

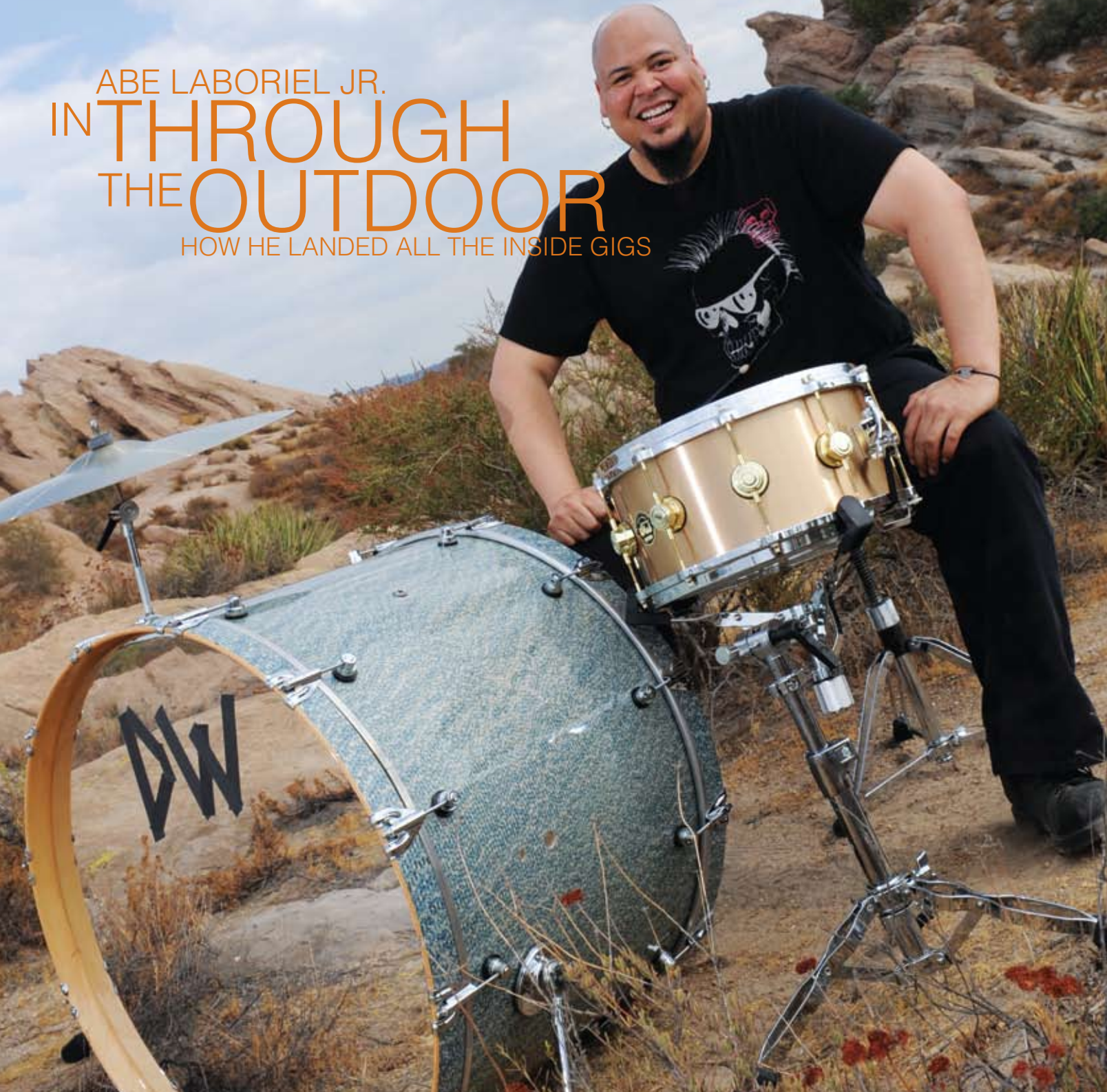
STEVIE NICKS' JIMMY PAXSON, UP CLOSE WITH DANNY SERAPHINE & STUDIO MASTER JR ROBINSON

# EDGE

M A G A Z I N E

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF DRUM WORKSHOP • 8.0

ABE LABORIEL JR.  
IN THROUGH  
THE OUTDOOR  
HOW HE LANDED ALL THE INSIDE GIGS



PLUS DW ARTISTS HIT EUROPE, Q&A WITH THE DRUMMERS OF NASHVILLE, DW'S LATEST GEAR AND MORE!

# IN THROUGH THE OUTDOOR

HE'S A GOT A PERSONALITY AS BIG AS HIS FOOTBALL PLAYER PHYSIQUE AND A FEEL AND POCKET THAT WON'T QUIT. A DYNAMIC STAGE PERFORMER AND STUDIO ACE THAT WAS ONCE WAS AN OUTSIDER LIKE THE REST OF US, AND NOW HAS MUSIC'S ELITE ON HIS SPEED DIAL.

photos by Rob Shanahan



## ABE LABORIEL JR.



Rich Mangicaro

It's hard to imagine our world of contemporary music without the name Laboriel attached to it. Performing on over 4,000 recordings and soundtracks, Abe's father Abraham Sr. has inspired generations of musicians. Abe Jr.'s destiny was

inevitable...he had, of course very natural abilities on whatever he picked up. His father impressed upon him the importance of the feel and flow of music and how to be musical, regardless of style or tempo, complexity or simplicity. The key was always to play for the song.

I first met Abe Jr. during his high school years, at the NAMM show in Anaheim, California. That year, I had booked Jeff Porcaro with a band he assembled to perform in our booth at Paiste and Jeff came to me and said, "Rich, meet Abe Laboriel's son, Abe Jr. He's gonna sit in and wait till you hear his samba!" The feel and groove coming from this 17 year old was so deep, something you could feel inside of you. Something you could tell was coming from an old soul.

*Rich: I remember that day so well at the NAMM show, when Jeff introduced us.*

*Abe: Yeah, it's amazing...we've known each other for 22 years! You signed me to my Paiste Endorsement and you were the first one to take a chance on me... so thank you, man.*

*RM: Well, I'm honored. It's great to have our long friendship and to see where you've taken it. I admit that I have some pride attached to it. You know, I'm sure in all your interviews, you've been asked how it all started... especially growing up with your Dad, who's such a legend in music. But, tell me - how do you remember it all starting for you?*

*AL: Really, quite literally with pots and pans, 18 months old, wooden spoons, with headphones on and just banging away. I got my first drum set when I was 4 years old, which was a gift from Jamey Haddad.*

*RM: Jamey is amazing...I didn't know you had that early history with him. Tell me about your other early influences.*

*AL: My Dad plays a little drums and would show me some things to play. He has an amazing feel and would show me a simple beat and stress the pulse and feel. I would play it and he would jam with me. I would also listen to records and try to emulate what I heard. We moved to LA when I was 5 and by the time I turned 10, I told my Dad that I wanted to be a professional musician, seriously. I would go to sessions with him and watch him play with Gadd or Jeff and many others. So then, Dad asked Alex Acuña whom I should study with and Alex said, "I'll teach him." Alex really gave me the freedom to explore and learn improvisation.*

*RM: Was there reading involved?*

AL: A little bit. You know, we had the “Syncopation” book but that wasn’t what attracted me to the instrument. I think the freedom that I had to explore with Alex kept me interested and it wasn’t until later, when I was 16, that I began studying with Peter Donald, from the Dick Grove School and had some theory and reading lessons.

RM: How early was it that you began hanging with Jeff Porcaro?

AL: I was about 15 when Jeff would call my Dad and ask if he could take me to some sessions. He would come pick me up and I got to watch him record or rehearse. What was great about the hangs with Jeff was that it was not just about the drums but more about the interaction. When I would geek out and ask him how to play a fill, he would say, “Ah, you don’t wanna know that.” But, he would eventually show me. With Jeff, I learned about interacting with others and about having a well-rounded life.

RM: What about Carlos Vega?

AL: With Carlos and Vinnie (Colaiuta) and J.R., it was more just hangin’ at sessions, coming with my Dad. I’d ask them what sticks they used and how they tuned the drums. Vinnie was the first guy that I saw using coated Ambassadors, top and bottom, which, at that time most guys were using clears on the bottom. That helped me understand that you can break “rules” and use different combinations. Also, I would learn from them how they would interpret a song, either from listening or from a chart.

RM: Were you giggin’ around town at that time?

AL: Not really. My first real gig with my Dad wasn’t until I was just about to leave LA for Berklee. It was at the Baked Potato with Larry Carlton and Greg Mathieson.

RM: Remember that day at the Paiste booth, when you came and sat in? Had you ever played with them before that day?

AL: No. Jeff just asked me to sit in and I was foolishly confident enough to do it.

RM: Did your father ever sit with you and teach?

AL: Yes...the two things he would enforce were groove and time. When we would jam together, he would make sure I kept that focus. My Dad’s understanding of syncopation is heavy. When playing Jazz, he would make sure I kept the melody in mind while playing time. He would have me play the melody on the drum kit. This was invaluable to me and when we play together now, we know exactly where we are in the song. There’s this unspoken language that we have from our history of jamming so much. My father has taught me practically everything I know.

RM: Tell me about your first recording experience?

AL: The first one was a Justo Almario record, with my Dad and Alex Acuña on percussion. They actually hired me to play drums on the record!

I wanted to be really prepared so I brought a drum machine with all the clicks programmed with different sounds and upbeats, so I was able to control what we played to rather than try to communicate that with the engineer. I had my drums tuned just right and hired Ross Garfield to see to that. It was so much fun and Dad was just so proud. We were there 3 or 4 days.

RM: Were you gaining studio experience at Berklee?

AL: A little bit, but it hadn’t quite picked up there yet. I went through a couple of teachers at Berklee before landing with Ian Froman the instructor who I really connected with. He opened my head SO much and pushed me to think outside the box and beyond the downbeat...in a more free-form way. I learned from him how to trust the other players more. Ian’s approach was a continuation of what my Dad and Alex taught me, but he put it in a different context that resonated with me.

“There’s this unspoken language that we have from our history of jamming so much. My father has taught me practically everything I know.”

RM: Did you finish school?

AL: Yes, although whilst there, I got an offer to tour with Barry Manilow and I considered it pretty seriously. At first, I wasn’t finding my niche at Berklee. What I did get into was working with Phil Wilson, the ensemble leader. He really took me under his wing and pushed me to improve my reading. The first time I showed up outside his office, with my kit on my back...I figured out how to carry an entire kit on my back...(laughs). When he saw me, he laughed and I said, “What – am I early?” I then looked in his office and he had the smallest office! He said, “No man, all you need is your snare!” He really opened my eyes to the fact that I hadn’t really explored just one of the pieces of my instrument, let alone all of it. I left the rest of the kit out in the hall and, with Phil, I realized all of the different tones and sounds you can get out of just one instrument. Using sticks, brushes, hands, snares off, hitting the side of the drum, or any combination therein. This was another life-changing experience for me. I think this is why I’ve never felt the need to have a bunch of toms or a large kit and to explore as much as you can with a simpler setup.

RM: That’s a great compliment to Phil as you’re kind of known for that. So, what happened with that offer from Barry Manilow?

AL: It was a hard decision, but I decided to stay in school. I changed majors...I felt I had gotten all I could out of the drum department and switched to Music Synthesis. I still studied with Ian, but I wanted to work in a field that would really have

merit in the future of recorded music. So I worked a lot with synthesizers, sequencing, programming and some production techniques. Sampling was really at the vanguard then and that really interested me. So, I did that for the last 2 years of school, while still playing in bands around town.

RM: You know, the first time I saw you with McCartney, you were singing background vocals and I thought, what an amazing experience to be singing those vocal parts with him! Recently, I saw a video clip of you singing lead for a French artist...what was her name?

AL: Mylene Farmer. Yeah, that was in Paris and we did 13 shows in a row in an arena that held 18,000 plus.

RM: How did that gig come about?

AL: In 1996, I had worked with Steve Vai, Seal and also Jonathan Brooke, doing theater gigs in the States. I then got a call to play with this French Pop star. That was Mylene. When I got there, we walked into this arena, 20,000 seats and I had no idea that she was that big. We rehearsed there for 2 weeks and then, the first night of the tour, I was shocked by the crowd. It was like a Beatles crowd! I had never heard that before...they were so loud and intense. That was my first experience playing to a crowd like that.

RM: That spawned a few other French artists, right?

AL: Yeah...I toured with her for about 6 months of that year and then worked for about a year with Johnny Hallyday. My first night with him was in Paris, in front of 85,000 people and I was again blown away by the intensity of that situation. So, by the time I toured with Sting and Paul, I was comfortable playing those types of venues and all that comes with it.

RM: So how did Paul McCartney find you?

AL: I received a random call from a friend named David Kahne, who was a producer and A&R guy for Warner Brothers. We would run into each other from time but had never worked together. Paul hired David to assemble the musicians and produce his “Driving Rain” CD. I remember getting the call from David, asking me, “How do you feel about making the next Paul McCartney record?” I almost dropped the phone. The night before I met Paul, I didn’t sleep much. When I got to the studio, within 5 minutes of shaking Paul’s hand, we were listening to a demo and recording.

RM: Is that when the big diameter thing came into play for you?

AL: When I was juggling between playing softer volume gigs with artists like k.d. to playing very hard with Steve Vai and Seal and I was finding out that I was choking out drums. I found that the smaller diameter drums were maxing out from the way I played and not giving me what I wanted. So I went to a 26” bass drum and loved the range...the way I could hit it soft and the note would be a darker tone, but then I could hit hard and it would punch and follow me, dynamically.



## I REMEMBER GETTING THE CALL FROM DAVID, ASKING ME, “HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT MAKING THE NEXT PAUL MCCARTNEY RECORD?” I ALMOST DROPPED THE PHONE..

So I asked D.W. to make me a kit with 12”, 15” and 18” toms and the 26” bass drum. Since then, I’ve never gone back to smaller sizes.

RM: So for Paul, you began working immediately?

AL: Yeah – we were at Henson Studios, which used to be A&M. My drums were there; Paul’s drums were there. Paul was in the tracking room with us, myself, Rusty Anderson and pianist Gabe Dickson. Paul was very open to our ideas, during the creative process.

RM: How long did you record?

AL: We recorded for 2 weeks, took a break for a couple of months and then came back and recorded for another 2 weeks. It was just a beautiful experience. He was so open to exploring things with us. I was into a more organic type of programming and rather than getting a computer out, I was using guitar effect pedals and loop pedals and also using the Roland Handsonic, which I love. I would create the loops on the guitar gear, which enabled me to be all about the live feel, then triggering it where I felt it should be. I would then run all these things through flangers, delays and various effect pedals and all through guitar amps, which further gave that organic sound that Paul loved.

RM: That was 2001?

AL: Yeah, we finished the record in June and he was considering touring but had not finalized plans when a few months later, September 11th happened. Two weeks later, I was in New York, playing with k.d. Lang and got the call from Sting. He had some dates to finish and Manu Kathe wasn’t available. Two days before Sting’s rehearsals were to start, Paul’s “Concert For New York” benefit was to be my first big show

with him. During that weekend, I did that show with Paul and also began rehearsals with Sting. I finished out Sting’s dates and while I was on the road with him, I got a call from Paul’s camp, letting me know he wanted to begin doing some shows, but I had to say no, which was one of the scariest things I’ve ever had to do. Luckily, he understood my commitment to Sting and waited ‘till I was done, to do his tour.

RM: Wow, what a position to be in. Abe, of all the dates you’ve done with Paul, I’m particularly interested in the trip to Russia. I have the “In Red Square” DVD, which I highly recommend to everyone.

AL: That was just an incredible experience. Paul had never been to Russia...even with The Beatles. Back in the day, popular music from the West was banned there, so that was his first trip and he was completely moved by the whole thing. I was so honored to have been a part of that. Not to mention playing “Back In The U.S.S.R.” in Red Square!

RM: Yes – it must have been amazing. That DVD really captures the emotion of the event. You know, after all your work with such amazing artists, have you worked on your own material?

AL: Yeah, I’ve been working on some songs and probably have enough for a record, at this point. It’s just been about finding the time to record them and probably, now is the time. I enjoy writing, even just for the sake of exercising that muscle.

RM: Do your song ideas begin more melodically or with a groove concept?

AL: It’s melodic with harmony and a lot of leading tone stuff. Eventually the melody forms and lyrics come, hopefully. There’s a bunch of songs that I want to record and I’m not sure what I’ll do with

them yet...maybe I’ll set up a website. We’ll see. I’m just having fun with the creation process.

RM: What is coming up for you in the near future?

AL: This year, I toured with Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood. It is sort of a Blind Faith reunion. It is an incredible experience to learn about American-influenced British Rock from the very pioneers of it. I’ve been approaching this tour with more of a tribal mindset. As a tip of the hat to Ginger Baker I’ve added some more toms to my kit. My set from left to right is 14”, 12”, 13” rack toms and 15”, 16” floor toms. I also have more shows scheduled with Paul too.

...At this point, Abe picked up an acoustic guitar and played a song. It was moody, in a minor key, almost Spanish in flavor...reminded me a bit of Sting. The song’s lyrics were about someone realizing a love that’s right in front of them and the struggle to get out of their own way to appreciate it.

Abe is honored to have the influences he had as a young, up and coming player and is thankful every single day. Unlike most of us, he had the amazing fortune, not only to have great studio legends take him under their wing but also to have a father guide him in a way most of us can only imagine. Even with his inherited talent and natural ability, he learned very young the value of hard work, the importance of mutual respect and the invaluable tool of listening. Listening to everything...to the words spoken around him, to the subtle lessons between peers, to every style of music, to his mentors and finally to himself. **Abraham Laboriel Jr. was destined to endure a legacy...a legacy that still thrives today.**