious artistic achievement—and, you better believe it, popular success—on these tracks. *The Full Catastrophe* slays in nearly every possible way. The songs, though clearly inspired by rock and R&B's past geniuses (Stevie Wonder and Todd Rundgren immediately come to mind) feature hip arrangements and fresh sounds. The playing is top-notch and grooving like no one-man-band has a right to groove. And, perhaps the biggest surprise, Coleman's vocals are not only deeply expressive, but risk-taking. Ween fans won't have to be convinced that the drumming rules. The rest of you, go directly to "Backdown" to get an inkling of Claude's deep groove—and this from a guy from Newark, not New Orleans. Soon some suit with deep pockets is going to give Amanda a marketing budget, and the rest of the world will know what we're getting all nutty about. (www.amandanet.com) **Joshua Parker**

Sun News, The (Myrtle Beach, SC)

January 11, 2008

Band gives proof of life

Album ends the healing process for lead singer

Author: Mary Erskine, The Sun News

With his latest release "The Full Catastrophe," singer/songwriter Claude Coleman Jr. is out to prove that his life is anything but.

Best known as the drummer for cult favorites Ween, Coleman is currently fronting Amandla, now on tour in support of the album. The band will be performing Saturday at The Clubhouse in Myrtle Beach.

Though catastrophe may have happened to Coleman - a serious accident left him facing years of recovery - the album and the band are on track for success.

The album itself is a milestone, marking the end of the recovery process and serving as evidence of Coleman's recuperation.

"Finishing [The Full Catastrophe] was part of the process, the healing," he said. "I needed that to get past everything I was going through. I didn't want to wallow."

Coleman stresses that the album isn't a post-traumatic work, but rather evidence of how far he's come.

"It's a celebration of sorts, of the act of the living experience and art of living," he said.

Coleman describes the work as an escape, but said there wasn't a definite sound or vibe he had in mind while writing it.

"I took it song by song on their own. It's about individual journeys and adventures. Not predictable," he said.

Coleman's lyrical skill is evident in the tracks on "The Full Catastrophe," with delicious double entendres and quirky asides coupled with solid musicianship.

"Beyond Tomorrow" is dedicated to Coleman's wife, and he looks forward to performing the song while on tour as it brings her to mind when played.

"It's a nice place to go to in the middle of wherever you are," he said.

Though "Beyond Tomorrow" will be part of the setlists while Amandla tours, the rest is up in the air. Coleman said each venue is different and the band will perform songs that fit the vibe of the performance space.

"We may jam or just play the fun stuff. It'll be a mixed bag."

Coleman will be serving as lead singer and guitarist while on tour, a far cry from drumming, which he describes as being the foundation of the band. Performing vocals and guitar allows Coleman to be more expressive.

"I love being the frontman," he said.

Though Coleman will be back at his drum kit touring with Ween at the end of the month, he said the goal of his current tour with Amandla is to make his mark as a singer/songwriter, and gain some respect in his new role.

"I'm just trying to get to the place where I'm not struggling to kind of fit in."

If you go

Amandla with the Old Scobes

Where: The Clubhouse, 510 N. Kings Highway, Myrtle Beach

When: Saturday at 10 p.m.

How much: \$5

626-9058



Give the Drummer Some



Charles Hughes writes:

Claude Coleman, Jr., drummer from Ween, has had enough. Currently in the middle of a national Ween tour, supporting the group's latest album, you'd think Coleman would be basking in the glow of the group's legions of devoted (even fanatical) admirers, who have helped the eclectic pranksters become one of the truest grassroots phenomena in pop music over the last decade-and-a-half. While opinions about the group are justifiably mixed, one thing that is undeniable is their musicianship, and Coleman's expressive, rock-solid drumming is one of the clearest manifestations of that proficiency. Claude Coleman's name and presence behind the kit provokes adulation from the roaring masses, and justifiably so.

Still, Coleman's musical interests and output are not limited to Ween's various projects. For the past three years, Coleman has led his own group, Amandla, essentially a one-man recording project that—on tour—allows Coleman and his own group of musicians to let loose and explore the pop, rock and R&B sounds that fascinate the quietly intense multi-instrumentalist and songwriter. The sounds that Coleman unleashes on Amandla's two records—*Falling Alone* and *The Full Catastrophe*—are just as wildly innovative as those of his bosses, and they are far more affecting, with none of the smirk-and-snark that too often taints even the seemingly sweetest Ween tunes. Particularly with the release of *The Full Catastrophe*, consisting of songs developed by Coleman after a near-fatal car crash, Coleman's Amandla work reveals that he is not only a supremely talented musician, but also a creative artist of vast proportions. In Amandla's live shows, the sweetness and intricacies of Coleman's songs are complemented by the blazing glory of a truly mighty rock-and-soul band, lending the climactic moments of Amandla gigs a thrust that's simultaneously reminiscent of jazz improvisation, gospel church, and arena-rock power.

The trouble is, he's gotten very little love for any of it. There have been essentially no reviews of *The Full Catastrophe*, and the lion's share of the press that Coleman's gotten for anything Amandla-related was connected to the car accident that inspired the newest album. Despite the endless playability of Coleman's tracks, none have received any airplay, nor has the touring version of Amandla shared stages with any of the high-profile musicians (Ben Harper or John Mayer, for example) whose genre-hopping music bears such similarity to Coleman's. Even among those famously "loyal" Ween fans, Amandla is the subject of heated debate: While some give Amandla props and show up at the band's gigs, other Ween-heads offer up nasty dismissals of Coleman's solo work, sometimes with a not insignificant dose of racism. This has led Coleman—who once regularly posted Amandla news on Ween sites—to grow disillusioned with the prospect of trying to excite Ween's fan base, despite the fact that they, theoretically, should be the foundations for Amandla's success.

The fact that Coleman's Amandla projects have received such little fanfare is a major shame, not only for the small-mindedness and unfair ambivalence that it reveals, but also because both Amandla albums, particularly *The Full Catastrophe*, are minor masterpieces, textured tapestries that reveal Coleman's deep ability to write and perform across a variety of musical genres, each of which is unified by Coleman's delicate songcraft and performances. *The Full Catastrophe* sounds like a lost treasure from that wonderful moment in the early 1970s when artists from Stevie Wonder to The Beach Boys

constructed albums that were unafraid to intermingle sounds and sensibilities into a heady pop brew that was rich in daring sophistication and deep soul. Coleman's work has particular precedent with The Isley Brothers, whose 1970s work destroys lines between rock, R&B and pop with an ease that clearly left its mark: Coleman's a huge Isleys fan, and the traces of the legendary group are evident in everything from Coleman's whispery falsetto to preference for fuzz-tone guitar. Coleman's love of pop music extends across eras and genres (he loves Journey, for example), and the innovative musicality that suffuses *The Full Catastrophe* is both grounded in and intensified by the strong melodies (and luscious harmonies) that Coleman sprinkles throughout each song.

The catalog of 1970s influences nestled into the grooves of *The Full Catastrophe* announce themselves from the opening song, "Kiss Me (The Full Catastrophe)," the first lyric of which directly references Joni Mitchell's 1973 song "Help Me," an homage extended throughout Coleman's jazz-inflected tune. "Respectable" is a bright glam-rock strut, "Before Tomorrow" sways in a hazy Pink Floyd groove, and Coleman even integrates country/folk sounds into "Bustop," a fiddle-laced ballad that finds Coleman's voice and lyric at its most naked. Clearly, though, it is 1970s R&B, in all its strains, that provides Coleman with his strongest inspiration. "Right Mind" juxtaposes the pent-up sexuality of Al Green with the easy-lovin' vibe of the Isleys, while "Stoned Love" wafts across the speakers like a buoyant L.A. jam pushed through Detroit's "Quiet Storm." Rather than feeling self-consciously eclectic, though, *The Full Catastrophe* (like its predecessor) instead suggests the personal catholicism of Coleman's listening tastes. It's AM and FM radio unified.

The only thing missing is a full-blast rocker, until—with a listed "bonus track" called "Backdown"—Coleman kicks out the jams, boogie-ing his way through a playful rave-up that provides the rich journey with a perfect, cathartic closer, and Coleman himself with a suitable encore.

Given Coleman's day job, it might initially seem that Amandla is—at best—a sideman's diversion, and—at worst—a vanity project. Nothing could be further from the truth: The musical vision of Claude Coleman, Jr., captured so brilliantly on *The Full Catastrophe*, is at least as deep, and certainly more soulful, than that of his more famous gig. Please visit [Amandla's site](#) and support this highly intriguing work. You won't regret it.

Amandla "[Right Mind](#)" and "[Backdown](#)" from *The Full Catastrophe*

This entry was posted on Monday, December 3rd, 2007 at 9:06 pm and is filed under [Uncategorized](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

3 Responses to "Give the Drummer Some"

1. *mike* Says:

[December 4th, 2007 at 6:02 pm](#)

Nice Amy Rigby reference in the headline!

2. *steve* Says:

[December 4th, 2007 at 7:17 pm](#)

Do i dare point out that it's likely a James Brown reference, or am I missing a joke? Who's Amy Rigby?

3. *Danny Alexander* Says:

[December 20th, 2007 at 7:58 pm](#)

Thanks for the heads up on this!

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Joshua Valocchi

9/25/07

Blog Archive

Amandla featuring Claude Coleman, Jr. of Ween

PLAY Magazine

May 5, 2007



Catastrophic Success

Joshua Valocchi
Contributing Writer



Five years ago, Claude Coleman narrowly survived a horrific car accident that left him partially paralyzed, neurologically traumatized and hospital bed-ridden for 35 days. Tonight his side project, Amandla, headlines a double-bill at West Philadelphia's Mill Creek Tavern. Coleman's story of tragedy-turned-triumph is as inspiring as it is empowering and the fact that he is even able to control basic motor skills is nothing short of a small miracle. That he has rehabilitated himself from both a physical as well as emotional standpoint and is touring in support of Amandla's second full-length album is simply phenomenal.

Despite the overwhelming odds and seemingly insurmountable

• ▼ 2007 (133)

◦ ▼ September (133)

- War on Drugs
- Plastic Little's Dopeness Video
- Gift of Gab
- The Join
- Blue Movie Bingo
- Trouble Everyday
- Vice Magazine's Tales of Colt 45 Party
- Deadstring Brothers
- Okay Paddy
- Catwalk Tragedy
- Soul Food at Bob & Barbara's
- Chromeo
- Puppies Are Biodegradable
- Bring the Truth Home
- Illvibe Collective Saturday Nights
- Manu Chao

obstacles, Coleman has taken his recovery process in stride, even going so far as to quash suggestions that his accomplishments over the past five years might even border on incredible.

"It's such a subjective thing. I can't step away from it and see it from an outsider's perspective. I survived. I'm living - and still living through it - and that's just the cold reality of the situation. People sometimes comment on how amazing my whole recovery is but really, what else can you do after something like that but move on and try to get back to normal?"

Best known as the octopus-like drummer for local cult rockers Ween, Coleman is much more than just a skin-slapper in the Amandla realm. In fact, the accomplished multi-instrumentalist wrote and produced every song on the latest Amandla effort, aptly-titled *The Full Catastrophe*, and plays every instrument on the record. When the band takes the stage tonight, he'll be the one at the mic with the Fender strapped over his shoulder.

The Full Catastrophe is definitely not a Ween album - not by any stretch of the imagination. Like Ween, Amandla's music cuts a wide swath across a variety of musical genres, reflecting Coleman's broad aural palette. Unlike Ween, however, Amandla's songs tend to shy away from absurd lyrics and carnival-esque instrumentation. Instead, Coleman sticks slightly closer to tradition, employing a basic guitar-led, rhythm-backed model to craft soulful rock that leans closer to '70s-era singer-songwriter material dipped in Sly Stone's sweet honey than Ween's over-the-top antics and tongue-in-cheek lyricism.

To that end, Coleman admits that his connection with the brothers Ween is a perfect example of the proverbial dual-edged sword. "Obviously the name recognition helps as far as drawing people out to the shows. On the other hand, if people come to an Amandla show expecting to hear Ween, well, that just ain't gonna happen, you know?" Despite conceding the possibility of facing a crowd that harbors false expectations, Coleman is quick to point out that Ween fans tend to be smarter than the average bear.

"The Ween expectations are, well, expected. It's not surprising. The way I see it, I'm out there reintroducing myself to people. It's a natural progression. I'm once again establishing myself and, let's face it, Ween fans have a fairly broad range of musical tastes. It's pretty much a requirement for entry."

Coleman also relies on lessons learned from recent history to guide his philosophy regarding anticipating audiences. "People who go to see a Dave Grohl show don't walk in expecting a show full of Nirvana covers, do they?"

Although Coleman earned his chops and most of his "fame" as a member of Ween, his affiliations with other lesser-known musicians may have had a stronger influence on the musical stylings evident in Amandla's songs. Coleman's tenure with *Chocolate Genius*, a soul outfit fronted by the Basquiat-like Marc Anthony Thompson, clearly affected Coleman's approach to songwriting. Several tracks on *The Full Catastrophe* bear elements of Thompson's thoughtful lyrical technique.

- Dawson Street Pub
Sundays
- Tommy Guerrero
- The Teeth
- Mad Dragon Records
- Ocean's 13
Soundtrack
- Hellcat Girls
- UNDRCRWN
- Wheat
- Lavender Diamond
- Brand New Heavies
- Panda Bear
- Talib Kweli
- Ryan Adams
- Icky Thump
- Lifesavas
- Mice Parade
- KRS-One & Marley
Marl
- Arts and Business
Council Awards
- Black Heritage
Festival
- Whistle w/ DJ Q-
Bert
- Where's Me Booty
- !!!
- KRS-One

Coleman not only admits to embracing aspects of Thompson's style, he makes no bones about his attitude toward the man himself.

"Marc is simply one of the heaviest human beings alive. He's so honest and sincere and that shines through in his music and writing. I also take a lot of my cues from him as far as executing as a performer is concerned. Working with him in Chocolate Genius gave me the unique opportunity to observe night after night how he simply controls every centimeter of a room from his position on the stage."

When it comes to his philosophy of performing for a crowd, Coleman is brutally honest about the role played by the crowd as an equal participant in the concert.

"I'm the kind of performer who feeds off of other people's energy. It's really a simple matter of reciprocity. If I feed them energy and they send it back in return, the cycle continues and the energy builds and snowballs all night long. When that doesn't happen, the show just gets cold and impersonal and it becomes kind of a drag. That's the only time when this whole thing even begins to feel like it's just a J-O-B.

Musicians are out there to affect people spiritually and emotionally. If that doesn't happen or if it just doesn't matter, well, then you're in the wrong field." Despite all of his talk about making spiritual connections, affecting people's emotions and tugging at collective heartstrings, Coleman has certainly not forgotten about the key to the art of rock: the electric guitar solo.

"My solos have really been improving all of the time. I aim very high and play way too much in the hope that 48% of the solo is incredible fucking guitar work. Eventually, I'll skew the law of averages enough so that a majority of the solos are top-notch. I'm a guitar geek. I love to talk about guitars, play guitar, talk guitar shop. I may be known as a drummer but I have seven guitars and one drum kit."

Perhaps it may take some time - and more work on the wanking - before Amandla achieves Ween status; the kind of status that brings with it large cash guarantees at every stop on the tour, five-star lodging, a comfortable tour bus and green rooms stocked with Cristal and caviar. Until that time, though, Coleman doesn't seem to mind foregoing the creature comforts and slumming it for a bit.

"Piling in a van and driving cross country is how I grew up in rock and roll. When I started playing shows, it was the heyday of independent music and that was how you lived. It's the way it was. Interestingly enough, I find it more fun now just breaking it down to the bare essence and bringing more of a gang feel to the band. When it comes down to it, I'll pile all of my gear into the back of a station wagon if need be. I'm fuckin' old school."

Posted by Joshua Valocchi at 7:00 PM

- Geek Fight!
- Deadstring Brothers
- When You Gonna Learn? World Hunger Benefit
- Amandla featuring Claude Coleman, Jr. of Ween
- David Vandervelde & Richard Swift
- Black Gold
- Hip-Hop Lives
- Godspell
- Will Bernard Band
- Bonde Do Role
- Klaxons @ Making Time
- Diplo @ Reading Terminal Market
- Impossible Shapes
- Rocks and Glocks Exhibit @ Bambi Gallery
- Black Landlord
- Sean Agnew - R5 Productions
- Mr. Gay Philadelphia
- Harlem Globetrotters



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Q&A: Claude Coleman Jr.

Q&A: Claude Coleman Jr.

An online exclusive interview with the Ween drummer and Amandia frontman



Claude Coleman, photograph by ECJ / Amandia, live photograph by Christopher Gagliardi

Friday, February 23, 2007

Q&A: Claude Coleman Jr.

By Drew Fortune

Claude Coleman Jr. is paying his dues. The versatile multi-instrumentalist and longtime Ween drummer is traveling the US with his backing band on a 26-stop, bi-coastal tour in support of *The Full Catastrophe*, the second album from his passion project Amandia. Meaning power in the Zulu language, Amandia is a pastiche of genres and musical styles, with a drive geared toward rock and soul. The gigs are small and the harsh, Midwest winter is menacing. But Coleman is on a quest to establish Amandia as its own musical entity, sans the Ween association. I caught up with Claude during the band's stop in Chicago, and began by asking how he first became acquainted with Aaron and Mickey, a.k.a. Dean and Gene Ween.

"When I first met those guys, it was just the two of them making music with a DAT tape," Coleman recalls. "It was the most heinous shit, but it was also the best shit ever. Back then, they were many pranksters, making music and doing good amounts of quality drugs. They were a lot of fun to be with and just insane. I didn't really get close to them until I started crashing on their couch when they were doing *The Pod* record in 1991. I took acid for two straight weeks, by myself, in this old barn with flies buzzing all around me. To this day, I still remember how fat my stomach was, but they did

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material for what would eventually become the critically acclaimed debut album, *Falling Alone*.

"I always recorded a lot of 4-track music in my basement, and around 1993 I had half of that record done," he said. "The songs were written, but I was so broke and had no way to record them properly. So I held onto them and continued to tour and record with Ween throughout the Nineties. In 1999, I had a friend working as an engineer at Waterfront Studios in Hoboken, which was Lenny Kravitz's first studio, and I got to record and work there for free. We went through crates of amps and guitars, and ended up using lots of Lenny's stuff."

After a brief relocation to London following his marriage in 1999, Coleman returned to Jersey three years later. Soon after, he was involved in a horrific, debilitating car accident near Hoboken. His pelvis was shattered in six places and he suffered severe brain damage, rendering the left side of his body numb and immobile.

"I don't really remember anything," he said. "I was parked at a meter and eating a slice of pizza. I don't have any clear recollection of when I woke up. Anything that I know about the accident is what I've read from police reports. I consider it to be a major blessing that I don't have any of that shit in my unconscious to feed any anxieties or nightmares. Every day was a milestone. I was so completely fucked up that I wasn't depressed. I was in too much pain and trauma to have any way to process what was happening."

For several weeks, Claude struggled to breathe and focus his vision, while trying in vain to muster the strength to simply shift his body in bed. Much of this time is a complete blur for him, though speculation about his condition was buzzing on the Internet.

"When I finally gained consciousness, my automatic personality kicked in. I'm a naturally entertaining kind of bloke, and I remember being really jovial with the people who came to visit. My room was covered with cards and balloons from family, friends and fans. I remember trying to convince the hospital staff that I was Jay-Z's cousin, but they didn't believe me. Everyone in the band was so supportive, and the fans were incredible."

Two months later, to mark the anniversary of the accident and help pay Coleman's extensive hospital bills, family, friends and bandmates organized several benefit concerts at New York's Bowery Ballroom. Having clawed out of the abyss, Claude came to the realization that he would have to write off that year, or the next couple of years. Five years later, he has not made a complete physical recovery, and suffers daily from residual effects.

"From the brain damage, I have a constant numbness and tingle on the left side of my body," he said. "It affects my circulation, so when it's cold, the left side is a couple of degrees colder, which internally feels frigid and really hurts. When it's warm, I'm sweating and perspiring. Like in Chicago right now, where it's fucking freezing, it makes it twice as hard to move my fingers and my dexterity is challenged that much more."

Claude now acts as songwriter, performer, producer and engineer for Amanda. On tour he's made the switch from singing-drummer to axe-wielding front man. "Playing guitar is like physical therapy," he said. "It's all about the reclamation and the relearning for my body. I love playing guitar, much more than playing drums."

The Full Catastrophe is an album of rejoice, a 13-track love letter to life. It brims with originality, bright soul melodies and displays a devotion to a rock/folk mentality, tinged with psychedelia.

Thanks a lot for the great and fast service. It was great to read through



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That night, Amanda took the stage at the Cobra Lounge and launched into "Right Mind," a tune Claude wrote as a wedding proposal. People leaked in from the adjacent bar, and soon the room was filled to capacity. The floor turned into a dance party and, halfway through the set, the stage was packed with dancing girls whose smiles beamed out to the crowd. Claude responded with meaty solos, his fingers flying nimbly over the guitar neck.

"I'm reintroducing myself to everyone," Claude said. "I'm having a great time doing it. By the end of 2007, if I'm playing gigs to 300 people who know all the songs, it would make me the happiest guy in the world. I could die at the end of the year. I'm not going to stop until I get there."

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[7 days, Burlington VT feb '07]

FRI
02**A WHOLE NEW GROOVE ::**

Best known as the drummer for mock-rock maestros Ween, Claude Coleman Jr. is celebrated for his skills on the skins. But he's also a prolific singer-songwriter whose work with **Amandla** is more soulful than strange. Combining elements of r&b, pop and psychedelia, the band — which in the studio features only Coleman — sounds a bit like Prince, minus the sexual obsessions. Amandla is now on tour in support of their sophomore release, *The Full Catastrophe*; catch them at Club Metronome this Friday with local rock monsters **Party Star**.

<music>

Club listings & spotlights are written by **Casey Rea**. Spotlights are at the discretion of the editor. Send listings by Friday at noon, including info phone number, to clubs@sevendaysvt.com.

Find past album reviews, full venue descriptions and a local artists' directory online at www.sevendaysvt.com/music.

Q&A With

CLAUDE COLEMAN JR.

We recently did a phone interview with Claude Coleman Jr. Claude is the drummer for Ween and now also plays in his own band, Amandla, which will be playing at the Vibe on August 2nd. Go and support this innovative and talented musician.



SS: You recently played in La Crosse at J&B's Speakeasy and are now slated to play at the Vibe on August 2nd. What about the scene made you want to come back?

CC: The girls are beyond compare... (laughs) We got invited, that makes a difference, between a gig that will happen and a gig that won't happen.

SS: Are you trying to get more local, more authentic with your music?

CC: No...everywhere is everywhere; it's all the same to me whether it's in New York La Crosse, Dallas, or Bum-fuck Idaho. It's a place you play; the audiences are the same as any other audiences.

SS: You're working on a new album right now called the Full Catastrophe. What are you hoping to achieve with this new album musically?

CC: It's very serious musically, very broad, covers the entire scope, every sound imaginable but not in any kind of pretentious or over-reaching kind of way. I think what I'm hoping to achieve is the mood and times of everything I went through and I think I achieved that. It's a very moody record, it's very musical, and it's very mature at the same time.

SS: Are you recovering well from the accident? (Claude was in a near-fatal car accident a few months ago)

CC: Yeah, I'm recovering really well, I'm

still in therapy, doing what I can and I imagine I'm going to be working on this till I die probably but every month is an improvement and I gotta just keep looking at it like that.

SS: Your debut album "Falling Alone" shows a lot of classic rock influences from Jimmy to the Dead, what got you into that style of music in the first place? The sex, the drugs, or the rock n' roll?

CC: The chicks, pretty much the primary motivation for rock n' roll, don't let anybody fool you. They call it art, but all of us know that we're just trying to get into those panties.

SS: So you're taking the no-pretentious shit to the maximum.

CC: (laughs) Yeah, I guess. I just kind of grew up with that kind of stuff you know. Those of us in that generation were fortunate.

SS: I'm sure you get asked about Ween all the time so I'll try to avoid the subject as much as possible. What was with that south park episode where they showed you as a white guy drumming with Ween for the Chef-Aid concert?

CC: I don't know, Matt and Trey have a lot of money, they are pretty well off so they get some good drugs. So it kind of freaks them out. I don't know, I think that was before I met them or it could have been after, but I think it was before; so anyone's default interpretation of a human being is going to be a white guy. And especially with a band like Ween, the last thing you're going to assume is it is a black drummer.

"I will definitely come to La Crosse every tour I ever do. It's an incredible town. Ready to rock, I'll always come through."

SS: What you did with Ween is vastly different than what you are doing with Amandla. What brought about this change in your style? It seems much more serious, and for lack of a better word, authentic in an organic way. Was the mocking stage in music history over or was just over for you?

CC: (laughs) What sort of question is that...I don't know, I wouldn't say it is over, I identify with their influences and the output of their music, in that way we're both similar but because they get interpreted more easily as mocking than I do, I can't give you a reason for that except that it happens. The stuff with Ween is 25% mocking material but then the rest of it is dead serious and even the mocking stuff is serious in its own way.

SS: So I hear you're a carpenter. How did that come about? Do you make your own drumsticks?

CC: Nah, I don't make my own drum sticks. That's an intense maling process that I don't have the time or money to do. But I started building houses in New Jersey for 3 years and it was probably the best job I ever had. You know, hard physical labor, use your brains, it's a very satisfy way of life. I'm a virgo so I guess I'm into the math and more anal aspects of carpentry (laughs).

SS: Along with being a skilled craftsman of fine imported woods, or pine, you also teach at the New York School of Rock. What made you decide to devote so much of your time to the education of the next generation of rock n' rollers?

CC: Well I had some friends who were involved with the school in New York who happened to have opened it. Since the first manager of the school was a friend, I told him to bring me in. And it's pretty much the coolest

way to teach kids in the world. We get these kids to perform at real venues like CBGB. So they get to play pretty legendary halls before they get to drive. It does a lot for their personality and development, it really transforms them. That's the best part, that we get to do these gigs and play Black Sabbath and approach it from a serious point of view and have a lot of fun and learn the best classic rock. It's very hopeful for the future history of music. A lot of these kids are real real smart.

SS: *The poppy shit from the 90's seems to be pretty much dead now (thank you by the way) and there seems to be a resurgence of more and more eclectic music that goes for the shock and awe technique. Where do you think music is headed now?*

CC: That's really hard to judge, I know where I would like it to go but I don't know if music is really going in that direction. Where I would like it to go is in a more organic and musical kind of thing, it's not bullshit, theirs some skill and some thought involved. There's some

seriousness, not without good fun and enjoying yourself, but it seems that the posturing element has taken over everything. Every band is a hyped band, you can't hear a band without hearing some hype. The hype dies down and you don't look at it anymore, it's a load of crap. It's happening all across the world. Hip-hop totally sucks now; it's a sham ball of crap, the whole world. You can't believe how bad that shit is. I would hope that it will return to the nature of the musician. I'm not saying people have to be incredible players. Just decent enough man. I've seen bands that didn't suck half as bad as kids playing, looking like total rock pros with the sculpted hair and the emo jackets shit, looking sort of hot and yadda yadda, they just suck, they're not a good band, they're not writing good music, they have their heads in the wrong places...god damn it god damnit! They fucking piss me off. It's hard to say, the crappy music wave has a little bit more to go before it's over. If no one gets assassinated by the rock police, that is.

SS: *Are you trying to be a part of that new wave?*

CC: I'm trying to be a part of that new wave of authenticity and yadda yadda and that's what we're doing in the school. The motto of the school is "saving rock n' roll one kid at a time." I truly believe in that (laughs). These kids come in and they know what's going on. They hear bands like Jet and they say "they kind of sound like ACDC and Oasis," it's bullshit man, these are nine-year olds telling you that, they should be writing for SPIN Magazine, it's bullshit man.

SS: *Amanda means power in Zulu, I assume this is why you picked the name for the band, any particular reason?*

CC: I actually just picked the name for the sound of the word. I'm into rhythm and that word itself has a lot of rhythm. And I thought it would be a great name for a daughter, a girl. And then I found out what it meant only later when I decided to call my music that, then I thought "Right on." That's what I'm all about, it was a perfect fit. And I think translated into other languages it means massive schlong. Which is also a perfect fit.

SS: *Way to get that in there at the end.*

CC: Hey I had to talk about my massive schlong at some point in this interview.

SS: *And this is the perfect venue to do it.*

CC: Fuck yeah man. You know what I'm saying.

SS: *Well thanks for the interview and hope you come back to La Crosse real soon.*

CC: I definitely will, every tour I ever do, I'll come through there. It's an incredible town. Ready to rock, I'll always come through.



— JOEL KUENNEN

Ween's drummer is equally comfortable with a guitar

By Rick Allen

If it weren't for James Brown, Claude Coleman might be considered the hardest-working man in show business. The musical jack-of-all-trades made this apparent to



those in attendance at the performance of his quartet **Amandla** at the High Five last Sunday.

Coleman is best known as the drummer for the goofy, psychedelic rock band Ween. But few fans realize what a powerful effect he's had, helping to morph Ween from a few four-track experiments into an actual live band and hooking it up with its first label, Twin/Tone.

When he's not behind the drum kit with Ween, Coleman works as a producer, music writer and teacher, as well as his headlining turn with Amandla. You'd think that kind of background would translate into a packed house, but instead, Amandla played to a handful of fans and scattered members of the opening acts.

It's a shame, as Amandla is a band that's hard not to like.

Coleman proved to be as comfortable with a guitar in his hands as he is behind the kit, playing soulful, fluid leads that were reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix's

mellow moments.

He also borrowed from Ween's lead guitarist, Mickey Melchiondo, with a prodigious use of vintage-sounding pedals. He spent the set coaxing out the sort of rich, trippy tones that don't see the light of day much anymore.

The band reveled in songs such as "Smog," a sunny, sweet little nugget of soulful rock, reminiscent of a garage-rock rehash of an old Stevie Wonder tune. Much of the set was like that, a rocking take on R&B, skipping over the past 30 years of decline and hitting the meaty center of the late '60s and early '70s.

Coleman's vocals were just as solid, slipping in and out of a husky falsetto. He wasn't quite at the level of Sly Stone or Curtis Mayfield, but that's a small slight.

The set culminated with "Stone Dove," a "goofy little disco-space fast number," as Coleman put it, that showed off the chops of bassist and longtime Coleman collaborator Dan Green, who maintained a busy,

funkadelic-esque bass line without overpowering the song.

Local quintet **La Quest** opened the show, blending Lauren Hill's soul, Mos Def's hip hop and Portishead's atmospherics

to a surprisingly enjoyable effect. Then the **AHA Collective** wasted two hours of the audience members' lives with a two-note reggae jam that all of the ganja in the world couldn't have made enjoyable.

Jeffrey Konczal



A mellow Jimi Hendrix: Claude Coleman performed last Sunday with his band Amandla

Drummer sheds his Ween-ish image

For **Claude Coleman**, being the drummer for one of the most fervently followed alt-rock bands of the past 15 years is both a welcome crutch and a kind of ball-and-chain.

"It's definitely a mixed blessing," says Coleman, who is best-known as the drummer for



**JOE
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Ween, a band whose adherents — though not numerous enough to make the band a truly mainstream phenom — tend to be of the cultish variety.

Most fans of the band are well aware of

Coleman, whose propulsive, casually virtuosic drumming forms the backbone of the band's high-energy concerts.

Ween's longtime producer, Ben Vaughn, refers to Coleman as "an octopus."

Gene Ween notes that Coleman "could just as easily get up and play any of the songs we do on guitar, bass or keys. ... Claude knows the songs on all levels and makes sure they come around to where they should be, even if the rest of the band is in jeopardy of completely losing their s—."

Gener's praise is borne out when Coleman drops his sticks and fronts his own band, **Amandla**, which appears in Missoula this Saturday at the Top Hat. Coleman sings and plays guitar in the band during live performances. On Amandla's records, he sings and plays everything.

Coleman, who has played with Ween in concert since the early '90s, says the influence of Ween comes through in his do-it-all-yourself approach to recording.

"Those guys and I are really similar in terms of the music we're into, and the way we make music," says Coleman. "We're kind of home-grown artists who like to do everything on our own terms. I've always identified with them on that level."

But Coleman is quick to point out that the similarities largely stop there between the music of Ween and Amandla.

That's where the ball-and-chain comes in.

"The slight negative effect (of being associated with Ween) is that it gives people a predisposition as to what I might sound like or what kind of music I'm making in my own band," says Coleman. "There's some fun, funky stuff that I play, but it's really nothing close to Ween in terms of the music and energy."

Coleman is most inclined to refer to himself as a singer-songwriter. That's a label that carries certain connotations in today's scene, and those connotations aren't quite on the mark, either.

He is a helluva singer, for sure. Possessing a soft-edged, honey-sweet tenor voice with a remarkably wide range and a lazy style of diction, Coleman sounds like a cross between Marvin Gaye and Gene Ween in "Freedom of '76" mode.

As is appropriate to that style of singing, Coleman's music is much closer to 70s-era soul than to what we generally think of as "singer-songwriter" fare. Songs like "Before Tomorrow" and "Respectable" sound like they could be lost tracks from a Jackson Five record.

The dreamily innocent tone of Amandla's music stands in marked contrast to the trials that Coleman has faced in recent years. In August 2002, Coleman was involved in a car accident which left him with serious injuries to his head, pelvis and spine. Partially paralyzed on his left side, Coleman spent the better part of a year in intensive physical therapy.

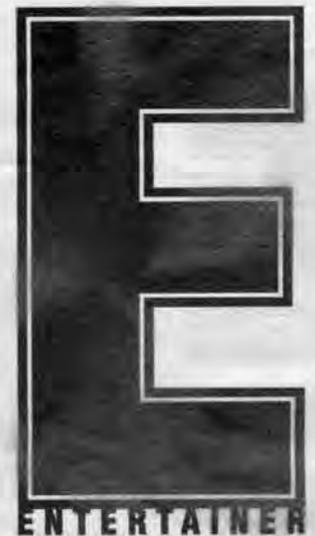
Coleman says the injuries still linger, in subtle ways.

"It definitely affected my speed and dexterity," says Coleman. "That drastically affects playing guitar and bass, because that involves so much finger dexterity. ... (But) I think I'm almost drumming better than ever, though, because I'm a lot more hungry and passionate about it. I'm playing

like it's the last time you're gonna hear me play."

Chances are, we haven't heard the last of Coleman. By the end of this summer, albums are due out from both Ween and Amandla. Both bands will be touring extensively in support of their respective releases.

"I'll be out on the road all the time, smelling my bandmates' farts in the van," laughs Coleman. "Gotta love this life."



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**CLAUDE COLEMAN JR.,
OF AMANDLA AND WEEN
PLAYS AT JB'S SPEAK EASY
IN LA CROSSE**

FAIR AND BIASED

VOL. 4 - ISSUE 29
MAY 24th - 2006

Thursday May 18, 2006 marked the first time Ween drummer Claude Coleman Jr. walked the streets of La Crosse, as his new project, Amandla, performed at JB's Speakeasy. The place was packed with over 100 people who squeezed in to see the new funk soul sensation that dropped occasional rifts and licks of psychedelica.

"We got to JB's as Cheech finished up, right before you could still get a drink at the bar without feeling you're riding in a Geo Metro Coupe," recalled Andrea Bourget.

Amandla played only original Amandla material, refusing to play any Ween songs, which turned out for the best. The performance was described by attendees as "intimate and personal," as Coleman responded to feedback and even invited an individual from the audience to perform tambourine on stage. Amandla was eager to put on a great show as they

felt a sense of duty to honor the crowd that filled the house on two days notice. There was a general consensus amongst group members that they would love to entertain the genuine down to earth people of the aesthetically pleasing Seven Rivers Region again.

The Speakeasy show was a logical pit stop for Amandla as they were on their way to the Top Hat in Missoula, Montana. Currently Coleman is back with Ween, who will be performing with The Flaming Lips at Red Rock and with an assortment of other rock bands and artists at Lollapalooza in Chicago. Aman-

dla informed The Second Supper after the show over a few drinks, among other activities, that they want to contain an original entity that is musically unassociated from Ween.

To listen to Amandla, check out www.amandlanet.com or www.myspace.com/amandla, and don't forget to add them as a friend. Details of when Coleman will return to La Crosse are disclosed, keep checking the music directory for the next local Amandla performance, as well as what's happening at JB's Speakeasy.

www.hudsoncurrent.com April 21 - 27, 2005 • 6

Ween!

Drummer from JC to hit Hoboken

By Dave Hoffman
Current editor

Almusic.com describes Ween as "a prodigiously talented and deliriously odd duo who's work traveled far beyond the constraints of parody and novelty into the heart of surrealist ecstasy." Now, that's quite an endorsement. So what kind of talent must it take to hold down the rhythms for such a band?

Find out Thursday, April 28 at 8 p.m. when Ween drummer Claude Coleman Jr., a Jersey City resident, brings his band Amandla to the Whiskey Bar.

"I think we've got some really strong tunes that can stand up in the world of rock," said Coleman. "The Whiskey Bar is a hidden gem of a rock venue for Hoboken. They have a lot of cover groups. It's a really great house. It has a great sound system, great bar, and great stage."

Coleman is a talent all his own. He plays all the instruments on Amandla

CLAUDE COLEMAN



Amandla will play at the Whiskey Bar on April 28 at 8 p.m.

albums, including guitar, bass, keys, vocals, and of course drums. Traditionally, Coleman has been the singing drummer, but on next week's show, he will front the band while playing guitar.

"When I was singing and drumming, I would sit with the drums up front," said Coleman. "But now I started playing guitar out front. It's kind of a foreign element to front the band, but it feels natural to me. It's all part of my ongoing therapy."

The ongoing therapy refers to a near fatal car accident he was in in August of 2002, leaving him hospitalized for 35 days with a multiply fractured pelvis and brain damage. He was unable to move for four months, but by 2003, determination and intensive therapy allowed him to tour with Ween in 2003.

see **AMANDLA** page 8

AMANDLA from page 6

"I'm still dealing with the residuals, but you wouldn't be able to tell if you saw me drum because I'm ripping it up," he said. "I still struggle a little bit while playing guitar, bass, or keys."

Different from Ween

Coleman said Amandla differs from Ween in that it is more of a mainstream

sound. Ween is known for being rather unusual.

"I have fans Ween fans who come to the gigs, but Ween listeners have a broad taste in music and can appreciate it. In terms of what Ween is and what Amandla is, it's like polar opposites. Like apples and oranges," said Coleman. "I'm heavily influenced by country and some electronica

stuff. Call it what you will. I just call it music."

Coleman said that his accident did broaden his mind, but he tries not to let the experience filter into his music.

"The cliché rings true how you realize how precious life is and how it widens your awareness of all kinds of things," said Coleman. "But I have to live with it

day to day, so I don't want to deal with it on stage. I'd rather sing about flowery field or pretty women with big booties or something."

Coleman is working on a new Amandla album while Ween is on break. His CD *Falling Alone* is available at www.amandlanet.com. □



RAP SHEET | Artists in their own words

A body broken, a spirit intact

By Claude Coleman Jr.
Special to The Denver Post

Claude Coleman Jr., the drummer for Ween and singer-songwriter behind Amandla, writes of his 2002 car accident — and his recovery.



Ween drummer Claude Coleman Jr. suffered injuries in a 2002 car accident that linger.

My last conscious memory before my life and body were altered forever was eating a slice of pizza in Hoboken, N.J. As I ate, I kept a watchful eye on my car, which was parked at an expired meter and vulnerable to another parking ticket I didn't need.

I awoke several days later with family and friends surrounding me in intensive-care at a hospital in Newark, my body shattered, my mind in a state of severe trauma and disorientation. The left side of my body screamed with searing hot and immobilizing pain. The left side of my face drooped, my speech was slurred, my jaw rigid. The room spun endlessly; the vertigo and dizziness wouldn't stop.

By accounts given to police, I was traveling westward toward my rural home when traffic stopped suddenly. I pulled to the left, and an 18-wheeler that was riding my tail at an unstoppable speed did the same and rear-ended my car, shooting me across the grass median and into the opposing lanes. My car was hit head-on at full speed.

My car was a mangled pile of steel; the top of it had to be cut off to get me out. Intravenous drugs were administered to me as the car was cut open.

I suffered multiple fractures of the pelvis, severe brain trauma and injuries with blood-clotting in the brain resulting in paralysis on the left side, a fractured jaw, damage to my vision resulting in the constant vertigo and dizziness, and substantial muscle damage to my leg and back.

The outpouring of support from fans and friends was overwhelming; my room was covered to the ceiling with cards, flowers and balloons. I

tried my best under a cocktail of painkillers and a haze of trauma to convince my nurses I was Jay-Z. They didn't buy it.

When I got out, I had to re-learn speech, memory skills and other aspects of communication. My drive to heal myself was a surging force that continues to this day. I desperately wanted (and still do) to escape the malaise of victimhood, and I wanted my life back. After not walking for more than two months, I worked my doe legs well enough to get back on-stage and perform with my bandmates for an unannounced acoustic show in New York, only 3½ months after the accident, to the ravenous and shocked appreciation of several hundred people.

On a bad day, the combinations of what I live with are nothing short of resolute, hopeless agony that is imprisoning and at times a suppressant of any true happiness. On an average day, however, I'm gracious and blessed to be above the ground, breathing in the gloriousness of life and making art that stirs my heart (and others' hearts) — something I never took for granted before, but that perhaps now has become that much more of a requisite to sustain me, like food and water.

Amandla plays material from its coming CD, "The Full Catastrophe," at the Appaloosa Grill tonight. Call 720-932-1700.

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Claude Coleman Jr., former holder of the New Jersey State Record for the 55-yard hurdles and drummer for Ween, brings his project Amandla to the Top Hat Fri., Nov. 11, at 10 PM. Call 728-9865.

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RHYTHM AND SOUL :: Best known as the drummer for rock-rock maestros Ween, Claude Coleman, Jr., is more than just a quality time keeper. Coleman's solo project, **Amandla**, showcases his multi-instrumental and production skills, honed through years of recording and performance. With soulful, psychedelic pop and a nod to folk and roots, Amandla stands on its own. Though Coleman suffered a near fatal car accident a few years back, nothing could keep him from making music. Catch him this Thursday at Nectar's with local alt-rockers The Cush, and Friday at the Matterhorn in Stowe.

Here's good news: The School of Rock isn't just a PG-rated Jack Black movie — it's a real music program (the Paul Green School of Rock, in NYC) for kids ages 8-17, and Claude Coleman Jr. (drummer for Ween) is its music director. And here's even better news — fans of Coleman's acrobatic percussion style (and his more recent songwriting and multi-instrumental skills) won't have to go back to school to see the performer up close and personal. He'll play a show at Emerald Lounge on Saturday, July 23, with his pop-folk band Amandla. The group plans to perform many songs off Coleman's upcoming album. Word is, Coleman played all the instruments in the studio — will he attempt it on stage? 10 p.m. \$5. 232-4372.



Ween drummer Claude Coleman Jr. will visit Emerald Lounge Saturday, July 23, with Amandla.



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CLAUDE COLEMAN AND HIS WEEN

October 19, 2004

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with **Claude Coleman**, drummer for Ween and all-around musician for his own band Amandla. Being a fan of Ween I'm quite familiar with his drum work, but upon hearing Amandla's *Falling Alone* it instantly became a favorite. Based on *Falling Alone* I knew I had to see the band perform. It's a great feeling when a band exceeds your expectations on CD and then takes it to another level live.

Considering Amandla is mostly Claude, I was surprised how well they came across live, and how many people became instant fans that night.

So Claude and I sat down at a local coffee shop in his new hometown of Jersey City, NJ to discuss a bit of Ween, some Amandla, and a little about himself, including his near encounter with death.

David Weintraub: So before I get into Amandla and Ween, tell us a bit about your health. How are you feeling these days, and if you're comfortable with it, tell us exactly what happened to you.

Claude Coleman: (laughter) I got dinged up pretty bad about two years ago. Story goes, I was rear ended by a tractor-trailer on Route 78 (Jersey), heading westward. Then what happened was the tractor-trailer slammed into my car and catapulted me across the highway's median into oncoming traffic, where I got completely crushed by two or three different cars. The car was a heaping mass of smoldering metal and they had to cut the top off the car to get me out.



Claude Coleman

It was a pretty disgusting and violent ordeal. Fortunately, I have absolutely no recollection of it, and the last thing I remember was eating a slice of pizza three hours before that. I think that's proof there is some sort of god (laughter).

David Weintraub: That was the night of a gig with your band Amandla?

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Claude Coleman: No, no, I was hanging fliers for a gig in Hoboken that morning. The last thing I remember was being at the venue hanging fliers. Then I woke up four or five days later.

David Weintraub: This was slightly more than two years ago?

Claude Coleman: Yeah, that was the beginning of the ordeal. So I shattered my pelvis, fractured my jaw, had severe brain injuries, clotting of the brain. I had constant vertigo and dizziness for about six months. Then I was in a wheelchair for two months, after that I had to do nine months of rehab to regain my strength, and then came a period of cognitive therapy, started to relearn language skills, memory skills and how to be a nice guy (laughter).

So does this currently hamper your drum playing?

Oh yeah, totally. In effect I'm playing with a handicap. I still have a lot of deficits on my left; still not properly feeling everything over here (puts hand on shoulder and arm). So, I am definitely dealing with this. I have to think harder, and play harder, and focus harder than I used to in order to get through it. It's less of a natural experience for me, unlike before where I could rock out, have a sip a tea, do my thing. Now I feel inhibited, so that's what changed a lot. My attention to it and my concentration is completely different. But it's no less enjoyable at all.



Claude Coleman from Dave's MarginalHacks

Two years removed from that, you have left Lambertville to reside here in Jersey City. How is the transition away from a place where so much of your music has been rooted?

It's fantastic. I'm a child of the city, born and raised in Newark (New Jersey). There are a lot of city elements in my character, as well as country elements. I've bonded with it, I identify with it. I really love the convenience of being in the heart of what's going on. Artistically, creatively, and politically, it's been great. Being close to many old friends, and new ones, has also been great.

In terms of the music, I've transported my whole operation with me, so it's not up here. I don't really feel any separation from the music which has been great. I just moved my studio down the street to my buddy's place, which has really worked out, at least for me! (Laughter) He's kind of putting up with me, working until three in the morning. I've got the headphones on while he's watching CNN. It's all worked out pretty great. I love being in this area. It's beautiful.

You're working with Ween, you have your band Amandla, so let's start with what most people know about you. Where's the collective head of the band Ween at right now? What ventures should we look for?



The Pod



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I'll give you the PG-13 version of the story. Basically, we're taking a little break from the last round of touring, and we're poised to start the new record. We're going to do some dates in October to keep our juices flowing.

Is the band close? I ask because here we are discussing your side project as well.

Oh, of course. We're family. Absolutely close like family. When you're in a band, and you have this close relationship, it's more like polygamy than a family (laughter). We are totally tight, and the best of friends.



Ween

I'd keep the polygamy thing off the record.

Yeah, totally. Well, you know how it is. Don't take it so literally, alright, pal? (laughter) We don't talk to each other every day, but we don't need to. We've spent the last 12 to 13 years of our lives together, so now it's just there. We are at arm's length away at all times, which is nice.

One more thing on Ween before we move on. I've seen the recent Ween DVD from the Vic Theatre in Chicago, and I must say, it's outstanding! It's one of the best live concert videos in my opinion. What are your thoughts on seeing yourself and the band in that setting?

I think it came out really wonderful. In fact it's really the only Ween I can sit down and enjoy, watch, and stomach. (laughter)

Why is that?

Usually, I have no interest in hearing our band live, on tape, or videos. I just have no interest in it. Not to disrespect the band, or anyone else, I just have no interest. I'm in the heat of it. I'm the guy on the stage. My approach to it is I want to keep the recollection of most shows in my heart and mind, not so much on a recording. And the fact that I've been playing those songs for a billion and a half years, I'm sort of indifferent to it. It's not like I am going to hear a song and be blown away after all this time. However, the DVD is a total triumph for our band. It came at a time when we were totally cruising on tour, and playing really well. It made me see Ween in an entire different light. I never realized we are as hilarious as we are! (laughter)



You mean hilarious between audience and band, or between band members?



I never realized how much hilarity, and rock moments, cream rock moments. It kind of overwhelmed me.

Well, you are a rock band!

I play the drums, and have been playing the drums. Then I go get drunk. I'm a purist about it, and I don't realize all the other things going on sometimes.

Why did the choose Chicago? Just curious, being from Pennsylvania and New Jersey in a sense?

Not really sure. Maybe because of the size of the venue? It was somewhere in between a large and small place. We sold out three nights there, but then again, we've done two nights in this area as well. You know, I'm not really sure. The Ween works in mysterious ways.

It came off great, regardless. Now you have your own band, which is Amandla. The first question, where did that name come from?

It's an African word from the Zulu language meaning "the power."

The Zulu language. Are you well versed in the language?

Not that familiar, but I know that word. It's a popular word. It was part of a politically used word of the African National Congress.

Which I think is disbanded, actually? It's now the Organization of African States, maybe?

Right? There's a whole bunch of political and criminal turmoil over there. Who can say what's what? (laughter)

Who knew this interview would focus on the problems in Sudan?!

Yeah, right? What's going on in Africa?

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Ween's Claude

Ween possesses what is likely the most outrageous, genre-defying song catalog in modern rock. Though they're sometimes written off as a "joke" band, a quick listen to any Ween album reveals musicians not only versed in the rules of just about every genre of pop music, but able to break those rules with daring effect. Expertly walking the lines between taste and excess, sincerity and humor, Ween operates on a level of sophistication precious few pop acts approach. The range of emotion and style between, say, "Poop Ship Destroyer" and "Stay Forever" is simply mind bending.

Claude Coleman is the man responsible for drumistically supporting the kaleidoscopic world of Ween. It's a job *very* few drummers would be able to pull off.

Coleman

Border-Crossing





little history: In the mid-'80s, childhood friends Aaron Freeman and Mickey Melchiondo, aided by their own personal god, Boognish, carved a unique place on the new-music scene. Aaron (now Gene Ween) and Mickey (Dean Ween) soon assembled a proper live band to tour and flesh out album cuts. Odd-ball hits, notably "Push Th' Little Daisies," caught left-field attention. A ravenous fan cult grew, tape-trading like crazy and constructing virtual altars like WeenRadio.com. Meanwhile, the band's music became more sophisticated, retaining the obscure, "brown" elements, but now featuring increasingly outta-sight songwriting, top-notch playing, and a dead-on ear for detail.

In 2001 they created music for the sitcom *Grounded For Life*. "Appearances" on *South Park* and *Crank Yankers* further widened their reputation from that of brainy musical pranksters to genuine cultural touchstones. Critics, at least those who "got it," bowed down at their feet.

Claude Coleman has abetted this musical iconoclasm almost since the beginning. Known as an ace drummer on the fertile late-'80s New Jersey rock scene, Coleman also turned heads as a multi-instrumentalist of rare talent. Claude ran in the same circles as Deaneer and Gener back in the day, and eventually became a pillar of the band's sound, especially during their infamous tours. An athletic rock drummer with an ear for jazz, Coleman is the perfect rhythmattest for a band as demanding, fun, and rocking as Ween.

Melchiondo, who has played some drums on nearly all the group's albums, recently told *MD*, "There's nothing I enjoy more than watching Claude play, even on other people's gigs. Because of Claude, the bar is set very high for what I look for in a drummer. And unlike many drummers, Claude makes a drumkit sound good. You can record him with just two mic's and he'll sound incredible."

Mickey went on to explain an additional

job requirement for Coleman: mimicking the insane drum machine patterns Ween often uses on record. "I might have four ride cymbals going at once," Mickey laughs. "Claude will be like, 'Why did you program it that way? And I'll be like, 'Because I don't care how hard it is for you to figure it out!'"

Perhaps the biggest reason Coleman works so well with Ween is his skill as a songwriter. In fact, Claude's aspirations as a complete performer, fronting his own band, Amandla, are as lofty as his drumming goals. Because he has such a good feel for song structure, Claude easily swings with the many moods of Ween, adding subtle shadings when required, or going out on a limb of excess when that approach is called for.

Aside from musical challenges, Claude has recently had to bear some heavy-duty physical ones as well. A nasty car wreck in 2002 left him wheelchair-bound for months. He still struggles with some limitations, though happily he's back behind the kit, recording tracks for Amandla's next album and touring behind Ween's latest, *Quebec*. It says something about Claude's value to the band that his temporary replacement was none other than the massively regarded Josh Freese.

Just prior to the band's performance at the Bonnaroo Festival in Manchester, Tennessee, and on the eve of the release of their first DVD, *Live In Chicago*, *MD* visited Claude at his recording studio in rural western New Jersey. We began with the past in front, gazing an hour east and twenty years in the past, when a young Newark drummer dreamed of being the next Stewart Copeland....



Claude spends a lot of quality time at his studio in rural Western New Jersey, just over the river from Ween's New Hope, Pennsylvania home.



BY DENISE COLEMAN FOR MODERN DRUMMER

Claude: My father was always into music, and he had pretty exceptional taste. For a person of his stature—being a black man growing up in the south, rising through the ranks of the Newark police department—he was into a pretty eclectic brew of sounds: jazz, and then Dylan and stuff like that. While he was in the police department, he put himself through law school. He became a practicing lawyer, then a legal analyst, then lieutenant, and then director of the police department. Now he's a superior court judge. He's intense, he's got a lot of personal power.

MD: Sounds like the kind of guy who would have a lot to say about the direction his son would take.

Claude: When I grew up I had all of these little gifts: I was a runner, I played a lot of tennis.... But my parents never steered me one way or another. It kind of happened on its own that I decided to stick with the drums.

MD: When did you really get into it?

Claude: I was in the school bands in elementary school. When my parents divorced we moved to Maplewood, New Jersey, and the school system there was very supportive of the arts. Lauryn Hill went there, for instance. It was easy to get involved.

MD: Did you play in cover bands?

Claude: Yeah, tons of them. We did The Cure, The Police, Squeeze, The Clash, R.E.M....

MD: Who were your big musical influences at the time?

Claude: I was big on Stewart Copeland when I first started playing. In fact you might say I obsessed on him. [laughs] I was the guy around town who played like Stewart. I had the same setup—I didn't have the Octobans, but I had a six-piece kit—I even copied the graffiti he had on his drumheads. You had to be a super-freak obsessive fan to know about that. But I had his licks down too. I was into all sorts of music, but as far as playing drums, he was it. He embodied everything that I wanted to be.

MD: Like what?

Claude: Energy, originality, musicality. Even then I could tell he was making great music with his parts. I just found it very stimulating.

MD: Was there a time when you felt you had to get out of this reverence mode?

Claude: Yeah, it was a painfully slow

process understanding that I couldn't play everyone's songs like Stewart. But that wasn't until later, when I started playing with songwriters. I realized things had to be a bit more steady, more linear. And then I got into other drummers, like Ringo, and all sorts of other music came at me. So I just started incorporating it all and understanding the full spectrum of music and

sonate about it, so I was excited to study with Keith. He was almost never around, because he was on the road a lot. But the six or seven one-on-one lessons I had with him were the most life-affecting lessons I ever had. I almost felt like I learned everything I needed to know just by being around him.

MD: What in particular did Keith teach you?

Claude: I learned how to swing instantly

Apocalyptic Playing

Claude's Best

Artist	Album
Amandia	Falling Alone
Ween	White Pepper
Ween	Live At Stubbs
Ween	Live In Chicago (DVD/CD)
Molotov	Molotov II
Hub	Hub
Tom Clark	Cross-Eyed And Bow-Legged

Claude's Favorites

Artist	Album	Drummer
Grand Funk Railroad	Grand Funk	Don Brewer
Pat Metheny	Bright Size Life	Bob Moses
Van Morrison	Veedon Fleece	Allan Schwartzberg
Wu Tang Clan	Enter The Wu-Tang	Dahaud Shaaz
Donny Hathaway	Live	programmed
Jackie Mittoo	The Keyboard King	Fred White
Jimi Hendrix & Band Of Gypsies	At Studio One	Bunny Williams
Minutemen	Live At The Fillmore East, CD I	Buddy Miles
	Double Noises	George Hurley
	On The Dime	

Further Props

Metal: Bill Ward, Dave Lombardo, early Lars Ulrich. **Rock:** John Bonham, Mitch Mitchell, Mick Fleetwood (whose style I borrow as a template for many tunes), Ringo (whose style is a template for almost every human music-maker alive). **Jazz:** Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones. **R&B:** Howard Grimes, Al Jackson. **Punk Rock:** The mighty D.H. Pelagra. **Overseas drummers:** Phil Selway. **Prog:** Bill Bruford, Neil Peart. **Hip-Hop:** 7astfove. **Multi-instrumentalists:** Stevie Wonder (I love the way he plays his cymbals so colorfully), Paul McCartney, Prince (one of the funkiest alive), Todd Rundgren. **Local Cats:** Drummers who I've always found to be absolutely fantastic and as inspiring as any well-known: Andy Demos (from Tiny Lights and the jazz/folk trio Soleil), Scotty Burns, and Sim Cam (who was a hero of sorts to me that I've admired from the beginning of my musical life). Plus techno music, drum 'n' bass, all other cultural musics that I consider influential and inspiring.

drumming—where it can go, what can be done with it.

MD: Did you ever take private drum lessons?

Claude: My only lessons were in high school—music theory class, marching band, orchestra, jazz band. I didn't see anyone on my own until I studied with Keith Copeland at Mason Gross College.

I never thought I'd be a jazz musician, but I did think that it was something I was going to need to learn to play well. I was really pas-

sionate about it.

MD: How?

Claude: You just felt the pocket and the time, and you understood it immediately. He had a really hard swing, and I've always been attracted to jazz drummers who have a hard swing. You just felt it, it was undeniable. It was so much easier after that, and it was really deep.

There's a story about the Dalai Lama. This guy takes a picture of a flower to the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama looks at it,

Claude Coleman

says thank you, and gives it back to the guy. The guy is like, No, I want you to have it, but the Dalai Lama says, I already do, you just gave it to me. People who are that profound and have that kind of sense about them can sort you out in like two minutes. Keith Copeland was like that; I

got stuff from him that'll last twenty-five years, just by watching him play.

MD: It's tempting to say that people with that much ability were born with it. But there's usually a lot of



Claude's Kit

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- C. 14x16 floor tom
- D. 18x20 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

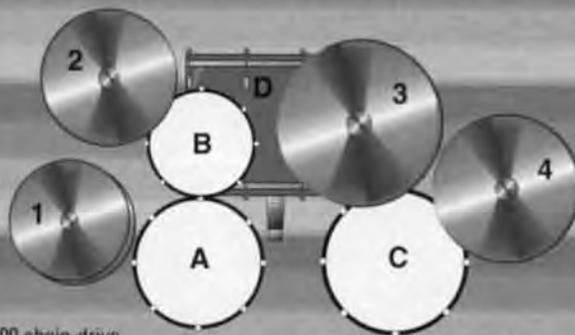
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- 2. 16" K Custom Dark crash
- 3. 20" K Custom Dark ride
- 4. 18" K Custom Dark crash

Hardware: DW, including a DW 5000 chain-drive bass drum pedal with a Danmar beater

Heads: Remo FiberSkyn 2 on snare batter, Evans Hydraulics on toms, Aquarian Superkick II on bass drum

Sticks: Vater 5B model (hickory with wood tip)

Electronics: Roland SPD-6 multi-pad unit, Akai MPC2000XL



work involved too, right?

Claude: Yeah, but so much of it *is* innate. To be a really good drummer, you don't have to be good on the drumset. I read a story about Omar Hakim getting the Sting gig. He was at a dinner table banging with forks and knives, and then Sting was like, You're hired. I got a gig exactly like that once. I was working at a record store and these hip-hop guys said they needed a drummer. I banged these beats in the stockroom, and they freaked out. I got the gig.

MD: Omar once equated being behind the drumset with dancing; you have to be comfortable with your own body.

Claude: I once wanted to drum with an African drum group for a dance class. I

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Claude Coleman

went there and watched them, and I was told I had to take the dance class before I could drum for them. So I did, because dancing to that music is parallel to playing the instrument.

MD: While you were at Mason Gross, your band Skunk got a deal with Twin/Tone Records. How long were you in school at that point?

Claude: About a semester and a half. Things moved really quickly for Skunk. After we got signed they wanted to tour. I was the only one in school, so it was obvi-

"I'm in overdrive to push myself to heal. Lately I've been playing gigs like they were my last ones, like, You're gonna *remember* seeing me playing drums."

ous I had to turn to the school of rock. We did the van thing and toured and toured,

including a long European tour opening for Babes In Toyland, another Twin/Tone band. After that tour the band broke up, so I found myself without a band and not in school. Not that I was worried, because at that point I was so immersed in the slacker-rock lifestyle that it seemed perfectly fitting to be out of a job, eating cheese sandwiches. [laughs]

MD: When did you become involved with Ween?

Claude: Ween had actually gotten signed to Twin/Tone through a gig they did with my band. After Skunk broke up, I started hanging out more with those guys. I was going down to this place they were living in called The Pod, which became the title of their second record, and I was crashing on their couch. *The Pod* was put out by [underground rock impresario] Kramer, and I think it was his idea to make a band out of Ween and do some shows.

At that time the band was called "The Ween," and the gigs were really cool, because it was all that early stuff, which to me is the most punk rock stuff you've ever heard. We did a two-week tour of England, and that was amazingly miserable, but an incredible bonding experience, at least for me, Mickey, and Aaron.

For the next record, *Pure Guava*, Aaron and Mickey toured with just the two of them and a tape deck. I was still hanging around with them, though. When it came around to the next album, *Chocolate And Cheese*, they wanted to make Ween more of a traditional live band, and I just kind of naturally fell into the role. I wasn't really the first choice for drums on the recording; it was always drum machine before anything, and if it wasn't machine, it was Mickey. He always did the natural drums on their early records, so he was still playing on that record as well. I did do a bunch of percussion stuff, though, like on "Voodoo Lady." When they toured behind



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that album, that's when the band became kind of a set thing.

MD: How do you approach Mickey's parts live?

Claude: I honor each one of them lick for lick. He's very specific, down to ride cymbals. And I'm perfectly fine with that.

I vividly remember hanging out with those guys at Andrew Weiss's house, working on a Skunk record, and Mickey and Aaron showed up there with the *Pod 4*-track cassette that they had just done. They were playing it for Andrew for the first time, and they were delirious, snickering and laughing. As far as I can remember, what we heard coming out of the speakers that day was exactly how that album would later sound. They always have a grand idea of what they want.

MD: So Mickey has pretty good facility at the drums?

Claude: Yeah! He's a totally capable drummer. I mean he's not a flashy showman, but he has good ideas.

MD: How are you presented with the material?

Claude: What usually happens is they'll do a demo of a tune. If that's the case, they'll come to the rest us with the demo, then we just play what the demo is. There's usually no reason to change anything. I might stretch things a bit or add a subtle stylistic thing to it. Now, if it happens that I'm there while they're in the process of recording their first version of a song, then I'll be playing drums on it. It's kind of circumstantial. I'm like that with my own music, which is why I end up doing everything. It's mostly a matter of practicality.

MD: After *Chocolate And Cheese* came the album *12 Golden Country Greats*, where they hired all these authentic country & western musicians, like drummer Buddy Harman.

Claude: Touring behind that album was one of the highlights of my career. It was a full band of seasoned Nashville session players. Not neo-country—they were all genuinely amazing traditional players. I was never more afraid than when I was flying to Nashville the day before the month-long tour behind that record. I was freaking. Here I was, this black kid from New Jersey coming down to Nashville to play country tunes with these lap steel and fiddle players. But they were such professionals, it wasn't an issue. It was just about the

tunes. They made it very relaxed.

MD: How long did you stay nervous?

Claude: I was freaking out for a while during the first rehearsal. I was trying to get the feel, which is the most important thing for that music. If you're not living it, you're faking it, so it's just a matter of how well you can fake it. [laughs] But after an hour and a half I felt pretty confident about how it was going, and nobody was iffy about the energy. After that it was smooth sailing; every night was the greatest gig I would ever do.

MD: How did you approach those feels? Did you go out and buy Johnny Cash records to cop the grooves?

Claude: No, because I identify with country music, and I write some tunes in a country vein. So I just kind of went down there with my own natural resources. Again, that stuff is really about the feel, the linear smoothness. It's a coasting, steady, pocket thing. I just tried as hard as I could to put the feel in the right place. I think it worked well. We made a great live record from that tour.

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Claude Coleman

MD: The *12 Golden Country Greats* album is such an interesting chapter in rock history. You've got Ween's crazy ideas being played in this traditional manner. Ween walks lines like that beautifully. A lot of the reviews of that album didn't really get that, though.

Claude: Not many people understand Ween in general. We're really easy to write off as a humor band. The humor doesn't even comprise most of the music at this point, but even when there is a literal joke, there's authenticity too. Not many artists

have those kinds of cross-references. It's too complicated for people to accept. But Aaron and Mickey are influenced by anything and everything, so it only makes sense that their creative output reflects that. In that sense, Ween is the most common-sense thing there is. It fits the bill for just about everything I feel.

MD: Are there specific Ween tracks that you're particularly proud of?

Claude: Generally I think the Ween studio cuts I've done are pretty tame. And I'm not ashamed of that by any means. Some of my

favorite drummers are those sort of invisible guys—feel drummers, groove drummers who you don't notice, but who support the music. Though, now that I'm thinking about it, on *White Pepper*, which is the first album where the band played on every song, there's a song called "She's Your Baby" that I remember doing some nice brush work on. I was trying to get all Russ Kunkel on it, that light supportive thing, as if I was playing with Joni Mitchell. I think that might be the song I'm most proud of.

MD: What other songs come to mind?

Claude: "Mutilated Lips": I kind of produced that song with Aaron. He told me he wanted an Amanda production on that. On "Even If You Don't," I was going for a Roger Taylor/Queen thing. I don't think I totally achieved it, but I tried. On "Exactly Where I'm At," we got the sickest snare sound. The snares were tuned down to like no tension, but when I hit it hard it sounded amazing. "Stroker Ace" is pretty great. That was originally a drum machine song. This actually happens a lot. Mickey will write a tune with a drum machine and we'll record it, and I'll have to play along to the drum machine. I've done this with The Moistboyz [Mickey's side project]. Playing along with a drum machine is not exactly like playing along to a click, because it's drum sounds, and it's usually this blazing-fast double bass thing, screaming in my headphones.

MD: What do you want to accomplish playing in Ween?

Claude: I think more than anything I just want to be involved in the beginning process of a song, before it becomes a recording process. I think it's kind of leaning toward that now. As long as I'm moving in that direction, that'll make me happier and give me a greater sense of "Ween worth."

MD: Can you identify any specific challenges?

Claude: A lot of my challenges are related to my recent accident. I'm still trying to get past some limitations.

MD: Can you explain exactly what happened?

Claude: It happened on August 7, 2002. I was traveling west on Route 78, and traffic stopped suddenly. I was a bit too close to the car in front of me, so I pulled off to the left to avoid hitting it. There was a tractor



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Claude Coleman

trailer behind me, and he was too close to me to stop, so he just kind of kept going and rammed my car and shot it across the median, and I spun around and ended up in oncoming traffic. Then I got T-boned. The steering wheel was broken off, they had to cut the top of the car off to get me out....

It was kind of tragedy on top of tragedy. They put me in a hospital in Newark, and somehow the staff filed away all of my identification, essentially making me a John Doe. I laid in a hospital bed for two days, in and out of consciousness, and

nobody was able to be contacted. But they couldn't do surgery without consent. Meanwhile, my parents and my wife and all my friends were hanging missing-person flyers, freaking out. Eventually the hospital put a notice in the newspaper, and that's how my mother found me.

So I had a shattered pelvis, a severe concussion, and constant vertigo, and I couldn't lift my arm or move my left side at all. I was in the hospital for over a month, and I was in a wheelchair for two months after that. At some point along that

crappy, miserable journey, I was told by a doctor that I was going to heal and be alright, but it was mostly up to me. And that's kind of when I knew I was going to be okay. I have a lot of discipline and strength, and I knew it was just going to be a matter of time. It turns out it was only about five months. I was back behind the kit two weeks after I started walking again. But it was a wretched time, and I'm still dealing with the effects. It changed my life forever.

MD: Did you have any practice routine to get back your drumming skills?

Claude: I sat with a pad every other day. And now before gigs I have to warm up my hands, especially in the colder weather, because my circulation is affected. But that's been really good, because I hit the stage and I'm nice and loose.

In a way, I'm almost a better drummer now. My body is in overdrive to heal. And mentally I'm in overdrive to push myself to heal. So these gigs that I've been doing lately, I'm playing them like they were my last ones, like, You're gonna remember seeing me playing drums. So I'm kind of bringing another level of intensity to the whole thing.

MD: It must have been tough to see them bring other drummers in for the latest album.

Claude: When I was finally out of the hospital, watching the band go back on the road, and then listening to the feedback—that was a little hard to take. But I'm a patient guy, and I knew it was just a matter of time. I didn't really feel any threat to my job, because, well, I'm just so amazing. [laughs] But seriously, that part was hard.

MD: Live, how do you approach the songs from *Quebec*?

Claude: I stay true to the record. It's a shame I wasn't able to be on the album, because I think I would have done a nice job representing those tunes. Not that Josh Freese and Sim Cain didn't do anything but a stand-up job.

MD: When you play live you use electronic pads. How do you use them?

Claude: There are a couple of tunes where I'll trigger samples, like "Spinal Meningitis," where I trigger the triangle.

MD: Sometimes you play along to a drum machine too.

Claude: There are a couple of tunes. "Roses Are Free" has a drum pattern that's

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“A crucial mistake drummers make is not seeing themselves as part of the song, but rather as drumming to the song. There’s a big difference.”

pretty much impossible to emulate, plus it’s got sounds on it that can’t be duplicated. I love playing to the drum machine. I always found it to be easy. I play to a click pretty well too.

MD: What’s your monitor situation? Do you have in-ears?

Claude: No, I can’t stand them. I do the live monitor thing. Generally Aaron’s vocal is the loudest thing, then Mickey’s guitar,

then my kit is kind of underneath all that. We’re a loud band, and I have to hear what I’m doing.

MD: Do you have a particular mindset about soloing?

Claude: The soloing thing came at the end of a pretty self-indulgent era of Ween.

MD: So that’s not a regular feature of a Ween show?

Claude: No. Any instrumental solo is pretty much the most self-indulgent thing you can do. Not that it’s any less entertaining; people dig it. When I do it, I don’t have a game plan. I like to be very orchestral, though, to make you listen. My favorite soloists are the real musical ones. I just got this Herbie Hancock box set, and there’s material with Tony Williams. His solos crack me up, I just try to envision what Herbie and Miles were doing in the control room while Tony is doing these comical, abstract solos.

MD: Is stamina an issue for you? Some of the solos you have done are very long.

Claude: I don’t know why, but it doesn’t seem to be an issue with me. I have an athletic background, and I’m in good shape, so maybe that helps. But also, there’s so many different kinds of music going on in a Ween show. It’s a constantly stimulating thing. There are times when we finish and I’m like, That was two and half hours? Can we play some more? [laughs]

MD: Let’s talk about your solo project, Amandla.

Claude: If I could get Amandla out there and make more of a career for myself making music, I would definitely be doing it. I’ll be pushing this new record hard, because these are the best songs I’ve done. I’ve already made the decision to be out front, and I’m auditioning drummers, which is a funny thing. The feel is the most important thing, flash is unimportant. A good drummer only uses technique and chops to communicate good musical ideas. I want to hear good drumming, not good chops.

MD: Name one thing many drummers do

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wrong.

Claude: If it's a rock drummer, it's not rocking.

MD: Define rocking.

Claude: Rocking is propelling the music while supporting it. Not rocking is playing without supreme, creatively driven passion, leaving your heart out of an art form that is engendered by the heart. I'm playing for the apocalypse, whether it's in front of 15,000 people or 15. That's the only way ever I've known. Passion lives in the quietest musical moment to the most explosive. Just because you're hitting hard, it doesn't mean you're rocking.

Also, don't play the same groove everybody else is playing. I think drummers need to be a little more inclusive of the history of music, if they want to be included in the history of music *themselves*.

There's something lacking in rock today, and it comes from this copycat way that things are going. It also comes from a lack of musicality. Take Dave Grohl: If you listen to those Nirvana songs, there are identifiable parts. He's not just banging away and pretending that he's rocking. He's making music. His advantage is that he's a songwriter, and maybe that's the crucial mistake that drummers make: They don't see themselves as part of the song, they see themselves as drumming *to* the song. There's a big difference.

Drumming can do a lot of subtle things to a song. But you have to open yourself up to the tune and push the creative boundaries. Put on a Thin Lizzy record. That to me is the definition of how to rock properly. It's unapologetic, kicking ass every step of the way, and at the same time it's musical. It's not just a lazy backbeat.

MD: What are your feelings on single vs. double bass drums?

Claude: If I were to have a double bass setup, I would have different-sized drums, to get two different sounds. But I've always just played single. I've played double for fun, but my double bass chops...I'm not gonna play any speed-metal gigs.

MD: Your single-pedal speed is pretty fast, though. Did you ever do any specific work on that?

Claude: Just practicing on my own. I think a lot of it is about balance. If there isn't too much weight dispensed throughout the lower region of your body, it's easier to keep your ankle a little bit elevated over the

pedal, so you can get some speed out of it. I definitely kept that in mind over the years.

MD: Did you ever do any experiments with seat height?

Claude: Oh, yeah. Seat height is the one completely crucial issue of the drumset to me. If I let other people play my drums, I let them move anything around, but never raise or lower my seat, because it's everything—distribution of weight, independent coordination.... I might still raise or lower my seat height maybe half an inch or so. I don't have any memory locks on my drumset. My roadie marks it with tape, but invariably I change it, because it's always different, depending on the riser, the stage, and my whole perspective on how I'm seeing myself. So it's a work in progress.

MD: How far forward do you sit?

Claude: I have long limbs, so I probably sit a little further back than most drummers. Generally I try to keep my legs as close to a right angle with the floor as possible.

MD: You ride with both hands. Did you ever work on that?

Claude: That was Keith Copeland's influence. When I studied with him, I had to perform exercises with both hands. I'd have to play the swing pattern on cymbal, then the melody on the snare, and then switch hands. I did so much of that, it became comfortable to ride with either hand. I found that it really opens everything up. I think you get more dynamic control of the snare; you can really crack it because your arms aren't crossed.

MD: How about stick grip?

Claude: Back in my Stewart Copeland days, I was into traditional grip. Anything Stewart was, I was. [laughs] Then eventually I moved to a French matched grip, with my thumb over the top of the stick. That was a natural evolutionary process.

MD: Do you have strong feelings about equipment?

Claude: I'm very relaxed about equipment. I could play the crappiest drumset and be happy. It doesn't even have to be a four-piece set. I've often played a three-piece, and I've recorded with kick/snare/hats.

MD: What are your thoughts on drum tones?

Claude: I've felt this for a long time, and it's been confirmed by studio engineers: All drums have their own natural tones, so

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Claude Coleman

foremost you have to tune the drum to its sweetest tone.

MD: How about muffling?

Claude: I'm an anti-muffling kind of guy. I like the kick drum with a lot of tone, but I do play in a rock band, so my tone is a little drier. As far as muffling, I use a thin pillow. Most of the muffling is provided by a ring built into the Aquarian Superkick head I use. The pillow is used mostly to control the front head.

MD: How about the snare drum?

Claude: I don't ever dampen the snare drum. That's kind of 1983.

MD: How about head tension?

Claude: I like a tight head but also a lot of depth to the sound, because I can't stand super-tight snares that don't really sound like snares. That drives me crazy. A wider sound fits for all the kinds of music I do. I do a lot of grace notes, so something in between works for me.

MD: How much singing do you do with Ween?

Claude: I do a fair amount of background singing.

MD: Any tips on singing and drumming



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simultaneously?

Claude: I've always approached the voice as another limb that needs its own independent coordination. It's always felt natural for me to sing and play at the same time. I've never consciously worked on it.

MD: Since you're a multi-instrumentalist, do you still identify yourself as a drummer?

Claude: I struggle with that from time to time, because I like to consider myself a songwriter. I don't think it's really important to have one kind of identity. Sometimes I find myself in situations where I could jump up and suggest something for a bass part or an arrangement or a mic placement, but I'll just kind of stick to the role of drummer, and that's fine with me too. I'll just take those ideas and use them elsewhere.

MD: How about when you were growing up and into Stewart Copeland? Did you consider yourself a drummer first then?

Claude: Funny enough, Stewart was the guy who inspired me along my multi-instrumental path. When his Klark Kent



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record came out, I was like, Yes! This is what I want to do, make music all by myself, quirky music that's not exactly great but not exactly bad. [laughs] But I think it's important to recognize yourself as a *musician*, even if you're "just a drummer" or "just a bassist," and to try to really understand those other components of music.

MD: So, what are your immediate plans?

Claude: We're going to go back out and do Bonnaroo and continue to tour more behind this record. We recently needed to take a bit of a break. We're a band that plays long and hard and parties longer and harder. [laughs] Mickey and Aaron are putting together a new studio so they can have a better recording environment, and maybe after this little bit of touring they'll go back to work on the next record. There are areas we've yet to tour, like Australia and Japan and some parts of the States. But ultimately I have no idea where this is going; I'm along for the ride as much as any Ween fan is.



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Getting Good Sound

It's (Almost) All About Technique

by Claude Coleman

So, you've just dropped two months' salary on a gorgeous, top-of-the-line drumkit. The shine off the hardware is blinding, and the custom finish is one-of-a-kind. Looking like a total pro behind it, you can't wait to make some miraculous sounds.

Then you start to rehearse with your band, and inexplicably the drums aren't sounding as good as you'd expect. They kind of sound like your *last* kit. Maybe it's a little louder and more defined, but it's still decidedly unexceptional. What gives?

One of the most neglected aspects of drumming, particularly with beginning players, is the ability to deliver rich and well-defined drum tones at all dynamic levels. There's an art to it, and contrary to popular belief, it has more to do with *technique* than how expensive your gear is. Obviously, tuning, the type of wood used, the quality of construction, and head choices are important. But the drumkit with the price tag of a Lexus will do nada for you if you hit it like a rabid gorilla hanging upside down—even if you're great at tuning!

*Many of the greatest drummers with the most inspiring sounds performed on kits that by today's standards would be considered inferior. Their technique **was** their sound.*

The sounds we generate on any instrument are determined largely by human control, and instruments that are inherently acoustic such as the drums are particularly facilitated by touch. We control all the aspects of sound: pitch, tone, and timbre, *before* tuning and drum construction are factored in.

Let's look at some of the key issues in the pursuit of creating consistently good drum tones. For the purpose of this article, we'll be dealing purely with the drums, leaving cymbal technique for another discussion.



Technique

Though there can be noticeable differences between lower-cost and high-quality drums, there's absolutely no reason that an inexpensive drumset can't sound good with some careful tuning—but more importantly, when played with good technique. In fact, many of the greatest drummers with the most inspiring sounds performed on kits that by today's standards would be considered inferior. Their technique *was* their sound.

Technique is a multi-faceted concept, and all the conventions and methods involved are relative to one another. While there are physical skills that should be developed, other skills like listening, musicality, and creativity deserve equal emphasis, and should in fact be treated as part of one's overall "technique." So when we outline the steps for creating good drum tones, we must relate them to all those other areas.

From a purely technical angle, having confident and authoritative sticking, with strokes that are controlled and consistent, is the most important skill to develop. We want to be able to deliver clean and even sounds from a drum. A stick grip that's too stiff inhibits drum tones, while one that's too loose won't amplify the drums' natural tones properly. Having one weak hand makes fills sound inconsistent, and being imprecise on even a well-tuned drum results in sounds that aren't very useful.

Stick Control For The Snare Drummer by George Stone is an absolutely essential book that focuses on developing precise stick technique. It contains pages of exercises for power, precision, delicacy, and development of the weak hand. Working with this book will not only steer you towards creating better sounds on the kit, it will vastly improve your speed, authority, and coordination. Just as importantly, developing good stick conditioning and control will enable you to be a better *dynamic* player, giving you the control you need under shifting musical moments.

Kick & Snare

Once you develop good stick control, you must acknowledge that each drum on the kit has a unique set of factors that affect its sound. The snare, for instance, can be an unforgiving enemy against all efforts of sounding good. For some, it's an issue

Basics

Checks & Balances

The drumset is a collection of individual instruments that we play simultaneously, hopefully resulting in a unified, collective sound. Just as important as making the individual components sound good is properly managing the balance of all these components.

Something I've noticed with some inexperienced drummers is how they'll be rock-

toms to be heard; we have to blend in our hats so that they don't dominate our sound. Everything on the drumset is in the context of itself. Yeah, I know—*deep*.

In theory you should be able to get an accurate and balanced drumkit sound in the studio with only two microphones. During the early days of studio recording, this is exactly what was done. Some of those fantastic Motown recordings: one drum mic.

John Bonham's legendary drum sound on Led Zeppelin's "When The Levee Breaks": two Meyer M160 microphones! That recording is governed by the performance.

I'll close with one more Bonham tale, passed down through rock lore. (As far as I'm concerned, all discussions of rock drumming start and end with John Bonham.) In the midst of whichever killer take, for whichever killer Zeppelin

Any producer worth his salt will tell you that you are more in charge of mixing your drum sound than any engineer could be.

ing a beat with kick, snare, and hat pretty good, but when they go to do a fill on the toms, the drums vanish. Or they'll be slamming the life out of their snares, but their kick drum is way too quiet. Or vice versa.

We must maintain an even balance all around the kit, and to do that we have to be our own mix engineers. Any producer worth his or her salt will tell you that you are more in charge of mixing your drum sound than any engineer could be. We have to play our

tune, an assistant engineer comes out, apparently to start relocating mic's, and mentions to Bonham that the cymbals are too loud. Bonham stops him in his tracks, and tells him, "No, I'll just play the cymbals softer." Duh, right? This is the lesson we as drummers must carry with us to the grave. All the pieces of our kit are balanced and facilitated dynamically by us, the drummers. It's all in our hands!

Ron Tutt

NEIL
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Claude Coleman is best known as the versatile live and studio drummer for cult-rock gods Ween, as well as the singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist for his own band, Amandla. Coleman is also music director and branch manager of the Paul Green School of Rock Music in New York City, where he also teaches.



Basics

muscles that aren't worked when you play heel-up, ultimately giving you more strength, control, and dexterity at all dynamic levels. The better your technique, the better your sound!

One more thing: Beater positioning is also important. The beater has to strike relatively in the center of the head, near its sweet spot. I say "relatively" because in some instances the size of your kick drum might dictate that hitting its sweet spot forces your beater to be placed at an uncomfortable length for you. On my 20" bass drum, for instance, having my beater slightly beyond the center of the head feels most comfortable.

Work Your Drums

So, what is the "right" way to manipulate and consciously draw out the full, rich sounds from your drums—to "work" your drums, so to speak?

Drum sounds are defined by physics as resonant energy. Basically this suggests that when a force of energy works simultaneously with natural resonance, that force transfers the energy to that resonance. This energy causes vibrations, which turn into the sound. So when a drum is struck, it is the vibration that is making sound. To control this sound, we adjust—"work"—the

As a good drummer, you should sound good on any drumkit, not just the one you own.

force we are striking the drum with.

The drum shell and head properties dictate the tone of the drum, but *how* we hit the drum determines the evenness of these vibrations, as well as the distributed flow of air inside the drum that is causing the sound we hear.

When striking the drum, we should use a light and controlled grip, and our stick strokes should be solidly up and down. We don't want to slice the stick when we hit our drums. A stroke perpendicular to the drumhead best allows the stick to bounce back to us, seemingly allowing the stick to play itself. I also interpret this concept as playing *into* the drum, as opposed to playing *on* it. However hard or light your stroke

will be, you should use your wrists and fingers to follow as well as guide the recoil of the stick. This controlled bounce is the crucial element of creating full drum tones.

When hitting a drum we also want to be mindful of its sweet spot: the center of the drumhead, where the frequencies created when it's struck will be evenly distributed and result in the richest tones. All drums have these "sweet spots," which can be heard and felt at various tensions. You simply have to develop your ears to hear them. Practice your fills around the kit, really focusing on the right spots, the right strokes, and the full sounds. Pretty soon you'll be naturally incorporating them in your playing. Furthermore, you'll be able to extract the best tones from any kit you sit behind—which, believe me, is a vital skill if you play a lot of venues with their own backline, and you're playing a different drumkit every other gig. Theoretically, as a good drummer you should sound good on any drumkit, not just the one you own.

Hear Your Drums

As drummers we should develop our ears to hear good drum sounds. Take the time to find the even and unwavering tones of your drums, and practice playing them.

It's this process of training our ears that encourages us to instinctively assimilate good drum sounds into our playing, because we will hear them in our heads and work to create them.

Besides listening to your own instrument, you *must* work on listening to the other musicians you're playing with. Get in tune with the musical framework and the energy that everyone else is committing to in that moment, because that's when you become liberated from the confinement of just your chops, and you make pure music. When you put the perfect fills in the exact right moments and spaces, or your drum patterns are the most appropriate pulse for the song's mood, you are drumming within the context of that musical environment. You are then contributing the most complementary rhythmic accompaniment to the overall sound. And *that's* where the best drumming sounds come from.

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they'll struggle with forever. We must be mindful of consistent, well-placed strokes, since off-center strikes can create snare vibrations that'll leave your drum sounding like a massive box of rice.

The same issues of control apply to the kick drum. As with the snare drum, getting a good sound from our bass drum requires solid, consistent, and confident hits at all dynamic levels. Even a heavily compressed kick drum can sound haphazard in the studio if a player isn't consistent with its use.

Pedal control generally suggests two specific techniques. Heel-down playing tends to allow the beater to recoil from the head at a quicker rate, and to some players allows a greater dynamic range. Heel-up playing tends to put the beater into the head a bit deeper.

Heel-up is the more popular method among many drummers—myself included. It creates the punchier tone associated with most popular music, which requires bass drums with low to moderate amounts of tone and decay. Heel-down is popular among many jazz drummers, who usually desire more sustain and tone from their bass drums.

Throughout my own playing development, I've acquired both methods—heel-up and heel-down—because I perform and

record in different types of musical situations, with artists who require varying drum setups and sounds. Even if you generally play jazz, you might find yourself using a 26" kick drum with little muffling, on a slow rock song. That bass drum has got to ring, and you've got to have the technique to make it ring beautifully.

Particularly critical to heel-up players is the development of the leg muscles, since we're lifting our legs to kick the pedal, and using that lift to determine the volume of the kick hit. We also have to be cognizant of the height we're raising our legs up to, in order to achieve total consistency and ultimate dynamic control.

One method to develop consistent, solid kick drum strikes is to practice your kick hits with a stick in your alternate hand over your kick leg. Play varying beats, and focus on keeping that knee rising to the same level. Practice that at several different stick heights for different dynamic levels. Then try alternating single strokes, double strokes, and paradiddles between the feet and hand...or taking your favorite snare rudiment exercises and substituting the kick for certain notes. Another tip is to practice rudiments with your feet on the floor with your heel down, even if you're a heel-up player. This develops all the

Quick Tips

1. Find a junky old kit somewhere, maybe from a garage sale. Set it up and do a bunch of playing and jamming with it. Even do some recording with it, and make it sound *real*. It most certainly can be done! This will help fine-tune your drum tone talents.
2. Occasionally do some playing in a group with different, minimal setups. Try a kick/snare/hat/one cymbal setup. Or play acoustic gigs with just a snare. This will help develop your ears and increase your overall musical space and time awareness.
3. Have another drummer play your drumkit. Train your ears to hear for yourself the differences in sound, texture, and volume that every player individually possesses.
4. Next time you're changing heads, take the bottom head off as well and determine what pitches your shells naturally resonate at. To do this, lightly tap on the shell with a rubber mallet, and find the note on a keyboard or guitar. Then try tuning your drum to that pitch.
5. Lastly, play, play, and play some more!



Tyler Stewart - Barenaked Ladies

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The World said No to War

Donna Lamb

20/2/2003

In countries east and west, north and south in over 600 cities around the globe, Saturday, February 15th, people massed in the streets to denounce the Bush Administration's call to war.



Claude Coleman Jr. with his sign "I Support Regime Change: Our Own"



A feeder march

Many people attended the rally as private citizens, such as Claude Coleman, Jr. who held a sign reading, "I Support Regime Change: Our Own." When asked why he had come, he responded, "There's an old saying, 'If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.' So I'm trying to make a difference in my own life and the lives of other people."

And Renee Vowser, who had come all the way from Washington DC with her sign, "US: Weapons of Mass Destruction Leader," stated, "I'm here because I believe the greatest obstruction to peace in the world is the U.S." She explained that Bush's real reason for wanting war couldn't be that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction since Israel has weapons of mass destruction and the U.S. government does nothing. "It can't be because they're in violation of U.N. resolutions because Turkey, Israel and Morocco are each in violation," Vowser continued. "So it has to be about oil. And I'm not going to war for oil."

Many religious organizations, both local and regional, were present too, such as the Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship and the Unitarian Society of New Haven, CT. Union members were out in force as well. There was a large contingency from 1199 SEIU, New York's Health and Human Service Union. George Gresham, the union's Secretary Treasurer said, "We're here as healthcare workers to protest this preemptive

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