

STEVE GOOLD

The Gospel Of Goold



Story: Michael Aubrecht • Photos: Nathan Dale Larso

Steve Goold is a VERY busy guy. When not on tour playing drums for the immensely popular Owl City, he can be found teaching students as part of the music faculty at Bethel University and Northwestern College; or cutting tracks at the studio with some of the Twin Cities' most popular producers and songwriters; or doing commercial work with corporate clients including General Mills; or performing with Grammy-nominated songwriter Joel Hanson and the Jason Harms Quintet; or serving as the drummer in local mega-church worship bands; or acting as the musical director for the children's entertainment vocal trio Go Fish; or hosting large drum clinics such as the "Drum Set For The Kingdom"; or filming instructional videos for Risen Drums; or rehearsing in support of the 250+ gigs that he manages to pull off each year.

In addition to all of that, Steve Goold is also a family man and an active blogger. After reading through such a demanding schedule (which, by the way, was paraphrased), one might think that this is a musician who has no time to practice, nor any desire to do so. However, the opposite is true in the case of Steve Goold, who is constantly working on developing his own technique while making a concerted effort to share his newfound knowledge with others. A devout Christian, Goold has also found a way to be successful in both the Christian and secular markets. This has enabled him to build a purposeful career as an entertainer and an educator, two roles that he relishes.

The teaching aspect of Goold's livelihood came to light at a relatively early age. According to his Paiste endorser's bio, he began playing drums at the age of 11 while taking lessons from Mark Nash, the drummer for the Grammy-nominated contemporary-Christian pop group PFR. It was during this

keyboard, playing piano from the age of seven to 11. Although it was not his first instrument of choice, it did provide him with a fundamental understanding and appreciation for both music theory and reading. These are critical skills that he continues to call upon today.

Goold's journey toward the life of a concert pianist was forever interrupted on a seemingly uneventful visit to the home of his sister's boyfriend in 1991. He recalled, "At this time we were living in Minnesota. My sister just happened to be dating the drummer for a local band called PFR. They have since gone on to become one of the most popular and influential bands in the Christian genre, but back then they were still young. I was like a third wheel, just hanging out, and Mark Nash asked me if I wanted to go down to his basement and see his drums. He showed me how to play a basic groove and I was immediately swept up by the instrument. I felt an instant connection and affection for the drums that I hadn't felt for the piano. I also seemed to have a knack for it. It just felt right. From there on, I was all in."

PFR's timekeeper saw some potential in his girlfriend's sibling and unbeknownst to Goold, told his parents that he thought their son might have an untapped talent for drumming. Always supportive of their children's interests, his mom and dad surprised him at Christmas with his very first drum kit. He immediately immersed himself in drumming, not with formal lessons, but with a passion that drove him to play every day. This freedom enabled Goold to develop his own unique approach, as he was not inhibited by the rigorous academics that had plagued his piano studies. Each day after school he would retreat to the basement and jam for hours on end.

"Looking back," he said, "I am so thankful that I was able to

"Music to me is not something that you find on the periodic table of elements. It's an art form, not a science."

time that he learned the fundamentals of the "groove." The son of a pastor, he began performing in local churches and participated in many high-school ensembles including the all-conference Jazz Band for the western Twin Cities. He was the recipient of the "Best Soloist" award at the LaCrosse Jazz Festival and started giving private lessons in his community at the tender age of 16. As an adult, Goold continued to study with Latin percussionist Mark Rio (Latin Sounds Orchestra), pop/rock legend Michael Bland (Prince, Madonna) and the internationally acclaimed David King (Jeff Beck).

Despite the fact he was teaching drums at an age when many kids are just starting to play them, Goold vehemently denies the notion that he was some kind of prodigy. He also confesses that he never intended to seriously pursue the instrument as a career. In fact, at one point Goold held aspirations of being an extreme athlete, rising to fame on the wings of the longboard that he still rides while on tour to help maintain his sanity. Today his unplanned livelihood spans studios, arenas, jazz clubs, ballrooms, churches and pit orchestras in the United States, South America, Central America, Asia and Europe. That's not bad for a guy with a degree in theology. In a phone interview with me, Goold shared his story, as well as his philosophies for drums both on and off the stage.

As is often the case with many musicians, the instrument they play is not always the one with which they began. As a typical kid growing up in Burbank CA in the 1980s, a very young Goold developed an interest in music and had dreams of one day shredding on MTV. After approaching a music instructor, he was told to begin his education on the piano prior to picking up the guitar. Taking that advice, he spent several years at the

cut my teeth on my own. Music to me is not something that you find on the periodic table of elements. It's an art form, not a science. My drumming is an expression that ultimately comes from my heart and not simply from a classroom exercise. By allowing myself to explore my creative side early on, it gave me the driving force to pursue the more analytical side as I matured." Goold stressed that the academics of music are a vital complement, but they must be tempered with a raw passion for playing. He remains a firm believer that joy is the backbone of effectively pursuing anything.

Having supportive parents was also a huge brick in the foundation of Goold's career. Beyond enduring the obvious noise issues with having a drummer in the house, the family enthusiastically helped their son to blossom and even gave him his first gig. He said, "I cannot stress enough, how grateful and blessed I was to have parents who supported me. Not only did they help me buy gear as my drum set grew exponentially, they actually took time to sit down and listen to me play while offering constant words of encouragement. That made a huge difference and pushed me to play even better. They were proud of me and I responded to that."

As a pastor, Goold's father arranged for his son to sit in with their church's worship team. Steve eventually assumed the drum chair permanently and continued to play with the youth group band, made up of his peers, as well as with the adult group, which comprised of professional musicians. In a demanding setting that required both skill and discipline on a weekly basis, Goold flourished.

This period as a church musician helped to shape his worldview of the drums and what is required to play them to

one's fullest potential. He said, "In order to play with the adults I had to put in the time and bring my 'A' game every week. I also realized that I needed to exhibit a Type A personality on the drums no matter what my internal personality was. The drummer needs to drive the rest of the band and that requires a certain level of dominance. In other words, it's okay to be a passive or shy person, but when you sit behind the drum set you need to own it." This is a theory that Goold uses today with his own students to guide them toward being more confident and assertive.

It was that very assertiveness that enabled him to become one of the most in-demand players in the Midwest. The vast range of genres that he has been able to accommodate while on tour or in the studio has set him apart and explains the demanding schedule that he now boasts. While many other drummers tend to specialize in a particular genre, Goold's resume is all over the map. From the pop and electronica scene to gospel, jazz improvisation and advertising jingles, eclectic seems to be an appropriate word. Most surprising is the huge difference both technically and aesthetically between many of these genres.

Goold explained his journey toward being a jack-of-all-trades. "I've made a conscious decision to learn to play as many different styles as I could. Why? Because I love good music, all good music, regardless if there are drums in it or not." He added, "Sometimes you will see a drummer subbing at a gig where he clearly is not in his comfort zone. He might be a great jazz drummer, but at a rock show he looks like a fish out of water. I never ever want to be that guy."

He continued, "A good drummer should be able to play any gig in the appropriate style and context that is required. I want

act. As a result, he uses a wide variety of drum setups and configurations. While on tour with Owl City, he forgoes any rack toms in favor of a trigger pad, and for his jazz and worship band rigs, he uses a minimal setup that helps him focus on the performance and not the percussion pieces that surround him. With a rock or studio session, he uses a larger kit with multiple rack or floor toms, although their position may vary depending on the song. He explained, "I realized early on that there were core components to the drum set and then things that you don't really need. For me it's all about function over form. If I have a bunch of toms and extra cymbals then I'm unconsciously tempted to use them. That ultimately interferes with me serving the song. A drummer's set-up should be logical. You should ask yourself 'Why do I have this?' 'Do I need it?' I don't use a double-bass pedal and rarely use splashes or China cymbals because I simply don't need them. They get in the way from me expressing what is truly necessary."

Goold also believes that the lack of a standard setup opens the doors of possibility and enables a drummer to push the creative boundaries. He said, "My teacher Dave King recommended that I periodically remove elements from my drum set at rehearsal and then see if I could still effectively perform a song. This forced me to look at different ways to play things and allowed me to feel a renewed energy and vibe with numbers I had been performing on autopilot." He added, "The bottom line is if you don't use it, lose it and don't inhibit yourself because you think things have to be set up or played a certain way."

Goold also recommends not being tied to your gear in a way that prevents you from dealing with unforeseen circumstances. He stated, "I'm very flexible when it comes to equipment. You

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to completely satisfy both the audience and the artist when I come to play, and if I do my job correctly, they will assume that I'm playing in my genre, because I sound like I'm in my element." Today, Goold's schedule may find him performing for thousands of screaming fans on one day, and to a few dozen parishioners the next.

His philosophy for serving both the venue and the song stretches well beyond the obvious playing requirements. Goold goes as far as to analyze the very equipment, drum tone, striking location and stick velocity that is required to properly perform. His belief is that in order to remain true and traditional to any form of music, one must become as knowledgeable about it as possible, while remaining flexible in the execution of it. He said, "When I perform a song, I am fulfilling a specific role. That role must be adhered to within the context of the music. This means that I need to know what to play and sometimes even more importantly, what not to play. Regardless, I also want to have the skills at my disposal that I can call upon if needed."

Goold went on, "A good analogy would be a running back. He has a specific role on the football field and must do his part in order for the team to function properly. He primarily runs, but he also has to be able to throw a block when needed. Running backs get the glory when they run, but defer the glory to others when they block. It's all about understanding context, not just what you play, but when and why you play it."

Understandably, Goold plays the role of a musical chameleon whose appearance and equipment change with each varying

have to be when you do as many sit ins as I do. If the tom sizes or wood types aren't what I planned for, I roll with the punches. Work within whatever parameters you are given. A good drummer can make anything sound good if it's played properly."

These beliefs have resulted in a liberating philosophy that also puts the onus on the musician. "The musician must take responsibility for every aspect of the performance," Goold says. "Own up to it. If things sound bad or are performed poorly it's your fault, not the act, or the facility, or the gear. Bad drums are always due to the drummer's mistakes. Professionals should constantly strive to sound good no matter what circumstances they find themselves in. This can be achieved by understanding what is required to sound good and having options at your disposal."

As a teacher, Goold has developed a playing and performance system that primarily focuses on the mental aspects of drumming. At his clinics, he shows up with a minimal kit and routinely speaks far more than he plays. The elements of his dogma range from the common sense fundamentals to unique perspectives that force individuals to reevaluate their entire approach to the instrument. Statements like "practice everything until it's easy, not just until you can do it," and "everything you can imagine doing on a drum set is either possible for you or impossible for everybody," instill a higher appreciation for practice and preparation.

Other insights like dumping the drum shields, effectively playing with hot rods, and what important components to add

into your mix, come from years of experience and playing in every kind of unforgiving venue possible. The classroom environment is where Goold is able to simultaneously share his own learned lessons and pay it forward by encouraging his students in the same way that his father had encouraged him. "I want my students to love the instrument," he said, "because that is what will make them work at it."

Perhaps Goold's greatest contribution to the metaphysical realm of drum theory is his self-discovery and designation of what he calls "Drummer's Disease." This revelation not only changed his own approach to his instrument, but has also influenced countless other drummers he has tutored, who were not even aware they were suffering from it. "Drummer's Disease," he said, "is a subconscious and skewed perspective that is largely the fault of the drum community. It is when

"I was in the habit of taking licks that I thought were cool, things that I had watched others drummers do, and then trying to find ways to incorporate them into my own playing. I was forcing things into the song and not using them in the same context as where I had originally seen them. I wanted to impress other drummers by trying to do things that I thought were cool, for no other reason than that. This led me to serve myself and not the song. Later when I tried to justify certain things to my students, I couldn't.

"Another misconception caused by Drummer's Disease is that complexity equals quality. Drummers think that playing things that are difficult make a greater impact than simple things. I came to understand that the concept of difficulty is entirely subjective." He said, "What is hard for me may be easy for someone else and vice-versa; so the notion of using



drummers are so focused on themselves that they lose sight of the contextual aspects of drumming."

"Take John Bonham for example...Drummers zero in on his bass-drum sound, triplets and solos yet they disregard how his actual playing style fit within the confines of Led Zeppelin, or how his influence affected the band's overall sound. This does a great disservice to his legacy. He wasn't just John Bonham 'the drummer,' he was John Bonham 'of Led Zeppelin.'" He continued, "Drums do not exist outside of the music, they are contextually bound. Far too many drummers divorce themselves from that. They need to remember that they are contributing to something bigger. The drums are just another piece of the puzzle, not 'the' piece."

This realization came to Goold after he found himself trying to explain concepts to his students and not liking his answers.

difficulty as a value when examining what to play is a total farce."

He continued, "I was intentionally playing things that I thought were higher up on the difficulty scale in order to appeal to other drummers as they are the only ones who could pick up on it. Too often this comes at the expense of the audience. I'm thinking 'yeah a paradiddle would be awesome here' while 99% of the people watching me have no idea what that even is. I had to ask myself, 'who am I really playing for, other drummers or the entire audience?'"

The threat of Drummer's Disease not only affects Goold's commercial playing but also his spiritual performances as well. "Christians view music as an integral part of their worship," he said, "not as an act. The role of a worship band is to harness the emotional potency of music and use it to

Another distinctive aspect of Steve Goold's style is the unique drum sets that he routinely uses. The most renowned of these is the "GLO-Kit," which was created by the incredibly innovative folks at Risen Drums in Minneapolis. Keith Anderson, founder and master craftsman at Risen started the company 14-years ago as a hobby, first building and playing the first eight Risen kits himself. In an email interview with me, Keith explained the story behind the "GLO-Kit" and the customer-service philosophy that has enabled his company to thrive.

"Most of what we do here today is based on trial and error," he said, "and lots of study of sound waves and wood types. My dad always said, 'passion runs the world,' and we say that often here at Risen. Our mantra is a simple one: We love drums and that's exactly why we do this. We also believe firmly in establishing personal relationships with all of our customers. For that reason we are a true 100% custom-drum shop."

He added, "We don't build anything until it's ordered and everything is designed and built one at a time. There is no way to buy a Risen kit other than right here in the shop in Minneapolis. So everyone who buys a kit from Risen talks to me. We are not interested in an assembly line or mass production. We are dedicated craftsmen, and every drum that comes out of our shop is a part of us. Over the years we have been blessed to know and work closely with a lot of great musicians." Risen artists include: Lester Estelle Jr. (Kelly Clarkson / Big 'N Rich), Randall Harris (Need to Breathe), Brandon Commodore (Mint Condition), Adam Silverman (Lauren Alaina) and "the Bwack" (David Crowder Band).

The original concept for the "GLO-Kit" was inspired by Goold's daughter's nightlight, which he and Anderson discussed one evening over a family dinner. "What I love most about the 'GLO-Kit' is how it came about," Anderson recalls. "This was a 'wouldn't it be cool if' kind of dream in Steve's head, and we just had to try it. I love the relationship of that and the grass-roots idea that anything is possible. It pushes us to be more creative as drum manufacturers instead of mass producing clones."

He added, "The drum shells on the 'GLO-Kits' are acrylic white, not clear, so they allow the colored light to pass through, but still remain relatively solid in their appearance. We lined them with LED strips to an XLR jack on the side of the shell, so there are no unsightly cords or anything hanging off the side. We installed coated heads on top and on bottom so the entire appearance is like that of a lampshade. These drums truly glow."

Anderson continued, "For Steve's kit we added a specially designed brain-box that controls the lighting system in each drum. There are 34 presets for colors that the drummer can switch as he is playing. These lights can also be controlled by the front-house lighting techs. For other 'GLO-Kits,' there is a total flexibility and the lighting interface is unique to each drummer's needs. Therefore every 'GLO-Kit' we do is always a bit different from the last one because every player wants to control the lights a little bit differently based on his setup. The biggest difference with a Risen Drums 'GLO-Kit' can be defined by three main things:

"First, we cut our own edges into the shell. This is a very tricky process because you do not want to melt the acrylic. You must cut the bearing edge differently than you would on a wood shell. We also want to maintain our own unique Risen sound, which always presents a challenge. Second, we use our own Risen lug system, which utilizes aluminum. This allows the shell to resonate more because aluminum is so light.

Third, the venting system on acrylic shells is different than on wood. This is what I believe really sets Risen Drums apart. We have studied sound waves enough to see a variance in different sized shells and different types of materials. We recognize that each drum needs to breathe differently. Acrylic doesn't have pores like wood, so sound waves react inside an acrylic shell much differently than inside a wood shell. The shell needs to breathe differently, and we need to let more air escape out of an acrylic shell than any other material. This requires our unique Risen venting system and some innovative master craftsmanship."

The result of Risen's efforts is a spectacular drum set that stands out in any performance. For more information on Risen Drums or to order your own "GLO-Kit," visit www.risendrums.com.



The "GLO-Kit" Sound Worth Seeing

- 24x16 kick, 15x8 snare, 13x9 rack, 16x14 floor, 18x14 floor (white, translucent acrylic shells featuring full RGB LED lighting strips wired throughout with 5-pin DMX cables, controlled either by the drummer or the front-of-house lighting designer).
- Cymbal: Paiste Twenty Series 20" Crash, Twenty Custom Series 16" Full Crashes (as hi-hats), 20" Full Crash, 22" Full Ride
- Steve exclusively uses Vic Firth sticks and Remo drumheads.

“By stepping outside of myself, I came to realize that I was approaching my instrument solely as a drummer and not as a musician.”

connect with God. Musicians who are called to serve the church in that role must understand that they are playing for a higher purpose and it is not about them. If someone leaves a service at my church saying, ‘Wow what a drummer!’ I have failed miserably at my role.

“By stepping outside of myself, I came to realize that I was approaching my instrument solely as a drummer and not as a musician. This forced me to revamp my entire approach. Today I remain in a constant fight with Drummer’s Disease as it permeates everything I do: from my setup, to my playing, writing and performing. The bottom line is that being a drummer isn’t just about drums. Drummer’s Disease seeks to undermine a drummer’s focus on how music touches his heart.” It is this attitude that Goold strives to share with drummers both young and old.

Despite the rigors of maintaining such a demanding schedule, Goold still takes plenty of time to count his blessings. “I’ve played with so many incredibly talented people,” he said. “Some of the records I’m proud to have played on include Elizabeth Hunnicutt’s *On The Way*, Joel Hanson’s *What If It Is*, Surrounded By Werewolves’ *Things Are Getting Weird*, The Bill Mike Band’s *Truce* and Could Cult’s *Feel Good Ghosts*. Back in January of this year I recorded an instrumental record with a well-known Minneapolis producer named Matt Patrick and the Owl City guitarist Jasper Nephew. We are tentatively calling

ourselves Mass, and the record should be out this summer. I’m also working with singer-songwriter and pianist Sara Bareilles.”

With a career that continues to spread across multiple continents and genres, Steve Goold has proven himself to be both a player and philosopher of percussion. His unique perspective for the instrument is now influencing a whole new generation of players who he hopes will not simply become drummers, but more importantly, musicians.

Whether on tour with Owl City, or sitting in with a small quartet at a local jazz club, Goold no longer strives to be the best drummer in the room. Instead he begins every show with the intention of being the best musician he can be for that particular gig. No longer pursuing the praises of other drummers, he now works just as hard to please the audience.

“I love watching my kids listen to music because they experience it in its purest form,” he said. “They aren’t trying to judge the composition or analyze the chops of the musicians; they are having a visceral reaction to something that touches them. It’s just a good song that makes them want to dance around and they don’t know why. They are experiencing the art form as it is truly intended to be. All of us should try to look at music a little more like that.” ✨

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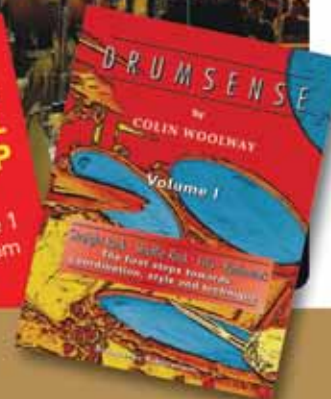


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