





Mike Bordin

A Little Faith
Goes A Long Way

Words: Rich Mangicaro
Photos: Mark Weiss

After having the pleasure of a lengthy conversation with the great Mike Bordin, it hit me...how many of us can say that we've played with our mentor? To grow up listening to someone, to be heavily influenced by them and then for that person to meet you and ultimately ask you to join their band! We've all imagined what that would be like. For Mike, hard work, homework and perseverance were his way to that reality. It's a privilege that he doesn't take lightly.



One of the first things Mike told me was that he isn't much of a traveler, quite the challenge for someone who spends so much of his time on the road. However, considering where he lives, you can see why he likes to come home. Mike was born in San Francisco and still lives in Northern California. It is a beautiful place, and one could even say a *magical* part of our country. When we spoke, Mike had just finished 51 weeks of touring with Ozzy Osbourne, so needless to say, he was happy to be home with his family, amongst the majestic redwoods and pristine ocean air. It was a pleasure to speak with a true resident that stayed and still appreciates it so much.

Mike Bordin: We just finished 110 shows during those 51 weeks, which is a high watermark for *my man*, at this point in his career. We went everywhere but Japan this time: Australia, New Zealand, South America, extensive European travel and North America.

Rich Mangicaro: On that tour, were you still promoting *Black Rain*?

MB: Yes, after making that record, the way we recorded it, it was great to play it live and see how well received it was.

RM: It is a great record, the opening track just slams! It doesn't get any more powerful than that. I also love the main riff in "I Don't Wanna Stop."

MB: Thank you. You know, at that time, I hadn't been playing much and Ozzy wasn't working. I was itchin' to play and got a call to do a pretty cool gig, but decided to wait and see what Ozzy was gonna do. Funny enough, the very next day he called me and said, "Can you come on Monday and start recording?!" Just like that. We went to Ozzy's studio, just me and Zakk [Wylde], and I just listened to Zakk play. There were no demos, there were no rehearsals. We just started playing. It felt like we had a real shot at laying down spontaneous, honest music. We tracked 33 songs, and nothing I did was more than 4 or 5 takes, all complete passes. That was exciting.

RM: Well, you know that doesn't happen very much any more.

MB: That's right, and you can tell that they were actual performances and not just pieced together. It reminded me of those great recordings where the guys are all around the mic, cutting right there, live, and there's your record. It was exciting like that, where we were just playing. That's the way I approached it, and it was a good exercise in focus for me, leaving absolutely everything out that wasn't essential. It was just people working, rather than the computers working for the people.

RM: It has a freshness to it like that of older records.

MB: I really appreciate you saying that. It wasn't accidental; we wanted it to be genuine. It was just me, Zakk and Ozzy. The label didn't even know what we were doing. We would just play, and Ozzy would say, "I like that" or "try this." We were at Ozzy's house, had meals together; listened to what we did the night before; you know, as organic as it's going to get at that level. Ozzy was writing lyrics and wanting to be involved, which after such an amazing career, is a huge blessing for those of us working with him.

RM: You know, Lets go back a bit. Tell me about playing a right-handed kit as a lefty?



MB: I never set up left-handed. It was my teacher Jim Eaton's idea to start playing this way. Jim was from the Chuck Brown school of teaching, up in the Bay Area. Chuck was a famous teacher with students like Terry Bozzio and David Garibaldi, to name a few. Jim felt I could be stronger playing open style instead of crossing my hands and thought I would have more options and power. When I started, he would leave the hi-hat where it was for a right-handed drummer, so that's the way I learned. And because I wasn't that strong as a kid, Jim thought this would help me. He taught me technique and basically got me on the right track. I remember at my first lesson he gave me Tony Williams *Believe It* and said, "Listen to this, come back afterwards and tell me if you still want to play drums!" I was floored. Tony was playing like a running back, cutting, slashing: it had a huge effect on me.

RM: Was it strange to start this way? Did it feel awkward?

MB: I always felt comfortable playing open style. My dominant hand was on the hi-hat without crossing, so I felt I had better control.

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RM: How did your right foot feel playing bass drum?

MB: I guess because it's the way I learned, it felt right. For me, that way of playing opened up everything. With Ozzy, double pedal is useful for only a few things, to highlight and accentuate, but mostly his music doesn't require it. His music is about groove, and last I checked, groove is what we're supposed to do.

RM: I bet your teacher is very proud of where you ended up. Have you stayed in touch with him?

MB: When I first got the Ozzy gig, we spoke, but not since then.

RM: Like most of us, after the lessons, did you start out playing in bands around town?



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MB: I had a few, but not that many. It started when I was 12, was sitting in my friend's bedroom. We were both obsessed with music. This was around 1974, '75. That, to me, was the golden era of metal. *Physical Graffiti*, *Sabotage*, *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, Thin Lizzy, Rory Gallagher, the list is endless. Anyway, we were sitting there, and my friend told me he wanted to play bass. At this point, my heroes were all guitarists, but I wanted to play drums. That bass player friend of mine was Cliff Burton [Metallica]. We learned to play together, and were each other's first rhythm section. We saw everybody live, from Black Sabbath, AC/DC, Sex Pistols to Andrés Segovia. We went to every concert we could; we were thirsty for knowledge. Our first band was with Jim Martin from Faith No More. We ended up in Jim's band at that time. From there, a few other bands briefly, but then met Billy [Gould], bass player for Faith No More.

RM: So would you say Faith No More was your first “big gig?”

MB: Yeah, I guess we made it into that. We just worked all the time and refused to quit. (Laughs)

RM: How long was it from the band's inception to the point where you were getting recognition, making money, basically when you knew the band was making waves?

MB: The money came later. At that time, lighter rock or the college music scene was big and we weren't that. The only thing that we did was blend the music we liked. We loved the aggression and power of metal; very reminiscent of early Black Flag and hardcore. We left out the indulgence and kept the aggression. Rap and hip-hop were exploding

back then, which we also loved.

RM: I loved the result of the blend of your influences, it was fresh and unique.

MB: That was the problem with getting us signed. They didn't know what to do with us. We felt like we were climbing that “success ladder,” but still slipping down the rungs. We were lumped into the hardcore scene, playing smaller clubs; we didn't seem to fit in. However, we were learning at the time, and trying to figure how to make our thing work. So, that moment when a label signs you, puts you on a salary so you don't have to keep working day gigs: we never had that. We just kept writing and playing.

RM: How soon after things started happening with Faith did you get approached for endorsements?

MB: The very first deal I had was with Zildjian, with Michael Morse, a delightful guy. I'll never forget it: Here I was at Zildjian West in the room, and there's Vinnie Colaiuta and various other drummers, donating their platinum records to the walls. And then there was me. He was very good to me.

RM: I remember that time. Mike and I used to talk about guys we were working with, and he was very excited about you and your band.

MB: You know, it works both ways, and they've been good to me since. Even when they stopped making certain cymbals that I was still using, they'd make me some. They've always made sure I have what I need.

RM: It's been a long time with Yamaha as well.

MB: I remember very clearly when Yamaha approached me. I was in Brisbane, Australia, it was four in the morning, I'm asleep in my hotel room and the phone rang. I answered it and, “This is Steve Ettleson from Yamaha. I heard you like Yamaha drums.” Man, it was 4 AM! He knew I was on the road and knew our itinerary; so I'm not sure why he called me that early! That was '89, but I was already using them since 1983. The Yamaha folks have been good to me since.

RM: You're an example of what it means to have an endorsement relationship and how serious that relationship is. You set an example for younger players, not only with your musical ability, but also with the way you conduct business.

MB: Well, it's a symbiotic world and you have to treat others right: those who make your gear as well as those who buy your records. Word can travel fast in our business if you do otherwise.

RM: In a recent conversation you had with DRUMHEAD's Heather Smith, she asked you if you were a fan of Ozzy and Black Sabbath. You answered, “Black Sabbath is the only reason why I'm here. The first Sabbath album that I bought, when it was actually current, was *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*. I have a Sabbath t-shirt for every day of the week!” Now here you are, working with him! How long was it, after you began Faith No More and how did it come about?

MB: I'm guessing it was around '85 or '86 when we [FNM] made our first record, and then by '89/'90, the secret was out. The first connection that Ozzy had with us, was through James Hetfield [Metallica]. He used to wear Faith No More swag, and actually had our t-shirt on when he was photographed with Ozzy, when Metallica was out as his support act. We actually met Ozzy when he came and sang “War Pigs” with us at the *RIP*



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Magazine party in 1990. He didn’t really get what we were all about, and didn’t realize at the time how much Black Sabbath meant to us. If it weren’t for Black Sabbath, I wouldn’t be doing what I do. That simple. They were like – making a door where there wasn’t one previously. That important. Four or five years later, we ended up supporting him on a South American tour, and he remembered me. We were finishing our cycle and he was just starting his. A couple months later he called me and asked if I wanted to come play and I said, “I’m there.” After I talked to him, I was just sweating: it was so exciting!

RM: After you got off the phone with him, who was the first person you called?

MB: Of course my wife, who’s been with me for 25 years. And after her, I called my drum tech. He’s been with me for 15 years and is now running the stage for John Mayer. I said, “Are you sitting down? We’re goin’ to work for Ozzy.” We’ve logged millions of miles together, and lots of ice cream in Europe! It was exciting, and to this day, I’m honored and proud to have this opportunity. It’s something I take very seriously.

RM: How was it working with Jerry Cantrell?

MB: That was a highlight. I had known him and followed Alice In Chains. Everyone I knew

loved them. In my opinion, he’s a genius and one of the best songwriters of our generation. To work with him was an honor, and at that time, he wanted to do something different. As he said, “Simple and brutal.” We were actually the last project in A&M studios, just the ghosts and us. You can put this in capitals: I LOVE THAT ALBUM I DID WITH JERRY. It’s dark and it’s painful and it’s uplifting. One thing – the original vision of Jerry’s was cut up by the record company, so if you’re going to listen to it, you must listen to the original double album, otherwise it absolutely makes no sense. It’s a very special album to me.

RM: Any live shows with Jerry?

MB: Only a couple because I was so busy with Ozzy.

RM: You’ve been with Ozzy for 14 years now. Do you have a favorite album that you played on?

MB: Hard to pick one, I love ‘em all. I’m proud of each one, and for the challenges they presented. I do like this last one a lot though, because it was just us, no outside influences, no label rep. Just all of us in a room playing.

RM: Was there a period of time when he was so busy with “The Osbournes” that there was less work for the band?

MB: The show followed him around, but when we took a break, he was home working on the show. They came out with us on tour, but it didn’t keep him from playing. It was odd to see new fans connecting with him as this quirky TV star instead of the rock legend that he indeed is. You know, if you’ve ever had long hair in your life – he’s your Frank Sinatra. He’s a great communicator and the one people relate to.

I think working with Ozzy enabled me to finally figure how to balance my head and my heart when I’m playing. I’ve learned to not think about it too much, so it doesn’t feel stiff. It’s taken me 30-years, but I think I’ve finally figured out how to play drums. I feel better than ever now.

RM: That’s a beautiful thing to have achieved that level of playing. It’s very hard to find balance between head and heart, not just artistically but just generally in life.

MB: I’ve never had it, honestly, but I feel it now. Another thing that it comes with-and I know my soundman is happy about this-I have a thousand percent more finesse and control. When I really need to stomp on it, I know it’s there, but I have more control than ever before.



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 others right.”

RM: Do you notice a difference physically?

MB: Yeah, it's like that race car driver who is giving ninety percent but saving that extra ten for when he really needs it. I feel I know how to save it for when I really need it.

RM: Do you do have a physical regime that you do at home to help your drumming?

MB: I have one of those Yamaha electric kits that I'll play along with songs, or I get together with friends in my area and play. Before a tour, I'll woodshed a bit, but mainly I know the songs well enough that I like to leave it alone and hit it fresh when we go out. Other than playing, I lift a lot of rocks! My property keeps me in shape, digging out trees, keeping things up around the house. I'm not a gym guy, but I'll carry a one hundred pound boulder or chop down a tree with an axe; much more interesting to me. Balancing the head and the heart, and to play just what's right for the situation, that's where it's at for me. Learn To Be A Team Member! It's a team game.

RM: That's the whole thing about touring and keeping a gig at this level, it's not only how you are onstage, but the other 22 hours of the day when you're not. You have to be very awake in all areas of your gig.

MB: There's no question. It's like driving down the highway in a Mercedes at 100 MPH, you're insulated. The dangers are still the same, but you may not be so aware because you're so insulated. Touring is like that. We all take for granted how much is done for us out there. Every year, some guys push it too far and don't make it home. So, it is a team effort, and we all have to take care of each other.

RM: With changes in the record industry and record sales being at such a low point, have you felt these changes?

MB: Royalties are definitely not what they used to be. I feel that the old industry has died and is waiting to be reborn in some other way. This may not be a bad thing, although it's hard for those who are still depending on the old way. I think you gotta have faith that it's going to evolve, and that you must evolve with it. I believe that Ozzy's last album was the only one to reach gold status [last year] for Epic Records, which really shows how much the industry's changed.

RM: Again, it shows the validity of rock's legendary figures, those artists who can still sell out a stadium. By the way Mike, congrats on the Grammy nomination!

MB: Thank you Rich. It's nice to have the recognition. It was an honest record and we're all very proud of it. ✨



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GEARBOX

Drums

- Yamaha Oak Custom
- 24" X 17" Kick
- 14" X 12" Rack (w/YESS Mount System)
- 15" X 13" Rack (w/YESS Mount System)
- 18" X 16" Floor
- 14" X 6.5" Mike Bordin Signature Snare

Cymbals

- Zildjian
- 19" K China
- 21" A Sweet Ride (Brilliant finish)
- 15" Bottom Rock Hi-Hat (top)
- 15" A Mastersound Hi-Hat Bottom (bottom)
- 22" Z Heavy Power Ride

- 19" K Medium Thin Dark Crash or K Thin Dark Crash
- 20" A Medium Crash (Brilliant finish)

Hardware

- Yamaha Rack System On 4 Cymbal Stands
- Pedals: DW 5000 Delta Series Strap Drive Double

Heads

- Remo
- Racks & Floors – Ctd Emp Top / Clr Amb Bottom
- Snare – Emperor-X batter
- Kick – P3 Clear

Sticks

- Vic Firth

Misc.

- Ahead Gloves

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