

Auspicious Aussie Artists

Australian representatives at the 2008 AUDW, Mike Mangini, Virgil Donati and Michael Barker, know that success on an international scale requires unique skills, technique, unparalleled chops and great showmanship in an environment where drummers are being undervalued. And to remain innovative at the top level, artists have to establish motivating factors, as unique as their playing styles.

It's the pulse, the heartbeat at the source of the sound, the engine of the song, even more than the guitar, it's ubiquitous, ancient and essential; the drum. It's instinctive, and the drummer who creates that tribal rhythm, be it with their fingers, hands, body or sticks, transposes the tune with their individual temperament in seamless time. The drummer is the most physical of musicians; it takes strength, endurance and practice to play. This gladiatorial marathon of musical instruments is divisive in style: There's the "Hey everyone, look at me" school of flashy stick-twirling and glitzy drum kits; or the selfless nobility of those who realise it's sometimes best to stand together rather than stand out.

Mike Mangini, Virgil Donati and Michael Barker made up the proud Australian contingent at the 2008 Australia's Ultimate Drummers Weekend (AUDW), August 23-24 at Melbourne's Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, and are anything but mechanical in their approach. Effortlessly superhuman, these extroverted showmen are helping to dispel the contemporary misnomer that quality drummers are dispensable, replaceable by digital technology or somehow inferior musicians, even in comparison to the most flamboyant front-man.

"They all bring something unique and exclusively exceptional to the table. Be it their stage presence, dynamic or appreciation for music generally, they stand out at the highest level," says AUDW CEO Andrew Raines.

All have a wide appreciation for music, but their different approaches are key factors in their respective successes. The commonality is a passion for their craft, a passion that

also enables them to see where drumming fits in the bigger picture musically, and in terms of life.

Mike Mangini

Mike Mangini's first real "break" came in 1987 playing drums for the Rick Berlin Band in Boston. Since, he has recorded and toured with thrash metal band "Annihilator" (1991-94), progressive rock act "Extreme" (1994-96), guitarist Steve Vai (1996-2000), and has travelled the world as a clinician selling out venues in over 40 countries. In late 2000, Mangini began teaching at Berklee Music College as an associate professor, accepting a full-time teaching position in 2005. He currently holds the title of the World's Fastest Drummer with 1,247 single drums strokes in one minute (matched grip).

Despite these achievements, he says that focusing on other aspects of life and music away from the drum kit, has helped him "maintain the rage".

"Since my last appearance at AUDW in 2005, I've been raising a family. I've made time to sit down, especially with my wife, son and other family members. I feel that these other aspects of my life really help me concentrate on my musical endeavours."

Since 1987, Mangini has given private instruction to drummers, guitarists, and pianists; a blend which he says ultimately makes him a better player.

"I find that learning other instruments puts my drumming into perspective. I have more vision now and I'm not so 'drum part' oriented."

Virgil Donati

Virgil Donati found himself behind his first real drumset as a 2 year-old, turning pro by age 16. Donati played with visiting artists including jazz pianist George Cables, vocalist Mark Murphy, Branford Marsalis and Kenny Kirkland and Melissa Etheridge. In 1996

he permanently relocated to the USA where he has toured and recorded with “Planet X”, Steve Vai, “CAB”, Scott Henderson, Steve Walsh, Mick Jagger, Josh Stone, “Soul SirkUS”, “On The Virg” and the “Virgil Donati Band”.

Artistic dedication dominates Donati’s global reputation, shadowing even his peerless execution of imaginative rhythmic phrasing, staggering tom and cymbal play, dumbfounding double-bass coordination and jaw-dropping riffs and stick-flips. But, he’s also a grinder and a grunter, undertaking exhausting practice sessions day after sweat-soaked day, despite his proven success and many accolades.

A famous practise monster, Donati still spends the better part of each day on the drumkit. “I try to get in four to five hours a day of practice time”, he reports. “My hat goes off to those drummers who say that they never practice but can play amazing things. I don’t know how they do it.”

Michael Barker

Michael Barker is the drummer and percussionist for the ARIA Award winning “John Butler Trio” (JBT) with their latest release, *Grand National*, taking him on a world-wide tour. Born in Rotorua, New Zealand in 1966, Barker began playing drums at age 10 and migrated to Melbourne as a 19 year old to study drums and percussion at The Victorian College of the Arts (orchestral percussion). He released his first solo recording *Wonderland* in November 2006, which highlighted his unique sonic relationship and ability with percussion. He has also recorded and toured with Neil Finn, “Split Enz”, Kasey Chambers and Alex Lloyd.

Barker says he keeps his drumming passion alive by finding new avenues for the application of his music, performing at the 2004 Sydney fundraising concert Wave Aid - following the 2005 Boxing Day Tsunami - and the historic Australian contribution to the global 2006 Make Poverty History movement.

This same selfless state-of-mind led Barker to risk his own life, in an attempt to save a drowning man, while on tour with JBT in Townsville in 2003.

“A man was floating in a river under a bridge and a woman was screaming for help, so I slid down the embankment, which was quite a steep climb,” Barker recalls.

“What else can I say, it was the right thing to do.”

The ability of these drummers to appreciate other music and see drumming as just one art form, and just one aspect of life, is helping to elevate the contemporary drummer to its indispensable primordial status; one paradiddle at a time.

Sidebar:

“The Gear”

Mike Mangini

Pearl Drums – Reference Series (Broken-glass finish)

22” x 18 Bass drum

18” x 16 Floor tom

14” x 14 Floor tom

12” x 9 Tom

10” x 8 Tom

14” x 5.5 Snare drum

10” x 6.2 Mike Mangini Signature Popcorn snare drum

Zildjian Cymbals

13” K Special K/Z HiHats

13” ZBT HiHats

14” A Custom HiHats

12” Mastersound HiHats

17” A Custom Crash

18” A Custom Crash

6” A Custom Splash

21” Rock Ride

6” A Zilbel

14" Oriental China Trash
18" Oriental China Trash
18" Oriental Crash of Doom
22" Oriental China Trash
3 x 14" ZXT Trashformer

Michael Barker

Pearl Drums – Reference Series (Purple Craze with Nickel Hardware)

12" x 10 Tom
16" x 16 Floor tom
18" x 16 Floor tom
14" x 6.5 Brass Reference Snare
22" x 20 Bass drum
10" Popcorn Snare
13" Timbale
11.5" Pearl Conga

Zildjian Cymbals

15" K Custom HiHats
22" K Custom Ride
19" Armand Beautiful Baby Ride (w/Rivets)
19" K Custom Crash
17" K Custom Crash
15" K Custom Crash
10" K Custom Splash
8" K Custom Splash
6" K Custom Splash
8" Zilbell
20" K China

Virgil Donati

Pearl Drums – Masters MRX Maple 6-ply (Purple Craze)

14" x 12 Tom
14" x 5 Signature Virgil Donati Snare
10" x 9 Tom
12" x 10 Tom
16" x 16 Floor tom
18" x 16 Floor tom
18" x 22 Bass drum
10" x 4 Sopranino Snare

Sabian Cymbals

18" HHXtreme Crash
16" Saturation Crash
14" HHX Power HiHats
17" Saturation Crash
18" Saturation Crash
12" Regular HiHats
20" Prototype Saturation Ride / or 20" HHX Dry Ride
19" Saturation Crash
14" AAX Mini Chinese
12" remote HH HiHats

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The following articles were used from this page:

[September 2006 - Virgil Donati. Minimal Space, Maximum Chops](#)

[April 2006 - Virgil Donati Soloing Feature](#)

[March 2006 - This just in: Virgil Donati has only two hands, two feet](#)

[March 2006 - Virgil Donati talks about his left hand and power drumming workouts](#)

Also see DrumsScene magazine, issue 53. – pages 22-23 and 34-36.