

At just 26 years old, Garret Goodwin has already amassed a resume that would be the admiration of professional musicians more than twice his age. From securing a coveted gig as the steady touring drummer for country-music sensation Carrie Underwood to performing with Rock and Roll Hall of Famers such as Lindsey Buckingham and Steven Tyler, Goodwin has already left his mark on both the Christian and secular markets. Add to that the accolades he's received from fans, such as being voted "Best Up and Coming" in *Modern Drummer's* 2013 Reader's Poll, and one can't help but take notice.

Goodwin's path to the spotlight in many ways is similar to, yet in other ways very different from that of his peers. Growing up in an active church family, Garrett recalled his early exposure to the pounding percussion of the worship band. He said, "I remember being very young and having a great interest in the musicians at my church. My family attended services almost daily at Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida. For some reason, I always found myself fixated on the drummer. I don't know if I was specifically drawn to the drums at the time, but there was something about performing music that spoke to me. After a while, I started asking lots of questions. Lucky for me, the musicians answered them."

At the age of 11, Goodwin finally expressed an interest in playing the drums. "There was no history of music in my family," he said, "so I had no clue what I was doing. I was searching for something and the drums seemed to fill that void." Recognizing their son's enthusiasm, Garrett's parents signed him up for the first and only drum lesson he would ever take.

Today he refers to that event as a traumatic blessing. "I remember going to my first drum lesson and the teacher gave me some exercises to work on at home. I practiced them as best I could and the following week went back for my follow-up. I began playing through the first exercise when the teacher interrupted me and said 'You'll never be a drummer.' I was just a kid at the time so it kinda messed me up. Looking back now," he added, "I'm actually grateful. That painful incident ultimately gave me the incentive to prove the guy wrong."

One can only wonder if that discouraging teacher ever caught his rejected pupil performing on "Saturday Night Live," "Jimmy Fallon" or the Grammy Awards. With a discouraging perception of drum teachers, Goodwin decided to tackle the instrument on his own. His parents bought him a 5-piece Percussion Plus beginner's set, with a small hi-hat and a splash cymbal. From that point on, his drum lessons consisted of playing accompaniments to CDs. Gravitating toward the musicians at his church, Garrett began performing with the children's worship band and soon after proved that he had real talent.

According to Goodwin, the worship leader believed in developing and cultivating young musicians and took the promising drummer under his wing. "I was primarily home schooled," Garrett recalled, "so my music program was at the church. Our pastor was musically inclined and he encouraged the youth of the church to pursue music as part of their faith. To this day, I still believe that there is no greater musical experience than playing during a worship service." For the next two years, Garrett cut his teeth practicing and performing with the various music groups at the church.

The more time he spent on the drum stool around other musicians, the more Goodwin began to grasp the fundamentals of drumming. Over time, and perhaps unintentionally, timekeeping and dynamics crept into his repertoire, and before he knew it Garrett was not only competent at the instrument, he was exceptional. He was so exceptional that he went on tour with the church's youth band, routinely performing at church camps, conventions and conferences.

These opportunities provided his first exposure to playing in front of large crowds. "I remember being 14 years old," he said, "and playing drums at Winterfest in Knoxville, Tennessee at the Church of God Conference. There were 25,000 people packed into this arena. I can still remember the roar of that crowd and the sound emanating from the stage. What a rush that was for a teenager like myself, to have the opportunity to perform at that venue and at that level. I was hooked. I was a real musician!" The experience at Winterfest drove Garrett to pursue his interest in the drums more seriously than ever.

Due to his family's strong religious convictions, Goodwin was primarily exposed to Christian music while growing up. As a result, he was not aware of the hard-rock scene or the drummers that typically influenced the mindset of drummers his age. "I didn't listen to any of the bands or drummers that most players cite," he said. "I only discovered John Bonham as a young man because the only music I ever listened to was church music. Growing up, I had no idea that Led Zeppelin even existed." This lack of exposure to the usual drum icons early in his development inevitably benefited Garrett, as he had no preconceived notions of



# GARRETT GOODWIN ONE OF A KIND



WORDS BY MICHAEL AUBRECHT  
PHOTOS BY MATTHEW SPERLING

what was "correct" and who was "cool." This isolation from mainstream secular music actually allowed him to evolve unencumbered, with his own unique style and drum setup. Both of these aspects are part of what sets him apart today.

Every six months, Goodwin's church would bring in professional session players from Nashville to record live versions of their musical programs. These recordings were then used to promote the church's interests and missions. Seasoned players like Steve Brewster and Scott Williamson would fill the drum chair, exposing Garrett to the working world of professional musicians. Their exceptional playing and positive influence affected the promising young drummer in a way that still resonates today. He said, "It was through those guys that I began to dream about making a living playing drums. Back then I couldn't believe that someone could make a job out of music. I knew that's what I wanted to do. It didn't matter what part of the industry I worked in, I just wanted to be a part of it. I still feel that way."

At the age of 16, Goodwin's family moved north to Nashville in order to help start the Grace Church, a nondenominational church with a robust music program. Arriving in Music City, U.S.A., Garrett finally found the resolve to pursue his dream. It seemed like a perfect fit, as many studio and touring players routinely performed in the area's houses of worship. By focusing his efforts on honing his craft and building relationships, Goodwin was able to lay the groundwork toward securing session and showcase opportunities. He said, "At that stage I began to figure out that what was working for other musicians might work for me, too. Working hard, keeping a good attitude, maintaining focus, setting goals that were achievable and sticking to them became my mission."

Continuing to play at Grace Church helped Goodwin to refine his chops and develop the skill set that would later benefit him onstage and in the studio. This included playing to a metronome, developing the finesse to stylize and differentiate when playing anthems or ballads, using hot rods and brushes, understanding situational dynamics and properly tuning and muting heads. Although he was not formally trained in reading or writing music, Goodwin developed his own system of charting that continues to serve him now. He admits that his system has evolved over time. He said, "Back then I would literally write out entire paragraphs explaining the phrasing. Thankfully, I've come a long

way since then."

This period was also the time when Goodwin began to explore other musical genres outside of the Christian realm. "As I got a little older," he recalled, "I began listening to different kinds of music. That was when I discovered John Bonham and Abe Laboriel, Jr. Those two guys are the only 'famous' drummers I can say really influenced me. They helped define my style due to their heavy hitting style, solid time and consistency. Those are still the 'big three' rules of drumming to me. If you listen to the drumming on any Led Zeppelin album, or watch Paul McCartney's band perform live, you see those three things personified. Both of those drummers hit hard, but with a purpose. I never forgot that."

As time passed Goodwin established a reputation and began playing with Christian bands and artists, including Zoey Girl and Jeff Deyo (later of Sonic Flood fame). His biggest gig came in securing the drum chair for By the Tree, a two-time Dove Award-winning contemporary Christian rock group. Looking back, Garrett credits his reputation as a worship-band player for providing him with a foothold in the industry. "I remember when the drummer for By the Tree pulled 'a Genesis move' and became the singer," he said. "I was later told someone had recommended me as 'that drum kid from Grace Church.' If that had been anywhere outside of Nashville, I may not have had that opportunity, but in that city, musicians are everywhere, attending services and recommending each other for gigs around town."

After experiencing success in the Christian genre, the members of By the Tree recognized that change was on the horizon. Goodwin recalled the conversation that, at the time, felt like an end, but was, in retrospect, a beginning. "One day the singer sat us down and informed us that he was going to leave town to become a worship leader in California. And that was it. I went from playing in an established group of inspired musicians to nothing. It felt like everything I had worked for was gone. Somehow though, I knew deep down inside that I was just getting started."

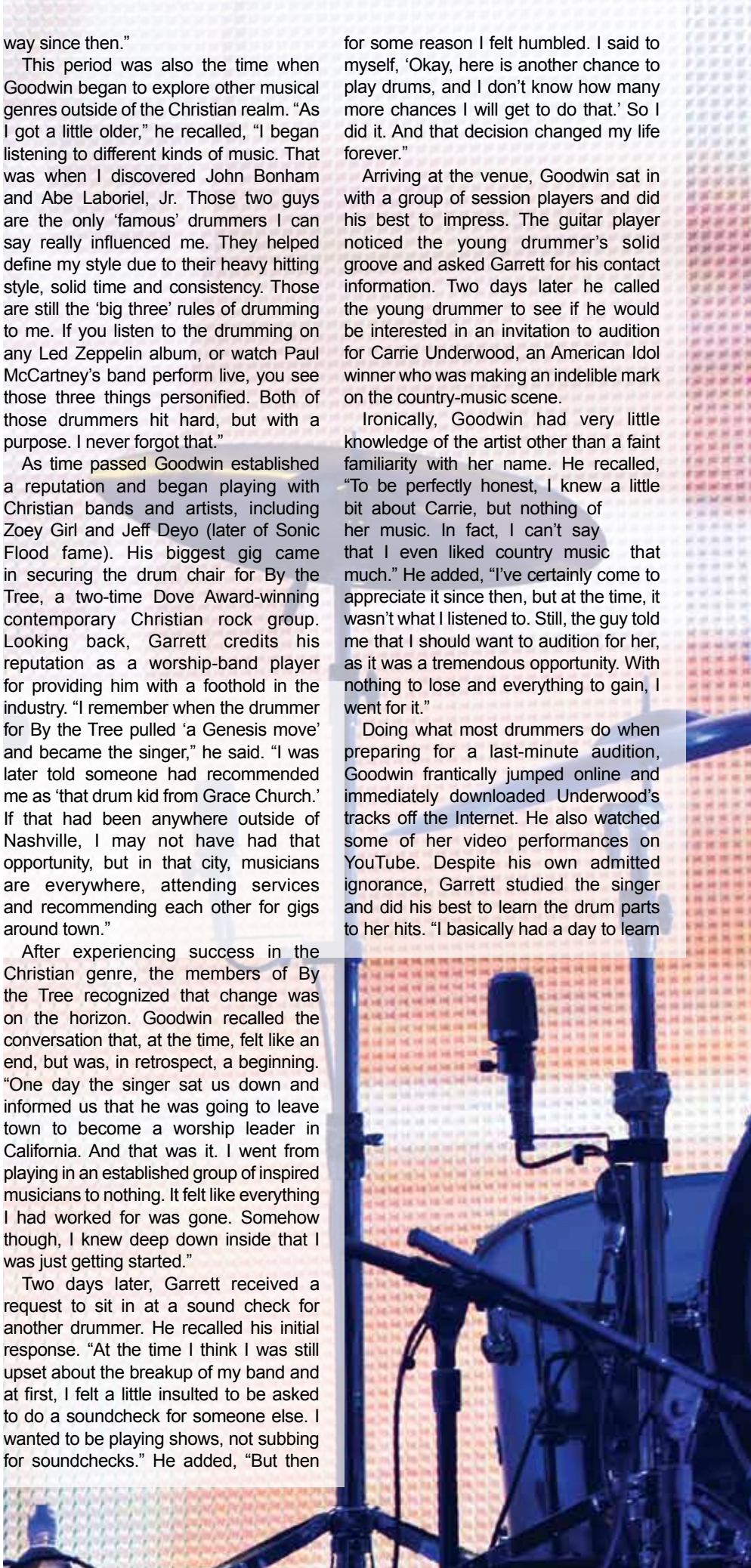
Two days later, Garrett received a request to sit in at a sound check for another drummer. He recalled his initial response. "At the time I think I was still upset about the breakup of my band and at first, I felt a little insulted to be asked to do a soundcheck for someone else. I wanted to be playing shows, not subbing for soundchecks." He added, "But then

for some reason I felt humbled. I said to myself, 'Okay, here is another chance to play drums, and I don't know how many more chances I will get to do that.' So I did it. And that decision changed my life forever."

Arriving at the venue, Goodwin sat in with a group of session players and did his best to impress. The guitar player noticed the young drummer's solid groove and asked Garrett for his contact information. Two days later he called the young drummer to see if he would be interested in an invitation to audition for Carrie Underwood, an American Idol winner who was making an indelible mark on the country-music scene.

Ironically, Goodwin had very little knowledge of the artist other than a faint familiarity with her name. He recalled, "To be perfectly honest, I knew a little bit about Carrie, but nothing of her music. In fact, I can't say that I even liked country music that much." He added, "I've certainly come to appreciate it since then, but at the time, it wasn't what I listened to. Still, the guy told me that I should want to audition for her, as it was a tremendous opportunity. With nothing to lose and everything to gain, I went for it."

Doing what most drummers do when preparing for a last-minute audition, Goodwin frantically jumped online and immediately downloaded Underwood's tracks off the Internet. He also watched some of her video performances on YouTube. Despite his own admitted ignorance, Garrett studied the singer and did his best to learn the drum parts to her hits. "I basically had a day to learn



as much of her album as I could,” he said. “She was really starting to ‘blow up’ and all I could do was to cram as much of her music into my head as possible and practice, practice, practice.” Goodwin spent every available second preparing the best that he could. In the end, he let his faith take over. “I left it in God’s hands,” he said. “I showed up ready to play and left the rest up to fate.”

The first audition took place at the house of the bandleader, who also happened to be the band’s bass player. This worked tremendously to Goodwin’s benefit as Underwood’s rhythm section demanded a solid lock between the drummer and bassist. “I wasn’t exactly sure what they were looking for,” recalled Garrett, “so I went there determined to do what I do best.” Focusing his audition

on laying down solid time and staying in the pocket, Goodwin decided to forgo the “gospel-chops shredding” that some drummers rely on.

“I wanted to play as naturally as I could, instead of trying to be busy and flashy,” he said. “Too many drummers make the mistake of trying to be someone else or what they envision the artist to be looking for. The truth is that you never know what they are looking for. Fortunately for me, I took the other route. I played like ‘me’ and I didn’t try to mimic the entire album. My performance at that audition was all about feel and it turns out that is what set me apart. They recognized that I was a heavy-hitter with a natural clock who was confident and comfortable being himself. That meant I would play honest and consistent. It turned out that is exactly

what the bandleader was looking for.”

A week later Goodwin received a call-back to meet with Underwood’s management. A few days after that interview he was told, “Carrie wants to meet you.” Garrett continued his unabashed honesty when questioned if he was into country music and more pointedly, a Carrie Underwood fan. “I wanted them to know the real me,” he said, “so I answered them truthfully. I told them that I wasn’t either. Now over time I’ve become a fan, but I was honest and I think they liked that about me.” Shortly after his confession, Goodwin was offered the job where he is now going into his sixth year as a member of Carrie’s live ensemble.

Clearly aware of his “cherry gig,” Goodwin doesn’t hesitate to sing the praises of the woman he backs up. “Playing for Carrie Underwood is truly a blessing,” he said. “You absolutely couldn’t ask for a more talented and respected singer to sit behind every night and listen to, much less play music with. It’s amazing to be able to go onstage and be proud to know that she is going to nail it every time. There are truly some spiritual moments during the performance, but it’s also a lot of fun. I couldn’t ask for anything



## GARRETT'S GEAR

Garrett Goodwin’s gravity-defying drum setup is a fascinating study in player practicality. There are several factors that make Garrett’s kit stand out from his peers. First, is the overall size of the kit. Typically Goodwin plays a four-piece kit that features a bass, a snare and two floor toms. One of the floor toms sits out front in the space that would usually be occupied by a rack tom. He will occasionally add a side-snare for effect, but the constant philosophy is a “less is more” approach. Second, everything is set incredibly low and facing out on an abrupt angle. In fact, the entire drum set looks as if it is about to fall forward off the riser. Garrett himself admits that it is an odd configuration. “It never fails,” he said, “my techs will set the kit up properly and then some stagehand comes along and feels the need to ‘correct’ it.”

### Drums

#### DW: Collector’s Series

26” x 18” Kick

14” x 12” Floor (front)

18” x 16” Floor (side)

14” x 6.5” Snare

### Cymbals

#### Sabian

18” AAX Stage Crash / 18” Paragon Crash Hi-Hats

22” AA Medium Crash

24” AA Medium Crash

24” AAX Studio Ride

### Heads

#### Remo

Floors - Black Suede Emperors / Clear Ambassadors

Kick - Coated Powerstroke

Snare - Coated Powerstroke / Hazy

### Sticks

#### Promark

Garrett Goodwin 2S Signature Model

better.” Underwood herself shows a great respect for her band and makes a point to always introduce and feature her musicians onstage. A YouTube search for “Garrett Goodwin” results in a fan video of Carrie belting out “Happy Birthday” to her young drummer and presenting him with a cake onstage.

One might wonder why someone as heavy-handed as Garrett Goodwin would be backing up an artist like Carrie Underwood in the first place. That question however is answered for anyone attending one of her high-energy concerts where her band routinely performs Guns N’ Roses covers and conducts heavy rock and blues-influenced jam sessions during costume changes. Goodwin himself breaks down his style: “I would describe my playing as very solid, straight-ahead, in the pocket, hard hitting and fun to watch,” he said. “I was always of the mentality that I need to complement the music, and not outshine everyone else on the stage. That philosophy has kept me very thoughtful in my playing process.”

Goodwin’s warm-up routine in preparation for these demanding shows is basic. “My warm-up is very simple and, for me personally, it’s a lot about

stretching more so than playing. I get my daily work out during the two hours I spend performing shows every night, so for me, stretching is key. On off days, I work on simple rudiments for the backs of my arms.”

Fans attending one of Underwood’s concerts may notice the unusually angled four-piece drum setup employed by her resident percussionist. This is another oddly influenced attribute that has set Garrett Goodwin apart from the pack. Unique may be an understatement when describing the drummer’s gear. “People may think I had some brilliant concept for this rig, but to be completely honest, I simply didn’t know any better. I never had anyone show me how to set up a drum set,” he recalled, “so I just did what felt

right. Someone else may think I’m nuts, but this is what works for me.”

The number of slanted pieces is the only thing small about Garrett Goodwin’s kit. He plays a massive DW Collectors Series with a 26” bass drum, 14” and 18” floor toms, and a 14” snare. Most notably are the monstrous cymbals that he employs. These include 22” and 24” crashes, a 24” ride and 18” hi-hats. Goodwin recalled what led him toward such large items. “I looked up to Abe Laboriel Jr. who was a big guy that played big drums. His sound was huge and I always craved that kind of volume. I used to get really frustrated because I wanted to play big stuff,” he said. “Unfortunately, most manufacturers didn’t offer ‘extra-large’ cymbals so I always had



to custom order them. Sometimes I had to improvise. I fondly remember using all ride cymbals at one point because those were the biggest cymbals available. Nowadays anyone can get big sizes.”

Goodwin’s drums are also tuned differently. Drummers attending Carrie Underwood’s shows immediately notice a distinctive ‘thud’ echoing from his shells. “I love the feel of loose heads,” he said. “I want the drumstick to sink into the head at the point of impact, like hitting a pillow. I think my throw has a lot to do with that. I tilt my drums on an extreme angle facing forward so when I swing and hit them it’s natural, like a golf swing. I don’t want a lot of rebound.” He added, “I have DW shave a ½ inch off the bottom of my snare stand and set the basket as loose as possible so the drum sits as low as possible. I also lean way over the drums, so my aggressive posture dictates the angles. Regardless, I still hit myself, every single time. The bruises I have on my leg are permanent.”

Despite the odd looks, Garrett remains proud of his unconventional setup and enjoys the good natured teasing he routinely receives at award shows. “Those shows in particular seem to make me stand out. Everyone’s drums are set up backstage and mine look different than

everybody else’s. Drummers from other acts are always shaking their heads and taking pictures of my gear. My good friend Boone Daughdrill from The Band Perry always tells me that my kit looks like it’s about to fall over. The weirdest part is that my drums actually feel ‘flat’ to me.” Still, Goodwin stands by a stripped down approach for practicality, one that uses everything to its full potential. “I don’t have any distractions,” he said. “If it’s there, I use it. If not, I lose it.”

The hard-hitting style at which he attacks the drums also necessitates the extreme angles and large sizes. “I hit everything very hard so I can go through drumheads in a single show,” he says, “not because I break them, but because I stretch them out.” The severe swinging of his huge cymbals during a show is also evidence of an aggressive style that harkens to the days of big-band drummers. “I want the sound of my drums to cut through the mix and resonate with the audience,” he said. “People can actually feel what I’m putting out. That probably comes from playing in church and wanting to move people emotionally.”

Goodwin prides himself in the fact that he never forgot where he came from. “I still play in church when I come home after a tour,” he said. “It’s a privilege to play in front of thousands of people when I’m on the road with Carrie, and I love the energy that is traded between the band and audience. That said, I still get the biggest thrill playing for the congregation at my church. It’s a different kind of exuberance, a different feeling that is indescribable. It’s not only where I find my roots, but also my strength.” While on the road, Garrett tries to sit in at churches when the opportunity arises to keep his perspective and maintain a sense of gratitude.

As with many drummers today, Goodwin has pursued other related ventures to expand his revenue stream and influence. One hat that he now wears is that of a studio musician and the other is as an author. In 2013, Garrett released his first eBook, *Music Pro Book™* in which he invites his readers to discover the insider secrets to breaking into the lucrative music industry from the perspective and experiences of a professional musician.

Located at [www.musicprobook.com](http://www.musicprobook.com), the website headline offers “A Brand New Guide That Pulls Back The Curtain And Reveals How To Break Into The Music Industry And Gain The Success You Deserve!” The reasonably priced, downloadable eBook has been well received and is getting positive critiques

from drummers looking for a peer who has “been there and done that.”

Goodwin recalls the vision behind the book: “This book really came about because I felt the need to help people in ways that I wish I had been helped. My experiences might be able to help someone who is just starting to navigate the music industry. I didn’t have that type of guidance when I was coming up and for that reason this book includes practical tips and pointers that anyone can use. It’s really my way of using the Internet to provide mentorship to up-and-coming drummers.”

Like many of his peers, Garrett also uses social media to establish and maintain relationships with the public. This is done through his website at [www.garrettgoodwin.com](http://www.garrettgoodwin.com), a Facebook page and a Twitter account. In addition to routinely interacting with fans via Skype, Goodwin also provides private evaluations of players via Internet video. “It’s ironic that I’m a totally self-taught guy,” he said, “and now I’m the one providing guidance to people. I’m so grateful that people think of me in that way and I do my best to give honest critiques and advice.”

Perhaps the biggest contribution that Garrett Goodwin provides to the world has nothing to do with drumming at all. Five years ago he started the charity project [KMLMNYC.com](http://KMLMNYC.com), a non-profit organization with the mission of sending bags that give hope to children in need. “KMLM” stands for “Know Me – Love Me” and for every bag purchased, another bag full of educational materials is sent to a child in a poverty-ridden country. This simple concept has grown exponentially and continues to target children in need in underdeveloped countries and third-world nations.

Goodwin paraphrased the charity’s mission statement and described its origin: “The concept is a simple one. You buy a bag and we pack one full of love and hope and send it to a child in need. The name originated from a simple conversation with an orphan from a small town in Africa. He was asked, ‘If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?’ We expected an answer such as a Playstation, a new bike, all the candy in the world or any other gift that a child would desire. Instead, he responded with a profound statement that blew us away. His words were simple and to the point. ‘I want people to know I exist and I want to be loved.’”

This humanitarian project has had a profound effect on KMLM’s facilitators and supporters, but most of all on Goodwin himself. “This concept has grown so



much, thanks to so many people and I am grateful for all of the support we have received. We have done drops in Africa, Haiti and Barbados just to name a few. It's so simple to help someone in need. Anyone can make a difference. I have a great team working with me and it is so encouraging to see photos of these kids receiving their bags. They think we are blessing them, but in reality, they are the ones blessing us." To date, KMLM has given away up to 250 bags at each drop. Readers interested in supporting this charitable venture should visit [www.kmlmny.com](http://www.kmlmny.com).

With all of his accomplishments and successes at such a young age one could understand if Goodwin's ego swelled a little, however it's just not the case with this young player. With a strong foundation in his faith, a reputation for

hard work and a commitment to charity, Garrett Goodwin exemplifies what a drummer should be on and off the throne. With regard to drumming, his mantra is simple, "Take pride in how you play and love what you do." With regard to humanity, the formula is, "Let love rest on your shoulders, and change lives." He also maintains a deep sense of gratitude and credits his parents and wife for a lifetime of support. "Without my family," he says, "none of this would be possible."

Although he was raised out of the mainstream music scene, Garrett Goodwin has found inspiration and success while playing all genres of music.

He has also managed to cross over from one to the other without losing sight of where he came from. His reputation as a touring and recording drummer continues to grow and his works as an author, mentor and humanitarian are now influencing the next generation of drummers who may strive to be as conventionally unconventional as he is. ✱

