



Drum Teacher and SHADOWS FALL Drummer **JASON BITTNER**

PHOTO BY FRANK WHITE

they're not going to play it better than you, once they master it."

Currently, Jason's longest running student has studied with him for almost three years, and his clientele ranges in age from 6 to people in their late 40s. Bittner says he appreciates the older students because of their dedication to learn. "They've got families and work," he reasons. "If a guy is going to take an hour on a Monday night to learn stuff with me, when he could be with his family, I'm going to do my damndest to make sure he has a good time and leaves feeling confident."

Jason says assessing prospective students over the course of a month-long trial period separates serious students from Shadows Fall fans hoping for a private performance. "You should come study with me if what I teach is what you want to learn. At the end of the month, I evaluate whether or not I want to continue with them, and whether or not they want to continue with me."

The drummer recently released *Drumming Out Of The Shadows*, a transcription songbook authored by Joe Bergamini and available through Carl Fischer Publications. Jason believes that drum lessons should involve certain aspects of being able to read music. "You learn the letters of the alphabet, and you learn how to formulate words, in order to speak to people. It's the same thing with drumming. It makes it so much easier to speak the language if you have an idea of what you're playing."

A typical hour-long lesson with Jason consists of 10 or 15 minutes reviewing techniques practiced since the previous session, followed by reading exercises. The double bass drumming style that is his forte is explored, concentrating on foot patterns and fills. Bittner usually concludes each class by listening to music, in order to expose his students to different styles and drummers. "If the student is into blink-182, Good Charlotte and the punk scene, I'll play 'em some Buddy Rich or Joe Morello playing with the Dave Brubeck band—something totally different from the kind of music they like; it accentuates the importance of knowing other kinds of music and appreciating it."

Applying a curriculum that varies depending on the individual student, Jason incorporates many of the same instruction books he studied, such as *Stick Control For The Snare Drummer* by George Lawrence Stone and *Double Bass Drumming* by Joe Franco. He also likes to incorporate ideas learned from his own teachers, as well as exercises he developed himself. "I kind of take a little bit of everything," he explains, mentioning that the basic Latin and jazz drumming concepts learned at Berklee come into play. "I also ask for input from the student: what do you want to learn?"

Another aspect of his teaching program is sharing his experience as a professional touring musician. Bittner, who spent seven years touring with New York hardcore band Stigmata, joined Shadows Fall during the latter half of 2001. "Not to knock them," he says about other instructors, "but they don't know what it's like to tour OZZfest for nine weeks straight." The potential pitfalls of a career as a musician is shared with his students.

Jason currently teaches privately, although his teaching affiliation with Drome Sound in Schenectady, NY, remains strong. "I have a loyalty to them, basically," Bittner says about the store where he has bought drum gear since adolescence. The drummer says he's not sure about wanting to someday own his own school, but instructing at the university level is an idea he has considered, although lack of a music degree would admittedly be a detriment.

The satisfaction of watching a student advance, either during lessons or playing onstage, is something Jason enjoys. "It's definitely a good feeling. I don't know if it's as good a feeling as playing in front of 50,000 people at Download with Iron Maiden," he jokes, referring to Shadows Fall appearing at the annual U.K. music festival in June. "If they feel like they're getting their money's worth, and I see progress," he says about his students, "at the end of the day it's all worth it to me." •

Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll are the primary hobbies enjoyed by most musicians, right? But for anyone curious about what rock stars do when not touring, recording, or making scandalous headlines, each month *Metal Edge* asks a different celebrity to discuss the passion of their non-musical ventures outside the studio.

"There are plenty of drummers that can play their ass off," assures Jason Bittner. "But they couldn't teach to save their lives."

Bittner, who started taking formal drumming lessons at age 10, has taught his own students since 1989, right around the time he returned to Albany, NY, a year after studying at the Berklee College of Music.

Jason quickly discovered that he liked teaching, as long as the students were serious about learning. His schedule of working a full-time job while attending college classes, practicing and playing with bands, made time for teaching extremely precious. "If I had a student that was not going to have anything done past the last [lesson], it got really aggravating," he says, to the point that he took a hiatus to appraise whether or not to continue.

Patience was the most difficult teaching skill to master, he laughs. Admittedly easily frustrated with some of his earliest students, the drummer had to disassociate the rate at which he learned different exercises and techniques. "Let them get it at their pace," he explains. "Just because you learned it a lot quicker, that doesn't mean that

Learn more about Jason Bittner at www.JasonBittner.com