

# Vibe

by Billy Ramirez

## JIMMY CHAMBERLIN

### BUILDING A COMPLEX

#### VITALS

**BAND:** JIMMY CHAMBERLIN  
COMPLEX  
**AGE:** 40  
**BIRTHPLACE:** JOLIET, ILLINOIS  
**BIGGEST INFLUENCES:**  
NARADA MICHAEL WALDEN,  
ELVIN JONES, TONY WILLIAMS,  
ART BLAKEY  
**CURRENT RELEASE:** *LIFE  
BEGINS AGAIN*

#### ALL GEARED UP

**DRUMS:** YAMAHA  
**HARDWARE AND PEDALS:**  
YAMAHA  
**HEADS:** REMO  
**CYMBALS:** ZILDJIAN  
**STICKS:** VIC FIRTH



**L**ife Begins Again isn't merely the title to Jimmy Chamberlin's new album. It is a philosophy that guides his music, his career, and his life — and this is a man for whom life has begun again many times over. It did so when he was booted from the popular Smashing Pumpkins, after a drug overdose in a New York hotel room left him facing jail time, and touring keyboardist Jonathan Melvoin dead. Life began again when he entered rehab to conquer his demons. And again, when a sober Chamberlin joined Billy Corgan's new band, Zwan. And yet again, after that project broke up. And with his first solo album, life has begun once more for Chamberlin.

Perhaps a few people will remember him as the drummer in Zwan, but most know him

for being the drummer for The Smashing Pumpkins for more than a decade. That is his identity. Even though their bands no longer exist, Jimmy is a Pumpkin like Ringo is a Beatle. With his new band, Jimmy Chamberlin Complex, he's aiming to break the mold. "My main objective is to dispel the parameters of my musical identity," he says. "By that, I don't mean I wanted to make a jazz record or a bossa nova record. I just wanted to make music and not really be constrained to making a Zwan or a Pumpkins record. I just wanted to make music."

The Jimmy Chamberlin Complex, comprised of Adam Benjamin on keys, Billy Mohler on bass, Sean Woolstenhulme on guitar, and obviously Chamberlin on tubs, hit the ground running almost immediately after

Zwan broke up in the fall of 2003.

"Mentally I started on it right away," he explains. "I am always looking musically to the future. Physically we didn't really get into it until January 2004. That's when we started farting around with the music. When the record deal was signed with Sanctuary, things went really quickly. We started writing and rehearsing in May and ended up finishing the record at the end of June. Everything, from writing, to arranging, to recording, to mixing, took about 45 days."

A re-energized Chamberlin put in a lot of overtime to complete the album on time, but he loved every minute of it. "Oh god, it was a riot," he laughs. "Billy Mohler was actually slotted to do Lollapalooza in July, so we were kind of under the gun. We basically had a



## CHAMBERLIN CONTINUED

month to get the record done before he took off. If we didn't get it done, I wasn't going to meet my deadline. We were working ten hours a day rehearsing, and when we went into the studio we were doing 12-, 15-hour shifts. The whole thing was such a blur of joy and was such a great time, I think it really comes across on the record. It wasn't laborious at all."

During the album's planning stages, Chamberlin bounced the idea off Sanctuary CEO Merck Mercuriadis to make a complicated jazz record. That idea began to change when the songs began to go in an unexpected direction. "We originally talked about the type of record I wanted to do when I was 16 – kind of a jazz-fusion record, avant garde space rock. It was going to be way out there, but as I got into the writing process, I was corresponding with Merck and telling him that the songs coming out of me were a little more commercial. Don't get me wrong, they're still very experimental, but I thought he was going to be surprised at the accessibility of the record. When he heard it, he said it was certainly the caliber of what he expected from me, and more. He was really proud of me. I think the one great thing

about the record is that it is very diverse, but I think there is a common thread running through it. I think when people listen to it they will say, 'Wow, this song doesn't sound anything like this song but there is something similar to it.' I think the one thing that holds all music together is that love and heartfelt conviction."

Corgan's influence on Chamberlin's music is apparent, as it is practically impossible not to be influenced by a friend and bandmate of 15 years. Not only does Corgan sing on "Loki Cat," the album is sprinkled with moments that bring back memories of the Pumpkins' heyday.

"It's hard not to have that influence rub off," Chamberlin admits. "I think some of it is indicative of what I brought to that band. I think drummers get the short end of the stick because they're not writers and people forget what somebody like Elvin Jones brought to the table. I think doing a record like this validates my contribution in a little respect, and pays tribute to what I learned in that band."

A revitalized Chamberlin seems to be benefiting from the constant sun after recently relocating from Chicago to Los

Angeles. A quick read of his journal on jimmychamberlin.com reveals a man in a great mood and with a positive outlook. Still, it would be unfair to suggest that he is a completely new person now compared to the drummer who played the nocturnal, moody, melancholy, and seminal music of The Smashing Pumpkins. Corgan got all the attention back then, but Chamberlin is in control now and he wants to be heard.

"The whole concept of *Life Begins Again*," he summarizes, "is a nod to the cyclical nature of quality where everything comes full circle. I think you have to have the discos to appreciate the Mahavishnus, and I think that keeps reoccurring. You're going to see a lot more honest music coming out of people in the next few years. It's going to be an important time. Art always responds accordingly to what's going on in the world, and I think the tumultuousness of humanity at this point is going to breed some interesting art. I don't think people are going to be satisfied with this watered down, cookie-cutter version of art. They're going to want something a little more substantial just because everything around them is a little too messed up." 🙌

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