

# THE LOWE DOWN

Jen Lowe's take on the world of drums and percussion

## YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

### Drummer and percussionist Jen Lowe begins a new series on things that affect us all

words: Jen Lowe

**O**n a sunny morning in Atlanta, I pull up in my minivan, and Jack is sitting outside waiting for me. He is not alone. Next to him is the cutest, new tomato plant you have ever seen, and Jack is proud of his buds. He greets me with the usual 'Hello Jen,' shows me the developing fruits with a gleam in his eye, and we head into my drum lesson. Jack Dukes is my drum set instructor, and tomatoes are his new love.

Some people get up in the morning, hit the gym, grab a shower and drive themselves into work. Me, I have been getting up early and taking a two-hour drum lesson with Jack. My mornings have been blissful.

Jack has been my teacher for several years. He is a good friend, and he accomplishes the perfect balance of pushing me and being patient all at the same time. I have yet to stump him in the acquisition of drumming knowledge, and I am always challenged and smiling on my drive away from his studio.

Lately we have been studying composition. This is something I feel very few drummers pay attention to. We forget that we are playing music, playing songs, and that there are melodies and lyrics to be considered. We get so caught up in the sensation of how cool it feels to play a nasty lick that we begin to ignore our real job to be music makers and composers.

So, how are we studying arrangement? We have started by tackling one of the greats, Steve Smith. The Steve Smith of Journey. I have always been a fan of Steve and of Journey, but now that I have dug into learning his arrangements, I am even more appreciative of his musicality. Steve took everything into consideration. He was careful, he was thoughtful, and he drove one of the best supergroups ever. I know from charting his arrangements and by trying to get into his headspace that I have become a better drummer and a better musician. God, I Love Steve Smith!

And I love Jack Dukes too. Here is what we have been up to. We picked three songs from Journey. 'Separate Ways', 'Don't Stop Believing', and 'Anyway You Want It,' made the list. I figured, why not study radio singles, the songs that sold millions of records, the songs that everyone loves, the songs that have 'it'. There is a reason these songs have been ever lasting, and I wanted to discover why. So Jack and I decided to see it from Steve's point of view.

It is no mystery that Mr. Smith is one of the

greats. We have all seen him in clinic explain the most complex Indian rhythm, and we all own his newest DVD (and if you don't, shame on you!). We have all had his name on our tongues for as long as we discovered who the great drummers were. He is easily awed. But I wanted to know more. I wanted to know what he was thinking when he was

playing popular music - mostly because this is what I do for a living. Certainly I appreciate the lessons in odd time signatures and the music of other cultures - and seeing him play with 'Vital Information' is breathtaking. But it is the arrangements of Journey that Jack and I decided to study.

We dove into 'Separate Ways' and found the bridge to be spectacular. It is melodic, just complex enough to be interesting, yet not over the top. Steve did one of the most difficult tasks for any drummer. He made a hook out of the drum part in the bridge. Pop drummers strive for this. Lyrics and guitar melodies are always the expected vehicles for hooks, but when you do it on the drums, it is really saying something. Jack and I discovered the pattern in 'Don't Stop Believing' stems right from a Bolero. I am now addicted to the way the left hand lead feels, and floating is fun - wee!

First listen to 'Anyway You Want It,' and I thought, easy rock tune. Then Jack and I charted it out. Good ol' Steve, it was more complicated and thoughtful than I would have guessed. Steve means every note that he plays. The kick pattern follows the vocal precisely and he repeats the theme of the intro as a pick up to the second verse. Genius!

This is why these songs are everlasting. This is why we love them so but don't even know why. This is why I think it is important for drummers to study composition and arrangement. Only when we are more considerate than the other members of our bands will we truly be great music makers.

So my lessons begin with a warm up. I have been working out the infamous 16th-note triplet lick in 'Separate Ways', I can only nail it while applying the Moeller technique. Yet another issue Steve tackles beautifully. Jack keeps an eye on me. At the end of the warm up he says, "your left hand is really coming along, it is growing, just like my little tomatoes".



### Details

Jen Lowe is an International touring musician and President and owner of [www.BoomBoompercussion.com](http://www.BoomBoompercussion.com)

The Hexagrip. Designed for better control, better technique & better feel.

# UNIGRIP™

The groove is in the grip

UNIGRIP USA 5A

*King Midas*  
Distribution

EXCLUSIVELY DISTRIBUTED BY

Tel/Fax: 0121 766 7561

[www.unigripsticks.co.uk](http://www.unigripsticks.co.uk)