

Franklin Kiermyer first came to prominence as a drummer, composer, and bandleader following the release of *Solomon's Daughter*, his highly acclaimed third album that features John Coltrane alumnus Pharoah Sanders on saxophone. Widely regarded for his intense passionate energy, spiritual feeling, and distinctive sound, his nine albums and many performances have brought his music international recognition. Franklin was born and raised in Montreal, lived in New York City for many years, and is now based in Oslo, Norway with his wife and young daughters. His latest album, *Further*, features saxophonist Azar Lawrence, pianist Benito Gonzalez, and bassist Juini Booth and is available for free download at www.kiermyer.com.

PHOTO: CARSTEN ANIKDAL



By Franklin Kiermyer



The Spirit of Drumming: wHAT iT IS!

So, this is not about flamadiddles or ratamacues. It's not about what heads are best, or the latest 13/8 shuffle rhythm. It's not even about getting the gig and keeping the gig. In fact, it's more about making music than playing drums.

I've named this column "The Spirit of Drumming" for two reasons. Firstly, I think the most important thing a musician can focus on is the feel – the spirit or heart – of the music. Secondly, I play the drums.

Yes. I play drums. I remember writing that sentence on the back of my practice pad when I was a kid. It felt like a manifesto – a declaration of purpose.

As a young teenager in the last part of the hippie days, growing up in the environment of the "revolution," I was deeply inspired by the incredible freedom music of the late '60s – John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, etc. My goal was to be able to answer "Yes" to the question *Are You Experienced?*, the title of the debut album by the Jimi Hendrix Experience. That album, released in 1967, is still regarded as one of the greatest debuts in recorded music. 1967 is also the year John Coltrane passed on. I was eleven years old. By the time I was 15, my main goal was to play music with that much soul-fire.

Of course, at that tender age I had no idea how deep and vast an undertaking that was and how much I'd have to learn. I also didn't realize how lucky I was. I was born at a time and in a place where I had enough to eat, a stable roof over my head, and I wasn't dodging bullets or bombs. Also, with just a little effort, I could listen to a recording of a great performance of pretty much

any music that grabbed my attention. I suppose that most of you have enjoyed these same lucky circumstances. Now, many years later, I see that there was one piece of luck that was even more rare. I was lucky to learn, from older and much wiser musicians, the three most important lessons a musician can learn:

1. Always be loose and relaxed. The heart of the music comes from openness, honesty, and bravery.
2. The music is already here. It's everywhere. We are channeling it, setting it free, and releasing it from the instrument – not making it or putting it in.
3. We need to be hearing, not listening – feeling, not thinking.

Volumes can be written about each of these points and lifetimes can be (and should be) spent on the path they signify, but these three points sum it all up. Sounds like a spiritual quest, doesn't it?

Music has always been used to conjure the spirits and fan the flames. We can assume that early on in human history there were no divisions between sacred music and popular music. It was all spirit and magic.

I think musicians have always tried to get deep in their soul and share that magic with others. I think that's the whole point for most of us. Whether you're playing church music or death metal, it's all about spirit and magic.

Ask a musician if their music is spiritual and most will say, "Yes, of course!" Some will say, "What could be more spiritual than the groove?" or "I

always play with spirit!" Some will say that everything in life is spiritual; some will say music is spiritual because it taps into the source. Others will say that when the music feels good, it's spiritual, and still others will say that soulful music is spirit music.

I've heard all kinds of musicians say these things – touring arena pop drummers, avant garde jazz drummers, virtuoso fusion drummers, classical percussionists, and Yoruba Santeria drummers alike.

I'm sure that, on some level, they're all speaking of the same thing. When we're young, before we can really get much happening on our instruments and with other musicians, we hear music that moves us. For those of us that are so moved as to devote our lives to "making it happen," these first feelings are a big part of what we try to emulate. We want to feel that feeling even more and share it with others.

Most musicians I've spoken with about this try to describe this peak experience where it seems like the separations between them and the music, them and the other musicians, them and the audience just falls away or disappears and the flow seems almost timeless. We can try to describe it, but it's beyond words.

When the music is really "in the zone," what is it we've conjured? Isn't that feeling the same passion of faith and freedom that lies at the very core of our human being? So, it's this feeling – the vibe or spirit of the music that motivates us. I'm convinced that to get that happening, we have to remember the three points listed above.

Dig? So, that's all for now, sisters and brothers of the drum. I'll say more next issue.