

REVIEW**DVD Review: *Modern Drummer Festival 2005 - Adler + Bittner***

March 29, 2006
Chris Beaumont

Let me get something off my chest right up front — I am not a drummer. Allow me to repeat that for those of you too stunned to react — I am not a drummer. Never have been, and never will be. I am sure you are now thinking, "Why would this guy be reviewing a drumming DVD when he doesn't even play?" Well, let me answer that by saying that I figured that it would help me in my appreciation of the art of drumming.

I recently ticked off a friend, who happens to be a drummer. I was saying how I prefer guitar, bass, and vocals. I clarified that. I went on to say I have never heard a drummer that could take me on a journey the way that other instruments can. I mean no disrespect to drummers; I love hearing a great drummer as much as the next guy, and when you hear a good drummer, you know it.

That brings me to this DVD which focuses on two Modern Drummer award winners. This disk has the presentation of their awards, as well as their stage presentations which run nearly 40 minutes apiece. The two drummers are Chris Adler from Lamb of God and Jason Bittner from Shadows Fall. After watching this, I have concluded that these guys are excellent drummers. I still do not feel that I have been taken on any type of journey, but watching a skilled drummer at work is an amazing sight to see.

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First up is Chris Adler's program. He came out to accept his awards, thanking the audience, then proceeded into his presentation. I have to say that he is one articulate man. Rather than just get behind the kit and start playing, he took the time to talk to the crowd about his journey, about how he came to be a drummer. He spoke about how he was a bass player for a long time, and the various bands he played for leading up to the formation of Lamb of God. He then moved into his drumming demonstration. For this section he brought out his brother, and fellow Lamb of God band member, Willie Adler. Chris, with Willie accompanying on guitar, played a few Lamb of God songs as a demonstration of his current work. After those performances, he went into a few pieces that he has been working on long distance, meaning, he has never sat with the other members to play. They send him the digital music files, and he works his drum parts out with them. These were the most intricate, yet brief, pieces. They were more progressive and a good demonstration of his considerable talent. I am not terribly familiar with Lamb of God, but I plan on seeking them out. His drumming is excellent, and his approach to drumming is very forward thinking, not all about speed. Very entertaining piece.

Next up is Jason Bittner, a two time winner at these ceremonies. Bittner comes out and goes right to work, setting up behind his kit and launching into a lengthy drum solo. The first thing that will strike you about his playing is his amazing double bass; this guy is quick and mixes it up. The second thing that you will notice is his technical precision — his technique is tight and incredibly precise. He mixes up a few styles, the base being metal, but with excursions into jazz and funk, very good stuff. After the solo, he talks about his double bass technique, and plays a few Shadows Fall songs. He isn't quite as talky as Chris, but every bit as interesting. His talk/demonstration centers purely on technique and how the precision is applied to varying patterns, very math-oriented playing.

Both of these guys put on incredible demonstrations of their drumming ability. Watching this program has helped further my appreciation of drummers, and I am starting to notice different things in the music I am listening to. I may still not get all of the intricacies, or

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the math, or a lot of things for that matter, but listening to a skilled drummer is truly magical.

In addition to the two full programs, there is some very good extra material included here.

First up is an 18-minute interview with Chris Adler backstage at the festival. The interview has Chris taking us through his warmup routine, which involves a small pad with two kicks attached to it. Here he works on progressions and loosening up. Pretty interesting to watch, a firsthand look into his preparations.

Next is a 15-minute interview with Jason Bittner at the festival. Here he talks about his experiences coming to the festival. But more than that he goes through his warmup drills, and also goes over a few things that he discussed during his onstage presentation.

The third addition is a 12-minute compilation of footage showing Chris Adler on the road. Watch him warm up, talk about his warmups, as well as watching him onstage. There is also a bit about how he got hooked up with his drum tech. I found this interesting, as he met him while he was working with Hatebreed. Even more interesting is that I know the drummer from Hatebreed, we were childhood best friends. Again, some good footage here.

The final two segments both feature Jason Bittner. First there is a lesson on how to play the Shadows Fall track, "The Light that Blinds." Jason takes us through all of the segments of the songs, explaining some of his choices, and demonstrating them at slow and full speeds so that we can pick up on everything that he is doing. Lastly there is a clip from a clinic he held in Ibbenburen, Germany. Here he goes through warmup exercises where he mixes up accents and various drums to work on accuracy and giving different emphasis to the music. Both of these are very interesting, although overall I found Chris Adler to be a bit more personable.

There are a few other extras, including a photo gallery and some text-based information on

Modern Drummer and few other organizations involved in the DVD.

Bottom line. I am very glad to have seen this disk. I may not be a drummer and will probably never get all that I can out of it had I been a drummer, but to watch these two at work was a joy. If you are a drummer or have an interest in the drumming art, I highly recommend that you check this release out. I gurantee you will want to check out more of their work. Granted, the disk has rather narrow appeal, but they did a wonderful job putting this together.

Highly Recommended.



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Guppusmaximu
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08:25 AM

Great Article Chris.
You don't have to be a drummer to appreciate the technical prowess, sounds and their place in music. I feel that if you don't listen to every instrument in a song that you could be missing an emotion or direction.
You should check out Mike Portnoy's(Dream Theater) "Liquid Drum Theater" as he has won many Modern Drummer awards,"Best recorded performance" (5 times) and "Best Progressive Rock Drummer" (10 times in a row), and is also the youngest person (at 37 years of age) to be inducted into their Rock Drummer Hall of Fame. He is truly amazing to watch and he will give you a deeper understanding of how the drums effect the music...

