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CD audio examples performed by Rich Lackowski. Tracks 5, 17, 18, 24, 27, 33, and 36 performed by John O'Reilly Jr.

The Path

I vividly remember the first time I heard Neil Peart's monstrous fill in Rush's "Tom Sawyer." I was just 10 years old, but at that moment, something magical happened that was unlike anything I had ever experienced in my life. I felt the magic and the power of extraordinary drumming reach out through the speakers and grab a firm hold of me. Every hair on my body was standing at attention and I had chills as each successive note poured out. I internalized that musical passage in some primal kind of way; it was such an exciting and invigorating moment in my life. From that instant it was clear; I knew I had to play the drums.

Thanks to my incredibly supportive parents, I was fortunate enough to get my hands on an old 4-piece Ludwig kit that was gathering dust in the attic of one of my dad's co-workers, and hook up with one of the best teachers in town. The lessons provided an important, structured way of learning to play the drums, and I hung on to every word my teacher said, learning all I could over the many years of lessons that followed. But much of the unspoken and—maybe—the *real* learning happened when I got home, threw down those books, and tossed on the headphones to play along with my progressive rock drumming heroes.

It didn't take long for me and my close friend down the street, who was also learning to play the drums, to combine our kits to create one "monster drumset" that approached the arsenal of sounds we needed to emulate the drummers of bands we listened to. We would get together every chance we had and take turns playing along with tracks from the drumming gods. This continued for years.

One album at a time, year after year, and often by complete luck, I discovered band after band with an incredibly inspirational drummer. They belted out new and exciting grooves and solos that kept me chained to my drumset until I could at least fake my way through the more interesting parts. I remember thinking each time I made one of these musical discoveries how lucky I was to stumble onto such exciting drumming. And it made me wonder how much else was out there that I was missing.

This book structures and accelerates this process of discovering and learning from the legends of progressive rock drumming. It provides a roadmap of the progressive rock path, or style, that's labeled with vital landmarks, or drummers, along the way. I hope it allows you to spend more time listening and learning, and less time wondering where to find more insight and guidance into the progressive rock genre.

Two of the greatest gifts of our drumming community are the ever-growing pool of inspired musicians who inject new innovations into our craft, and the ongoing discovery of the legends that shaped our collective drumming history. It's impossible in the scope of just one book to cover every musician that has made an important contribution to prog rock drumming, so if you see some of your favorite drummers missing know that I have favorites missing too, and I plan to explore them in upcoming writing endeavors. But what you will find on the following pages is a vital exploration of a dozen legendary drummers analyzed in detail, complete with lessons that will teach you how to play their most defining drum grooves and solos. So, get ready to turn the page and start your journey on the beaten path!

One more thing: As you read through this book, know that it's impossible to perfectly emulate another drummer. The drummers in this book were chosen because each is a legendary artist with a unique gift. Their playing is constantly evolving, fueled by the things they've heard, the things they've seen, the things they've felt, and the experiences they've lived through. Rather than learning a few of each artist's unique licks, really try to absorb the bigger picture of what's happening. Listen to the beats in their original context. Go out and buy the songs if you don't already have them, and listen to *how* these masters play as much as to *what* they are playing. By internalizing their "thing," you will add it to *your* unique set of circumstances and use it to develop your own individual style. Then, when you play, play it honest, and make a statement by channeling all you've learned from the masters of the drums, process it through your unique set of circumstances, and play with a voice that is uniquely you.