

ED SHAUGHNESSY



by Rob Cook

Ed Shaughnessy has been playing drums since he was 14 years old in his native New Jersey. By 19, he was working with George Shearing at New York's Three Deuces. He's performed with the New York Philharmonic, the NBC and Pittsburgh Symphony, and the big bands of Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, and Oliver Nelson. Today, Ed is one of the most in-demand drum set clinicians in the music world. He is most widely known for his resident gig with the Doc Severinsen NBC Orchestra on the Johnny Carson Tonight Show where he's in his fourteenth year as a regularly featured instrumentalist. Shaughnessy also works with Doc's band, his own band Energy Force, and does numerous recordings and clinics. This interview was conducted while Ed was in Michigan for a drum clinic.

MD: What would an average day in the life of Ed Shaughnessy be like?

ES: Well, I usually start out the day with some recording dates in the morning, from 10 o'clock to around 1. After lunch and practice, it's usually about time for band rehearsal on the set of the Tonight Show. That runs from 3 to 4 o'clock or however much time is needed. The show is taped from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. with no breaks. I'll usually have supper around 7:30. On nights when my band *Energy Force* is playing, the gig usually lasts from 9 to 1:00 a.m. The band gigs mainly around Los Angeles, but we'll be doing some touring. Unfortunately, we don't have an album out yet. The main problem has been finding a studio. There are very few studios interested in recording a band like mine.

MD: You travel quite a bit. With so much going on, do you ever run into any schedule conflicts?

ES: No, not at all, and that's mainly because of Doc's good nature. He's very understanding and easy to work with. I do a lot of in-store clinics, concerts, school clinics, and periodic out of town gigs with Doc's band. I can get occasional time off whenever I need it.

MD: You deal with every imaginable musical situation; live concerts, recording,

TV. Does your set-up or style vary with each situation?

ES: Not the set-up or style, as much as the tuning. My recording outfit is heavily muffled. All the toms are one-headed. On the Carson show, the sound is semi-muffled, more open than for recording. For live work, a full, open sound is needed. That's pretty much the way all players do it in those situations.

MD: What about your actual set-up?

ES: I've been using Pearl drums for five years, with no special modifications. I've got the 20" and 24" bass drums, 14" floor tom on the left, 16" and 18" floor toms on the right, and the Jupiter snare drum. The two mounted toms in the middle of the set are both 9 X 13. I have a cluster of three concert toms, 6", 8" and 10" on a single floor stand up on the left. I understand Pearl is going to catalog this exact set-up as the Shaughnessy 11.

MD: Is it true that you use wood-fiberglass on the Tonight Show, and solid fiberglass for live work?

ES: It used to be. But now I'm using strictly solid fiberglass. It's a bigger sound. More powerful and fuller in a contemporary way. It's big and flat, not big and ringy.

MD: What about heads? How often do

you change them?

ES: I use Remo CS on all the drums except the snare where I use an Ambassador weight coated. I just put some of the new Pin-Stripe heads on my small concert toms and I really like them. They're a little flatter than the CS heads and very little, if any, taping is required. As far as changing heads, it depends on how much they're played. On my busy drum sets I have to change them fairly often. When I go to Vegas, we'll do two sets a night. I have to change the snare head at least once a week, sometimes every five days. I recommend changing them as soon as you get that shiny spot. Most of the zip is gone at that point.

MD: How do you tune your set?

ES: My bass drums are tuned a minor third apart. The toms are also tuned in minor thirds, starting from the largest floor tom and working up. Some people use fourths, others a major third. I don't feel the pitch is that critical, as long as when you go down the toms on a multi-tom set, it sounds like you're going down.

MD: I'm sure you're frequently asked why you use 20" and 24" bass drums.

ES: Sure. And it's a very good question. You see, I've never treated the pair of bass drums as one sound. Many people feel that

SWINGER ON STAFF

by having two bass drums you can get twice as much of one sound. But I get two very different sounds. It's much hipper for rock to have the power on the right foot off-beat, and complement it on the other foot. It gets me in the feel of the sound.

MI): How about your cymbal set-up?

KS: It depends on the situation. A typical set-up is a pair of 15" hi-hats, a couple of 18" medium-thin crashes, and a 22" ride. I'll also use 14" hi-hats. I like a couple of 20" mini-cup rhythm cymbals for recording. They're very distinct and don't build up so you lose the ride sound. I use a *Rock 21"* for live work. It's a dynamite cymbal, very powerful.

MD: Let's talk about miking for a moment. Do you place the mikes, or do you work with the engineer on placement?

KS: Microphone placement is left strictly to the engineer. He knows his room and the sound he's going for. Sometimes, in the studio, I get the feeling they're miking my nose. There can be anywhere from two to ten mikes on the outfit.

MD: How about the Carson show?

KS: Three mikes. The 24" bass is miked. There's also a mike between the snare and the hi-hat, and an overhead. The overhead is an AKG Condenser. The other two are Shure mikes.

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MD: Have you ever done anything with electronics?

ES: Yes. I use Maestro contact mikes, fastened right on to the heads. I run them through the effects, like a phase shifter, and filters, controlling them with foot pedals on the floor near the hi-hat.

MD: What type of stick do you use?

ES: The Pro-Mark 707. It's not anything radically new. Just a glorified 3A with some extra length, some heft on the taper, and made from white oak. The problem for most drummers who play the kind of music I do, is that the stick breaks right below the bead. Every stick maker you can name makes a good, stocky stick with a fast taper to the bead. We took the 3A and made it a bit longer. We added 1/16th" to the taper and it really beefs it up. My sticks only go when they're just plain worn down so far that they're unusable. I've got sticks that I can hear when they pass my ears, they're so feathered.

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MD: Your stick model has a big ball tip, doesn't it?

ES: Right. That tip makes for the fattest sound on cymbals. I use the wood tip.

MD: You don't have the stick breakage problem many drummers have. How about heads'?

ES: Drummers who go through sticks and heads are playing wrong. If they play into the drum with a downward drive, instead of pulling the sound out of the drum, they're not only going to break equipment, but choke off the sound, as well. Same thing with cymbal technique. Cymbals can shred sticks if they're not played correctly.

MD: How did you get involved with Indian rhythms, and tabla?

ES: I've been a great fan of Indian rhythms since I was about 16. In 1966, while I was in New York, I was fortunate enough to meet Allarahka. It turned out, he was a fan of mine. I studied tabla with him for several years. (Ed. Note . . . Allarahka is the virtuoso tabla player with Ravi Shankar.) Indian rhythms are a real trip for your head. It isn't something a drummer would need in the work-a-day world, but it is immensely helpful. It was the reason I was able to sight read the Don Ellis book, and do a fairly good job. And that's a hard book, with all those meters.

MD: How would you define a good solo?

ES: I'd rather define a good rhythm player first. In my book, that has to come before the solo. First, he's got to be a sympathetic player, and have a good enough ear to pick up cues from the other musicians. He has to know what's happening with the tune. Second, he's got to have good rhythm and that means more than keeping a beat. It means carrying the band. Lastly, we're back to diversity of style. At the very least the drummer should have a working knowledge of latin, jazz, and rock. Now to the solo. It should be interesting. Loud, fast playing doesn't make an interesting solo. A solo must have pacing, a structure built with some originality. One of the most important things with a solo, is knowing when to stop. An excellent solo can go sour if it's dragged on too long.

MD: Do you do much teaching now?

ES: No. I haven't had any regular students for the last five years. I taught for about fifteen years in New York. I regard my clinics as teaching. I do them to leave something, to communicate.

MD: Is it true, you still continue to practice a great deal?

ES: Absolutely. A minimum of two hours a day, mostly on muffled drums. I normally practice an hour at home, and an hour or so at the studio.

MD: What kind of a practice session do you recommend?

ES: It should start out with warm-ups. Single stroke rolls, rudiments, that sort of

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thing. I also recommend practicing on the drums. You should practice drums to learn how to play drums. Nobody is going to hire a great pad player. Of course, there are times when it's just not possible either because of money, or the neighbors, or whatever. Then, I'd suggest a practice pad set. If a whole set wasn't possible, than a couple of pads plus some telephone books or pillows. Just so there's something to hit where you would normally have a drum or a cymbal. Next, some time should be spent reading books like Joe Cusatis' *Rhythmic Patterns for the Drum Set*. Roy Burns has a nice record-book combination called, *Big, Bad and Beautiful*. It's very unique and very helpful. There should be more like it. Then, finish up by listening and playing with the headphones either halfway up off the ears, or on just one ear.




Photo by Cory Borst



"DRUMMERS WHO GO THROUGH STICKS AND HEADS ARE PLAYING WRONG. IF THEY PLAY INTO THE DRUM WITH A DOWNWARD DRIVE, INSTEAD OF PULLING THE SOUND OUT OF THE DRUM, THEY'RE NOT ONLY GOING TO BREAK EQUIPMENT, BUT CHOKE OFF THE SOUND, AS WELL."

This gets the sound close enough so you don't drown it out with the drums, but you still hear your instrument as it really sounds. This sort of practice, and of course practice with live musicians whenever possible, makes for better ensemble players. I've always stressed to my students that their goal should be to make music with other people. They can't just work on solos because nobody is going to hire a soloist who can't carry a band.
 MD: Many drummers complain they cannot take lessons because there simply aren't any qualified teachers in their area. What would you suggest for them?
 ES: Before I answer that, I'll say that there is really no acceptable substitute for a good teacher. You might get yourself

there sooner or later on your own, but whatever you learn that's good, you could've learned a lot faster with a teacher. When there simply is no teacher, I guess my advice would be to get records. Out of an average day's two hour practice session, at least 45 minutes should be spent playing along with records. And I'm talking about a broad segment of music. Even the heaviest Led Zeppelin freaks should listen to things other than Led Zeppelin. They should have at least one or two recent albums by Maynard Ferguson, and albums by Count Basie, Woody Herman, Duke Ellington, Buddy Rich. By listening to big bands, heavy rock, Ohio Players type stuff, and the jazz-rock fusion, they will become total players, and more likely to work. 



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