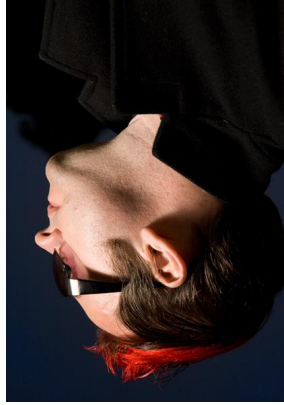


ROBERT BRIAN INTERVIEW - 19/08/09



Robert Brian is an in-demand session musician who has worked with Peter Gabriel and Hugh Cornwall, amongst others. He played drums on Siouxsie's Mantaray & More tour, the subsequent TV performances to promote the album and on Siouxsie's Finale (Mantaray & More) DVD that recently reached No.4 in the official music DVD charts. He is currently busy touring, recording and performing drum clinics/workshops around the country and working on my drumming/teaching DVD. He

is also featured in the current edition of Rhythm Magazine.

How and when did your passion for percussion start, were there any drummers in particular who influenced you to take up your drumsticks and start bashing away? Do you play any other musical instruments? (Mike)

Hi Mike, well my father played the drums back in the 1960's with Acker Bilk, Kenny Ball and also with London players like Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes and even Tom Jones at one point. Watching him practice when I was younger in our garage was something that must have stuck with me but my earliest memory of wanting to really play something was after watching Tubeway Army playing 'Are Friends Electric?' on Top Of The Pops. I was nine years old and this performance I guess was the one that finally pushed me into wanting to play music. I liked many bands such as The Police but this one performance woke something inside my imagination and from there it grew into The Beatles. John Lennon was shot in 1980 and I felt the ripples of grief around the world and through this I discovered their music. At this time I also saw the great drummer Buddy Rich play on TV and I was just blown away, so much speed, precision and dynamics was something I had never seen. So, I guess between my father, Buddy Rich, Ringo Starr, Stewart Copeland and Gary Numan the drumming bug was born. I play some piano and tuned percussion but just enough to get by, I'm certainly not confident enough to gig them, I stick to the drums for that!

How did the job touring with Siouxsie on the Mantaray & More tour come about? (Peter)

I know Steve Evans and Charlie Jones who both co/produced and played on the record. Charlie contacted me and asked if I was up for an exciting new project and invited me to his house to listen to some tracks. He played me a

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

few songs from the 'Mantaray' album without telling me who it was, and I sat there and was just blown away with the sounds and vibe of the record. I recognised Sioux's voice and thought her new sound and direction was amazing, it took just 1 and ½ tracks before I said yes!

Is being a fan of someone's music important when accepting offers for session work, whether that's in the studio or on tour? (Peter)

I think the general answer to that is no as sometimes work can be in short supply and when you play music for a living you sometimes get offers that you can't afford to refuse. Depending on the resolve of the person involved it is easy to turn down or shy away from an artist if you do not like or appreciate their work. I have been lucky that most of the people who have asked me to perform have been artists that I have admired. Siouxsie is no different and I was aware of the band from Top of the Pops - and the drumming of Budgie. I had cassette copies of 'Tinderbox' – 'Ju Ju' and a battered 7" copy of 'Spellbound'. I have of course worked with people that I have not liked and taken some tours or recording sessions literally just for the employment. This can be harder but bills need to be paid and being a professional means sometimes this has to be done.

Siouxsie stated in a recent interview that the inclusion of some of the older Banshees numbers during the tour was partly due to the band wanting to play certain songs. Did you have any suggestions or preferences yourself? (Peter)/(creature 24)

The Banshee's catalogue is full of great songs and drum parts and the list of tunes changed from week to week. I of course wanted 'Happy House' and 'Spellbound' in the set because they are just awesome drum parts to play and instantly recognisable to the fans. I would have liked to play 'El dia de los Muertos' as I love the drum part on that song, it's full on pure Latin flavour. Another would have been 'Lands End' from Tinderbox as that drum part is so strong and it's one of Budgie's talents; to be bold with his drum parts and make them just as important as the guitar lines. So many times the drums play supporting roles in songs which of course is what most songs need, but to be lucky enough to be playing songs where the drum part is SO crucial is just an amazing experience. I feel fortunate to have played the Banshee songs as they are anthems and seeing 2,000 to 15,000 heads move to the drum parts of all of them is a rare and privileged experience.

Why the hell didn't you talk her out of doing "These Boots Were Made for Walking", damn it ?! (The Real Belfagor)

That is a song that Siouxsie likes and all the covers we did were songs that she really wanted to do. We rehearsed it and thought it sounded good and it was a nice change of vibe in the set and definitely something fans wouldn't be expecting.

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

First things first: I just want to say thank you for being so friendly on the numerous times our paths crossed at many a stage door on the Mantaray & More Tour. Hope to see you again before too long! When performing Banshees songs during the tour were you able to improvise much or were the original rhythms "set in stone"? (John The Flower Man)

Well John it was always a pleasure to meet you at the stage door on many a gig and it was almost strange when you weren't there!

I respected the original drum parts and I played them in rehearsals as you hear them on record. Many of them are so integral to the song that to play anything else just wouldn't be right and I believe it's important to learn the actual part before you even think about changing it up. I got right inside the songs and listened to every part to hear how Budgie pieced the grooves together and then I placed myself in that space. I actually played all the old Banshee songs pretty much as the originals though there were a few extra fills or cymbal crashes here and there. I had a conversation with Sioux and she was happy with how they sounded and was happy for me to play a few alterations on fills as long as they suited the song. That old saying of 'if something is not broke don't fix it' comes to mind and these drum parts are perfect as they are.

'Right Now' was included in the set for the last show. Was there ever any mention of including any other songs by The Creatures? (Peter)

We actually did 'Right Now' a few times on the tour and it was a blast to play. The only other tune that was talked about that I can remember was 'Miss the girl' but this never got to the rehearsal stage. Whilst discussions were being made about the back catalogue I listened to all of it and appreciated a lot of the Creatures material with the tuned percussion and drumming.

You've worked with many different artists over the years, including Peter Gabriel and Hugh Cornwall. On a personal level what has been one of the most rewarding experiences? (Peter)

It is very hard to say as each of them has brought something different to popular music culture. I'm very proud to have worked with these artists as they have defined certain moments in music. They each play different styles but they were all trailblazers that helped define the last 40 years of music history from progressive rock to punk. They certainly influenced me as a listener/musician so to have the chance to work with them is just amazing. The rewarding aspect is to know that in working with them I have become part of that history and that will last long after I have hung up my sticks in retirement!

OK I dare to ask - The most common question asked when the Mantaray & More tour was announced was "Who will be sitting on the

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

drum stool?" Many of us hoped that the beloved Budgie would take up his post, but as further news broke regarding the separation not only in marriage but in music too this was never going to be a reality. Were you aware of the void you would have to fill and did this have any impact about how you approached taking up position on the famous drum stool? (robbiefett)

Hi Robbie and thanks for that question, I knew that one was coming! :-)

I was very aware of the situation and some drummers I know did not envy the position. I knew that through the 'Mantaray' material I could bring my own sound and style to Siouxsie's music and through that I could bring something to the Banshee/Creatures songs. I was kind of waiting for a backlash or anti-Rob movement and there may have been one, but I didn't feel it and when meeting many fans after the gigs I never got negative feedback. The thing is I never tried to reinvent the classic songs by changing them, I just played the parts Budgie played but with my style and my drum sound. Learning those parts was difficult and I worked hard on transcribing them and constantly listened to the tracks at home and in the car. I wanted to hit the marks on the Banshee material and I was happy with how they sounded and I can only hope that most of the fans feel the same.

When former Banshees/Creatures drummer Budgie was interviewed for Rhythm magazine in 2005 he mentioned Deep Purple drummer Ian Paice. He says: 'Deep Purple's Ian Paice is the one. I didn't realise how close some of the things I do are based around what he did, especially the floor tom and kick drum work.' I noticed that you mention Deep Purple as one of your many influences on your Facebook page. Being familiar with Deep Purple and having now played a selection of Banshees songs yourself would you say that influence is apparent in Budgie's work? (Peter)

Well, Ian Paice and Deep Purple were a massive part of my listening from the age of twelve. My dad had the Purple albums '24 Carat Purple' and 'Concerto for group and orchestra' which opened my eyes to a whole different world of classical/rock oriented music. The drum solo on the third movement blew my mind as Ian Paice sounded like Buddy Rich and the sound of Jon Lord's Hammond organ was just like heaven and hell all in one. I bought all the vinyl I could from this band and though I also admire Led Zeppelin and the great drumming of John Bonham, it's Deep Purple that remain my favourite.

I hadn't read that Rhythm article on Budgie so thank you for bringing that to my attention. A track that springs to mind is on Deep Purple's 'Fireball' album and it's called 'The Mule.' This track has a very prominent drum part which is major part of the song with big tom fills and snare rolls with a pumping bass drum line, this reminds me of how Budgie wrote his future drum parts. Also the way Budgie plays the bass drum between floor tom strokes on the pattern at

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

the end of 'Happy House' come from a similar thing Ian does on fills and solo's. This I definitely clocked when learning Banshee drum parts as it happens in a few places in Budgie's drumming. It's great that we both share that influence and Ian certainly has helped shaped my drumming when I play with ex-Robert Plant guitarist Innes Sibun.

Hi Robert it's me Mystic Meera. Did Siouxsie gently coax you into dyeing your hair red? I know she made the bassist have a hair makeover. If she asked you nicely would you and the band have donned a Pammy (Hogg) style catsuit on stage? You all looked very nervous on your various TV stints, was it daunting? (Mystic Meera)

Hi Mystic Meera, thank you for your question. Siouxsie is amazing to work with as she allows you to express your individuality and she wants your character to come through the music and the performance. The suits were a nice touch for the band and we each had our own choice for the style as long as they were black. I went for a pin-stripe as I thought this would get noticed more than just a plain black suit, and then halfway through the tour my inner punk surfaced. I decided to go for something different and something that would be noticed from the drum riser, I couldn't go all out blonde as Steve had already done that so I went with a red stripe. It was my idea and Siouxsie loved it so it stayed and it is still here as I write this today!

(Not sure about the cat suits on the band, it's an interesting thought but not sure they would suit us as well as they did Sioux :-)

We enjoyed the TV spots and I remember we were really up for each of them and I have done TV stuff before so it wasn't too daunting. For me there was a lot of triggering of loops on the songs we performed so I'm concentrating hard on the live drum part as well as getting ready for the loops. So, occasionally for me the rock 'n' roll shapes and rock faces were replaced with ones of concentration.

Gonna put you on the spot with this 'un, Rob - it's your choice whether you answer it honestly or tactfully... Is Siouxsie a hard taskmistress? Y'know, does playing a bum note on stage result in our beloved diva throwing a tantrum/chair at your head afterwards? (John The Flower Man)

I will answer that honestly John.

She is serious about the music and she wants it played correctly so if you go into the project with this in mind you will be absolutely fine. If you join the band and you have delusions of big solos and big drum fills then like any band leader she will let you know the score. I respect the way she works and for me I played the older tracks as she expected to hear them, and the 'Mantaray' stuff I played more as I thought they should sound. If there is something she doesn't

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

like she will say, otherwise if nothing is said then the part is fine and that's that. I can play the same drum parts night after night and I know this is difficult for some drummers, but this consistency is a trait and it gets me a lot of work. I know Sioux appreciates that consistency in a drummer and for the band it means if the drummer is tight the band will sound good. As far as picking up on mistakes, she does clock them and mentions it after the show but nothing is thrown! :-)

Have you ever used the line "I drum for Siouxsie" to impress someone that you want to get to know better? (Mike)

No I haven't really . . . However, when I mention it to other musicians when we are talking about past and future work it does get kudos.

One thing you and I have in common, Rob, is that we celebrated our respective 40th birthday's (both in the first week of July - so that's two things!) in the presence of Siouxsie - me in the audience at Barrowlands back in 2002 and you on stage at Tripod last year. Did you have the energy to go out partying afterwards? And can you remember what you got up to? (Feel free to be discreet at this point!) (John The Flower Man)

Well John, I must confess I think Sioux said I was 40 but in reality I turned 38 that night. I remember the night well and I had hoped someone caught on their phone Siouxsie and the crowd singing happy birthday to me, but alas it was not to be. We all had a few bottles of champagne in the dressing room and afterwards went out to a bar in town and carried on the celebrating. We then took a crowd back to the hotel to find the hotel bar shut, so we carried it on in my hotel room. A good night and a pleasant hangover to boot!!

Looking at your work schedule, gigging, recording, workshops, you are a very busy man. When you find the time, what do you do to relax? (Peter)

Good question Peter. Finding time is the first thing, but when I do get the time I like to go for walks or go cycling. I listen to music and get inspired by pieces and styles that I have never heard before. I am going through a minimalistic Steve Reich phase at the moment. I also get inspiration from great movies and Claire and I often sit down and watch some classics as well as a healthy dose of modern cinema. I visit record fairs as I collect a lot of vinyl though good fairs seem to be harder to come across these days. We both love good Indian meals and love trying out new restaurants and sometimes we just get in the car and see where we end up, it's nice just discovering somewhere new. Feeling totally peaceful is a thing I seek when I'm not playing, drums is a full on pass time and when I'm not playing I need to find that place. It's the ying to the yang I guess. A lot of music I listen to when I want to find this space has no percussion in it at all, and though it sounds a little bit spiritual I like to explore

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

and find these peaceful places within me. I get a similar feeling from walking through some amazing scenery or by just sitting and watching the sea. It means that my mind becomes clear and by the next time I play I am more focused on what I want the music to sound like.

I'll ask the inevitable pink and fluffy question... have you got any pets Rob? (John The Flower Man)

We have no pets at the moment, though I would love to get a Labrador or a Golden retriever at some point. The reality is that neither of us has the time to look after a dog properly so for now, that idea is on a back burner.

During the Mantaray & More tour you were required to play drum parts written/composed by three different drummers that have worked with Siouxsie, namely, Kenny Morris, Budgie and Clive Deamer. What can you tell us about the different drumming styles/techniques of all three? (Peter)

Yes, I had a lot of listening to go through to play all those different personalities. They each have brought something to the sound of the bands and the songs, and to drumming in that particular style. As a session player you often have to learn drum parts that were already written and played by someone else, so it was not too difficult to pen out or learn those grooves. Each drummer has its own character and touch on the instrument and I needed to catch a piece of that spirit when I played their parts. It was great and I think with the Mantaray stuff I put my own stamp on the material for the live performances.

How would you go about learning how to play, for example, 'Spellbound'? Sheet music? Listening to a recording of it? Picking it up during rehearsals? (John The Flower Man)

Good question John.

With that song I sat down and listened to the track and penned it out section by section on manuscript paper. I then watched many performances on 'YouTube' to see how Budgie played it and how he voiced it in a live situation. Both 'Spellbound' and 'Happy House' were songs that I really wanted to nail as the parts are so great and recognisable for each song. I did a lot of homework on the Banshee songs and it was a pleasure to get inside those songs and grooves. Some songs I wrote out as just bar lengths for the verses and chorus's etc...As the grooves weren't that hard and quite easy to remember. Other songs needed more preparation and that means writing them out on music paper and also writing how many bars in each section, so in rehearsals I relied on counting as well as reading the parts. That way all the angles were covered and I never got lost!

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

Eventually I used Siouxsie's vocals for pointers and various guitar riffs but firstly I learnt some of the songs in classic written form, that I wrote out for myself. I still have them here somewhere! :-)

You're currently based in the Bristol area. During the late 90s the Bristol music scene was really put on the map with the emergence of innovative new artists such as Portishead, Massive Attack and Tricky (amongst others). How vibrant and vital do you feel the current music scene in the South West is? (Peter)

This area is a melting pot of talent, and I have lived in this part of the world all my life. The music scene has lots going on in all styles from classical, jazz to the trip hop vibe of the 90's. There are lots of cool venues and good gigs happening here and I dip my toe in a lot of the gigs/projects. There are many young indie bands cutting their teeth and many are really good!

The Bath Bristol scene is very hip and I love the fact that I can do Jonathan Ross with Siouxsie one night and a day later playing jazz/funk in a sweaty pub in Bristol. It's the variety and choices that make my job so much fun!! :-)

What does the future hold for you, are there any musical ambitions that you would hope to achieve or do you prefer to wait till the opportunities emerge? (creature 24)

I really hope to work with Siouxsie in the future as it was so much fun and I love being around her and that band!

I am performing drum clinics/workshops around the country and working on my drumming/teaching DVD. I am really busy gigging and my calendar is full of gigs and recording sessions, so often tours get offered from these sessions. I am gigging a funk/fusion band as well called 'Cancel Silence!' which is booking festivals and odd gigs so please come along if you are playing in your area, also the same goes for the drum clinics, and any other gigs that I do.

Please check my sites:

www.robertbrian.co.uk

www.myspace.com/drummerrobbrian

There are many people I would love to work with on my wish list, here are just a few:

Kate Bush, Gary Numan, Prince, David Byrne, Mark Hollis-Talk Talk, Steve Reich, Paul McCartney, Devo, David Sylvian, Jeff Beck, David Bowie, Herbie Hancock, The Blue Nile, Thomas Dolby, Brian Eno, Cinematic Orchestra.

18/09/2009

Robert Brian Interview

Thanks for all the questions they have been great to answer!

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me on the mentioned websites.

Cheers,

Rob.

x