

Vibe

Drummers Making A Difference

STEPHEN PERKINS

by
Billy Ramirez

MOVING ON (AGAIN!)

VITALS

BANDS: BANYAN,

THE PANIC CHANNEL

AGE: 37

BIRTHPLACE:

WEST LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

BIGGEST INFLUENCE:

JOHN BONHAM, GENE KRUPA,

KEVIN HASKINS (BAUHAUS)

CURRENT RELEASE:

LIVE AT PERKINS PALACE

ALL GEARED UP

DRUMS: DW

CYMBALS: ZILDJIAN

HARDWARE AND

PEDALS: DW

HEADS: REMO

STICKS: PRO-MARK STEPHEN

PERKINS MODEL



Stephen Perkins likes to keep busy and it shows. Somewhere between Jane's Addiction and Porno for Pyros, Perkins conceived his current band – Banyan. Formed in 1997, Banyan served Perkins as a way to *feel* music rather than simply playing it. “Banyan is kind of a reason to stay busy because it started during Porno For Pyros in 1997,” Perkins says. “We didn’t work really hard and the work ethics weren’t there, so I started Banyan. Along with guitarist Nels Cline, bassist Mike Watt, and Willie Waldman on trumpet, *Live At Perkins Palace* is the band’s third release following *Banyan* in 1997, and *Anytime At All* in 1999. The new album touches on a

variety of musical styles and was recorded in Perkins’ home studio after the cancellation of the 2004 Lollapalooza tour.

Even before Jane’s left for rehab again, plans to record a third Banyan album were already in place. “We had done many, many shows since the second record,” he explains, “and we had a whole new sound and a whole new set of songs – a new set of ideas – so we all met at my house when everyone had the time. Mike Watt just joined The Stooges, Nels Cline joined Wilco, and Dave Navarro, Chris Chaney, and I were in Jane’s doing other things. I tried to get the timing right as far as getting people over to the house, but the idea to make it was always there.

Later, Dave, Chris, and I broke up Jane’s Addiction and I went to work on the third Banyan recording immediately.”

Ideas Banyan came up with while playing around Los Angeles after the second album were developed and turned into a variety of songs on the third release. “There are a couple of really upbeat, straightforward rockers, and a couple of songs with a Latin feel,” Perkins says. “We had different flavors that we were playing with on stage. We did maybe three versions of each tune and listened to them. If everyone got to say something nice in the tune, we would pick it because we feel it is important that everyone has a personality on these songs.

Photo by Chris Cuffaro

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PERKINS CONTINUED

There's a framework, but in the philosophy of jazz, everyone gets to pick a little bit of a solo. We like that philosophy."

Unlike a perfect, radio-friendly record, *Live At Perkins Palace* allowed Perkins to breathe and be creative. There was never the intention of creating the perfect song. "It's not about that," he adds. "I do that all day long and I love it because there's something great about carving the perfect song. There's nothing better than writing a tune and half the world likes it. That's a great feeling, but I am usually in the creative mood and do a lot of backyard jams."

"We'd have a discussion and sometimes we'd have a little framework and sometimes we wouldn't. For example, 'El Sexxo' is an Arabian jam with the bongos speeding up into a punk thing. We planned on starting with the bongos, then kind of go Middle-Eastern for a minute. Halfway through I'll grab my sticks and drop the Hot Rods, and then we'll see what happens there. There was a plan on what it would sound like, but really it was just a feel thing."

Even with the added room to jam, Perkins doesn't overplay because it would compromise the band's music. "I'm not out for chops because a guy who sits in his room

and practices all day and doesn't go out and hang out and meet friends, or go out and go hiking, is just playing right out of the book when he goes onstage. You need someone who experiences life. Sometimes you have all those crazy chops but they're not necessary when you're playing. That's what's exciting for me – to have four really cool personalities. We're all different people and listen to different music."

So you figure that seeing four talented and accomplished musicians playing together live would be one heck of a show, but Banyan also has painter Norton Wisdom perform on stage with the band. Perkins adds, "I'm with the drum set up front where the singer would be and Norton gets up on the drum riser behind me. When he paints at home or in the studio he uses canvas and oil, but on stage he uses a big Plexiglas pane lit from behind. He uses his hands, sponges, water, and paint, and his paintings are constantly morphing with the music. The bass riff will be huge and I'll look behind me and see a monster playing a bass and morphing into a huge wave crashing into an island and washing the island away. Then the island rises up as the Statue Of Liberty. The paintings are

constantly morphing because he'll take a squeegee and erase the whole thing. Every night I have paint on my ride cymbal or floor tom. As soon as you think it's something beautiful, he's ready to start something new. It's an element just like the music."

Remember how we said Perkins likes to keep busy? We weren't kidding. In addition to Banyan, has been busy selling a music therapy shaker product called a Go-Jo bag through the West Music catalog. But that's not all. He has also started a new outfit called The Panic Channel with Navarro, Chaney, and Steve Isaacs (formerly of Skycycle). While Banyan has been around for seven years, The Panic Channel serves as a fresh start for Perkins and the band has been busy recording. He adds, "Dave and I have been playing since we were 15 and it's the most fun we've had in a long time. It's a rebirth, and a new optimism. It's a moment for us to step into the next level and we stretched out as musicians. Jane's had a certain sound and idea but now we have an open canvas to play. Any direction is the right direction because no one has heard us. We're making music for the sake of music. It's fresh and I feel like a teenager again." 🎵

A Whole Lotta Backbeats

18 Ways to 2 & 4

Steel
Bright attack, long decay, ridiculously loud

Aluminum
Bright attack, quick decay, fat bottom end

Brass
Balanced attack, rich tone, unmistakable warmth

Copper
Dark attack, excellent response, punchy low end

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