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The drum break is one of the most important musical innovations of the 20th century, and by the year 2000, it had transcended its origins as a piece of a larger work into a commodity unto itself worth collecting and archiving. While the use of loops (especially looped drums) would flourish amongst dancefloors in the eighties, nineties and beyond, it was the birth of hip-hop on two turntables in 1973 that would highlight the importance of looping, and the loops of the drum sections DJs used were known as “drum breaks" or “breakbeats.” These were collected by DJs with specific knowledge of dozens of songs and artists that featured extended sections of unaccompanied drums. The practice of collecting these breaks became a driving force of hip-hop culture that in the 1990s was known as “crate digging,” in part due to the crates necessary to contain all the breaks needed for DJing (Hix). While the use of drum breaks originally required large record collections, the industry soon after began to compile breaks onto compilations, creating a niche industry for DJs, record producers and eventually studio drummers to fill with live breakbeat albums. This paper will examine this tradition, which has continued to shape electronic music today; it will observe the frequency of output in this genre spanning three decades, looking at changes in styles, trends, copyright law and consider how these affected the role of drum breaks as their use evolved; and it will present drum breaks and the sampling of drum breaks as a tool that can be developed further, culminating in discussion of the creation of an accompanying drum break record.

The drum break has its roots in live music and later electronic repurposing has formed a chronology of musical evolution spanning across six decades and at least as many genres since its inception. Nailing down said inception for the breakbeat era can be difficult. While a “breakbeat” is usually a term used loosely, referring to both genres of electronic music and a

looped sample of a drum beat, the concept of a “drum break” can be nailed down a bit more precisely, but even still needs a more nuanced explanation.

A simple establishing rhythm to start a song, often on a hi-hat, was a popular intro to use in jazz during the early and mid-twentieth century. During the fifties many new genres and styles began to emerge in the Americas, including rock and roll, soul, and bossa nova, and in this time new drumming styles were developed. As the development of these genres in the fifties and sixties led to an increased versatility in drummers, much of popular music moved away from earlier swing, shuffle or 6/8 rhythms, to place increasing emphasis on a backbeat of two and four, eventually settling into a locked groove with a much more straight feel. During the mid-sixties, this feel developed into a particular style of groove named “the one,” by James Brown, who pioneered this new genre of groove-based music (Pippins; Kelley). “The one” was accompanied by a focus on emphasized weak beats, which created a new type of danceable syncopation (Kelley). This syncopated dance music became known as funk, however the concept of “the one” became ubiquitous in all styles, especially rock and popular genres during the funk era (Kelley; Morrison).

An early James Brown song to feature both this style of groove and an unaccompanied (often referred to by producers as “open”) drum intro is “I’ve Got Money,” from 1962 featuring drummer Clayton Fillyau playing a heavily syncopated groove possibly influenced by New-Orleans-style street drumming (“James Brown – Shhhhhhhhh (For A Little While) / I've Got Money”). Brown’s 1965 hit “I Got You (I Feel Good)” is often cited as being the start of the funk era. Some however will give the credit instead to 1967’s “Cold Sweat,” which features a heavily syncopated and often-sampled open drum break performed by Clyde Stubblefiled (“James Brown And The Famous Flames – Cold Sweat.”). This song also features James Brown encouraging the drummer, with the phrase “let’s give the drummer some,” which would become a memorable phrase that would last in drum break culture to the present day. Released three years before Brown’s “Funky Drummer,” “Cold Sweat" is one of the earliest recorded drum

breaks to become an icon in and of itself, predated by only a few songs from the preceding years. Regardless of the exact year or recording that started the breakbeat timeline, the majority of “classic breakbeats,” as they are known in DJ circles, are from this era: the late sixties and early seventies. During this time many bands would feature funk-style or funk-influenced drumming and feature drum breaks as either intros or an actual break section.

There are dozens, if not scores or even hundreds, of drum breaks that have become arguably more known than the songs that they came from, being instantly recognizable in the public for the hit dance or rap songs that sampled them. People may recognize a drum loop from being sampled in multiple songs, for example, but not know the original source. Out of these scores or even hundreds of famous drum breaks, a very select few transcend far beyond the context of their release and still change the face of music today.

The Amen Break came from a cover of the African-American gospel standard “Amen, Brother” recorded in 1969 by soul band The Winstons (“The Winstons - Color Him Father / Amen, Brother.”). Released as a B-side for the hit single “Color Him Father,” the song featured a drum solo which did not deviate strongly from the beat, but put a stronger emphasis on the ghost notes that drove the rhythm. It also featured a driving ride cymbal instead of a hi-hat, with drummer Gregory Sylvester Coleman leaving spaces here and there, as well as a displaced snare near the end of the break – a syncopated switch-up which would be common in many drum breaks of this era (see fig. 1).

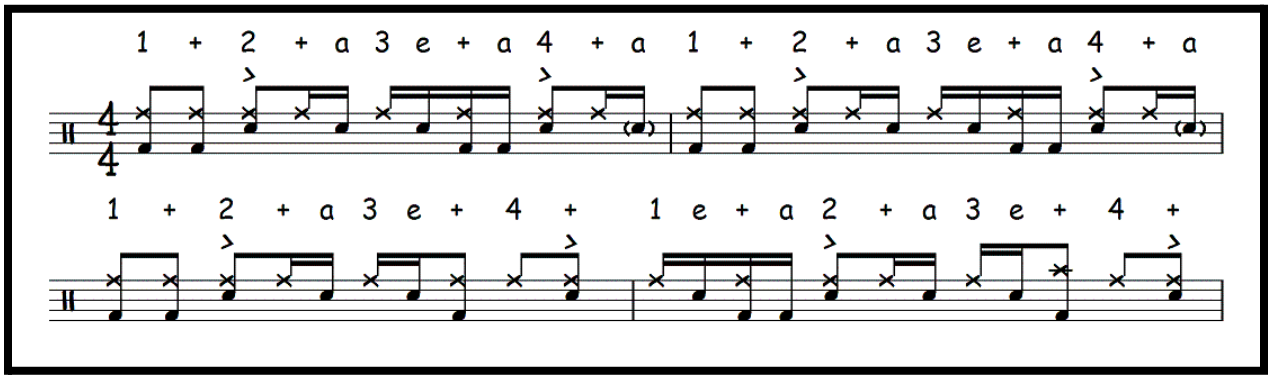

Fig. 1 Notation for Amen Break (“Free Drum Lesson: ‘Amen Break’”)

Heavy in sound and “hard-hitting” at just about any BPM, the Amen Brother break (sometimes shortened to the Amen Break) became a staple in dance and hip-hop music and was important in laying the sonic foundation for the entire genre of jungle and drum-and-bass, musical traditions that relied even more on the sound of sampled drums, though creators in these genres manipulated the loops far more heavily and cranked them up to high tempos. The Amen Break’s history as a dance music icon dates back to 1986, the same year it was included on *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* (SBR-501), the first “official” UB&B release of a dozen released that year. Its first documented use is Steady B’s “Stupid Fresh,” which only samples parts of the drum roll intro (Tony). Influential rap group Stetsasonic made use of the song as well, but only sampled a horn riff , making Salt-N-Pepa the first group to sample the drums in full with “I Desire” (stationary unit, “Stetsasonic's 'Bust That Groove' sample of The Winstons's 'Amen, Brother' | WhoSampled.”, “Salt-N-Pepa's 'I Desire' sample of The Winstons's 'Amen, Brother' | WhoSampled.”). Though Salt-N-Pepa’s 1986 debut album *Hot, Cool & Vicious* reached the Top 40 (*Billboard*), it wouldn’t be until 1988 that the Amen Break became the influence it remains today. Its most notable use that year could be argued to be N.W.A.’s massive hit “Straight Outta Compton,” but it was Mantronix, who with the instrumental “King of the Beats” could be credited with highlighting the break itself as the focal point (Potts).

The British electronic scene would continue this art form by sampling the Amen Break in more and more complex ways (Proctor). Indeed, as early samplers gained the ability to slice samples into smaller and smaller pieces, the Amen Break became more of a drum kit, allowing producers to take the sounds completely out of their originally rhythmic context and compose new rhythms. This slicing of drum breaks would become an important technique for producers of all genres going forward and fuel a ravenous hunger amongst electronic producers for new sample sources from which to pull drums.

While “Amen Brother” may be one of the founding breaks of the golden era, the explosion of popularity that drum breaks saw in the late eighties can more accurately be credited to, predictably, James Brown. The Funky Drummer Break comes from the 1970 single “Funky Drummer,” a single released by Brown in 1970. While Brown’s catalog already had many open drum breaks, this is certainly the one he is most known for and, in fact, may be the most sampled piece of drumming of all time. Like Cold Sweat, the break was included on the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* compilation, and, unlike Amen Brother, became a sensation almost immediately. The groove helped propel certain styles into the spotlight, through its use on rap hits such as “It’s a Demo” by Kool G Rap, “Rebel Without a Pause” and “Bring the Noise” by Public Enemy, and “F**ck Tha Police” by N.W.A. (Esa, Kool G Rap & DJ Polo's 'It's a Demo' sample”; M1989, “N.W.A's 'Fuck Tha Police' sample”). By the end of the 80s the sound of the Funky Drummer loop was ubiquitous, even being used by rock and pop artists such as Fine Young Cannibals and Kylie Minogue (Esa, Fine Young Cannibals’s 'I’m Not The Man I Used To Be' sample; rappy).

The titular Funky Drummer, Clyde Stubblefield, was a master of precision, feel, and technique, with a laid back but heavy sound, as evidenced in his aforementioned “Cold Sweat” break. The Funky Drummer pattern is similar in some ways to that of Amen Brother, but with a much tighter and more open sound, thanks to the choice to keep time on the hi-hat instead of the ride cymbal, as well as a slower tempo at 96, which allowed more precise chopping with less bleed (see fig. 2).

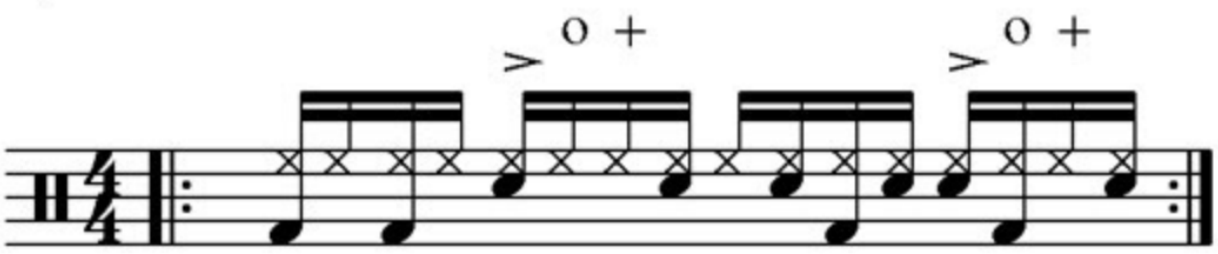

Fig. 2 Notation for “Funky Drummer” (“James Brown - Funky Drummer.”)

As in “Amen Brother," the solo doesn’t deviate from the beat, and this is actually referenced by James Brown himself on the recording: “You don’t have to do no soloin’ brother, just keep what you got” (Brown). He then instructs the band to drop out on his count, and gives Clyde Stubblefiled eight full bars to himself. He repeats this at the end of the recording, which fades out on another drum break. The fact that Brown helps verbally define how a drum break differs from a solo is significant, especially considering that it’s a part of an actual recording. He even christens the song during the recording, “The name of this tune is ‘The Funky Drummer,’” further drawing attention to the break in a way that no doubt increased its cultural significance when sampling became common in the 1980s.

Like Amen Brother, Funky Drummer started in hip-hop circles and comparatively made a much larger initial splash: Funky Drummer was on just about every sample-based hip-hop album for the latter half of the eighties whereas Amen Brother grew a bit more slowly. Both Amen Brother and Funky Drummer started to fall from popularity in the early 90s era of hip-hop as DJs continued to find new breaks from records that were more and more obscure. Evolving hip-hop trends also shed some of the “funky” aesthetics of the eighties and early nineties as the “hardcore” style grew in popularity, relying on dark jazz samples and simpler, grittier sounding breaks, or even programmed samples for an even sparser sound (@recordingarts). However, at the same time, Funky Drummer became adopted along with the Amen Break as part of the sonic blueprint for drum-and-bass, eventually leading DJs and producers to look for other drum breaks with similar patterns or sonic qualities.

Another one of the most important compositions of the early breakbeat era would be Allen Toussaint’s “Get Out of My Life Woman," released in 1966. The break features a slower, heavier sound than others. Its lack of syncopation lends to its emphasis on the first and third beat, rather than a busier, perhaps “funkier” pattern with more ghost notes. The kick pattern does, however, feature a sixteenth pickup note, which became a staple of a modern drumming

vocabulary. First released by Lee Dorsey in 1965, this R&B song became something of a standard amongst blues, soul and rock circles, and was recorded by Iron Butterfly, The New Apocalypse, Grassela Oliphant, Jimmy Hendrix, and others (“Various – Get Out Of My Life Woman!”). Because the iconic drum intro was retained in the structure in a great many of its cover versions, this song’s influence in hip-hop was multiplied by the number of cover recordings including this break that exist. While the overall tempo, pattern and feel remained the same, slight differences exist naturally in performance, as well as differences in drum sets, recording gear, and room. Countless uses of this break include Biz Markie’s “Just a Friend” and Beck’s “Where It’s At,” both sampled from the Lee Dorsey Version, and as many as five songs by Cypress Hill which each utilized a different cover version, such as drums from the Iron Butterfly cover, used on “Boom Biddy Bye Bye,” or George Semper’s version, used for “Insane in the Membrane” (madvillian2009, “Cypress Hill's 'Boom Biddy Bye Bye'”; stationary unit, “Cypress Hill's 'Insane in the Brain' ”), two of Cypress Hill’s biggest hits. Many of these covers, or at least the drums, made it onto various breakbeat albums, including an unofficial compilation of recordings put out by From the Basement Records (“Various – Get Out Of My Life Woman!”). Intended for DJ and production use, this record includes covers of “Get Out of My Life Woman” by Wilmer and the Dukes, The Mad Lads, and George Semper, all of which have been sampled before (garx, “Hideki Naganuma's 'Back 2 Back' ”; madvillian2009, “Smif-N-Wessun's 'Wrektime' sample ”; stationary unit, “Cypress Hill's 'Insane in the Brain' ”).

Birth of an Artform

DJ KOOL HERC

The art form of drum break manipulation as a new form of musical expression began with the birth of hip-hop, which can be traced back to one DJ, known as Clive Campbell AKA DJ Kool Herc (Goldman). DJ Kool Herc, born in Kingston, Jamaica, was an immigrant who grew up in New York City’s rich musical tapestry, which included soul, funk, rock, as well as the reggae

and dancehall traditions of his birthplace (Goldman). These influences manifested in block parties in his west Bronx neighborhood, combining the aesthetics of these genres with a focus on the drum breaks, especially those of funk and soul records, which had a particular effect on the crowd (Goldman). While sampling technology did not exist the way it would ten years later, it was possible to “loop” drum breaks by taking two copies of a record and playing them back to back indefinitely. While it wasn’t much more than a DJing technique at the time, something that Herc called the “Merry-Go-Round,” this hypnotic effect of repeated breaks would become the foundation for looping that would be explored in the next few decades. It was a 1973 South Bronx Party in which Herc first shared this new way of playing records, alongside hype men who would “toast” on the mic in the style of Jamaican dancehall performers - which laid the blueprint for the art of rapping (Jones; Goldman). Herc said of the experience:

> I was listening to American music in Jamaica and my favorite artist was James Brown. That's who inspired me. A lot of the records I played were by James Brown… So what I did here was go right to the ‘yoke’. I cut off all anticipation and played the beats. I'd find out where the break in the record was at and prolong it and people would love it. (D

MARLY MARL

One of the most important DJ-producers of the 1980s, Marley Marl was a foundational figure in the careers of many hip-hop legends, including but not limited to Big Daddy Kane, Craig G, MC Shann, LL Cool J, and Biz Markie. It is Marley Marl’s pioneering of sampling as a new technique that changed the way music was made entirely. The sample was none other than a James Brown snare drum, which was never intended to be used in the song in the first place (Muhammad). As Marley Marl relates:

> One day I was in the studio, and I was working on a Captain Rock record. And what happened, I was actually trying to get a riff off of a record. I made a mistake and got the snare in there before the sound came. I was truncating the vocal part but the snare was

> playing with the beat — we was truncating while the beat was playing. Thank God the beat was playing, because it probably wouldn't have happened if the beat wasn't playing. (Muhammad)

The song in question, “Cosmic Blast” by Captain Rock, didn’t end up having as strong an impact as Marley Marl’s own experience making the record, but it was clear that he saw the possibilities for the future of music and looked at his record collection now as a producer’s toolkit, and not just for DJ use:

> So I was playing it and the snare sounded better than the snare that I had from the drum machine when I was popping it…I was like, "Hold up!" This will enable me to take any kick and a snare from any record that people love and make my own beat…That means that I can go to my library at home — I've got so many records! I can take the kicks, the snares from everything and make my own patterns! (Muhammad)

YES

According to Roots drummer and hip-hop historian Questlove (stylized as ?uestlove), the first use of a breakbeat in an actual recording dates back to 1983, not in an early hip-hop song, but in the context of a progressive rock anthem, “Owner of a Lonely Heart” (Rhodes and Westwood 177). Progressive rock band Yes, having teamed up with producer Trevor Horn, reinvented their sound for a new decade, using an open drum break from Funk, Inc.’s cover of Kool and the Gang’s hit “Kool is Back” (Horn). The song featured a few different effects achieved with a Fairlight CMI - an early piece of sampling hardware - and the breakbeat in question, along with a horn stab from the same source, was sampled by drummer Alan White (Horn). Both the original version and the Funk, Inc. cover contain drum breaks, and both breaks went on to become classics in their own right in sampling culture. In the context of Yes, the band used the break sample as mostly a fill/special effect, with live studio drumming making up the actual backbone of the track.

This early use of two drum sources would become a focus of production technique later on - the contrasting of a sampled drum source with that of a live drummer. This would become a popular technique when the sampling trend reached the alternative rock scene in the 1990s - with a drum break intro sometimes setting up a contrasting drum sound for when the actual drums come in. Alternative rock and pop artists such as Beck, Sublime, Luscious Jackson, Eels, and Smash Mouth would use drum loops to add texture and enhance the mix, sometimes even replacing live drums altogether (Master Po; Simone; 49454285; justyna.m.szczech; neolithicman). Even mid-90s boy band Hanson, produced by The Dust Brothers, featured the iconic Melvin Bliss' "Synthetic Substitution" drum break (a rare funk holy grail) in the intro to their pop sensation "MmmBop" (no★durians). At the same time, new fusion genres such as trip-hop, acid jazz and nu-metal would allow for further hybridization of live and sample-based music, paving the way for successful crossover acts such as Gorillaz, a virtual band that also made use of sampled and live drums in a hybrid context. However, despite Yes' early rock exploration of drum break usage, for the most part, it was mostly DJs and producers, not bands, that were using drum breaks in the 1980s, with hybrid sample-band coexistence becoming popular the following decade.

THE BIRTH OF DJ RECORDS

Super Disco Brakes 1979

During the dawn of hip-hop records, underground record companies saw quickly how the perception of the record as a commodity was being changed. At the time, DJs were searching for individual records that contained drum breaks and would try to hide the source by removing or destroying the label and even hiring security to protect the crates during sets (Quan). In 1979, Paul Winley was running a record label that released music from The Harlem Underground Band and early hip-hop from his daughters Paulette and Tanya (Quan). That year Paul released the first DJ-oriented "breaks record" with *Super Disco Brakes* [sic] (Quan).

Fusion Beats Vol 2 1980

In the same year of 1979, record collector and dealer Lenny Roberts met engineer and fellow break enthusiast Luis “Break Beat Lou” Flores and began releasing bootleg break singles as well as compilations that were created by pausing a cassette recorder between switching breaks, fusing the samples seamlessly and resulting in the title “Fusion Beats” (Quan). Put out on Roberts’ private label Bozo Meko, *Fusion Beats* (and presumably its second volume) were based on tapes given to Roberts by Afrika Bambaataa, one of the founding fathers of hip-hop in the early eighties (Quan; “Flash And The Furious 5”).

For a time, *Super Disco Brakes* was an outlier in the hip-hop record industry, as it was more common to find rap songs with beats performed by studio bands, rather than any attempt to recreate the Herc-influenced break sound that was still being pioneered by the likes of Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash (Ettelson; Lewis). In 1983, “Sucker MC’s” by Run-DMC would popularize the drum machine, furthering the sonic palette of backing beats for rappers, but use of breaks was still fairly limited in the studio (Ettelson). At the time, Roberts and Flores had followed up their *Fusion Beats* output with a series of nine bootlegs called the *Octopus Breaks* series, which failed to gain popularity, though the odd call would come since “snippets” of breaks were sometimes still used by producers (Quan; “Octopus Breaks (2)”). However, after forming Street Beat Records in 1985, Roberts found the demand had increased substantially once Marley Marl ushered in the era of sampling. A huge market for breaks was wide open, and after acquiring the mechanical licenses, Street Beat rebooted its *Octopus Breaks* aries as *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* (Quan; “Octopus Breaks (2)”).

Ultimate Breaks and Beats released twenty-five volumes between 1986 and 1991, which were distributed worldwide (Ettelson). The popularity of the series codified the format of a breaks record, and countless low budget mixes, compilations, and bootlegs would be released during this golden era of breaks production. Some were DJ mixes, and some were simple

compilations such as the aforementioned “Get out of My Life Woman!,” which boasted eight different breaks from eight versions of the song: Lee Dorsey’s original and seven covers. The culture was so suddenly ubiquitous with break records that there would even be backlash from the spirit of secrecy surrounding the practice of crate digging, including rapper KRS-One who brags that “You can’t find beats like this every day on a breakbeat album” (Quan). The drive for new, original sounds for producers to loop created an idea for a new kind of record and a new kind of marketability - the idea was akin to the modern sample pack - but the source was a live drummer, not a record collection, and what they might put onto vinyl for the DJs to spin or sample would be the start of a new direction for sample-based music.

ORIGINAL BREAK SOURCES

As sampling, and by extension crate digging, was still a new and exciting form, much of sample-based music making was focused on either looking for “new” breaks and samples that had yet to be discovered (a major focus of hip-hop culture for the next decade, and still practiced to this day) or at the very least, using “canonized” breaks that were being used by everybody - hence the term “Ultimate” breaks and beats. It wouldn’t be until the early 90s when the idea of “original" samples started to take shape. In the early 1990s a few historic legal disputes over samples took place that influenced this trend. In 1991, two members of the rock band The Turtles sued De La Soul for 2.5 million dollars over a 12-second sample of their song “You Showed Me.” Plaintiff Mark Volamn asserted that “sampling is just a longer term for theft” (Fewtrell). The matter was settled out of court, but the same year, another high-profile lawsuit was brought against Biz Markie by Gilbert O’Sullivan. The court found Markie guilty of infringing copyright and also likened sampling to theft, setting a legal precedent that had a profound impact on the record industry that lingers today (Wang). In 1991 This has often been cited as causing the sample-based sound of hip-hop to change completely, resulting in new sub-genres

of the sound that feature fewer samples, more obscure samples, and new techniques in the manipulation of sample sources in order to avoid further litigation (@recordingarts).

Also during this time, West-Coast rap, AKA “G-Funk,” was taking over the airwaves. G-funk marked a departure in making rap records as it moved more towards synthesizer-based beats that featured fewer samples. As described by Adam Krims it is "a style of generally West Coast rap whose musical tracks tend to deploy live instrumentation, heavy on bass and keyboards, with minimal (sometimes no) sampling and often highly conventional harmonic progressions and harmonies” (74). However, during the time when samples still dominated much of hip-hop and sampling vinyl still was common practice, there existed some forward-thinking producers who realized there was money to be made in trying to produce royalty-free or at least hassle-free licensing of samples that were newly recorded with the *intent* of being sampled, rather than being repurposed.

WILD STYLE

The first of these records was released in 1990, however its recording dates back to 1983. The movie *Wild Style* was one of the first movies to feature hip-hop culture as a core element. Centered around a NYC-based graffiti artist, the film features appearances and performances from Grandmaster Flash, Fab 5 Freddy, and others. The music similarly focused on the emerging DJ culture of the time, but because of licensing fees, it was necessary to replace popular breakbeat standards with original beats in order to avoid expensive licensing fees (Patrin, “Wild Style Breakbeats”). So a live studio band was assembled by Fab 5 Freddy, and the result was pressed onto 100 copies for actual use in the film. From this, the instrumentals used were bootlegged many times, the earliest release being 1990, where it was put out as *The Wild Style Breakbeat Album* by DJ Black Steel (Patrin, “Wild Style Breakbeats”).

What followed in the next few years was a new renaissance of “original breaks” records that made some splash, though they remained a relatively small facet of sampling culture. At the time breaks were most popular, rare breaks that had yet to be sampled were being searched for all over the world by hundreds if not thousands of record collectors. While the *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* series ended at this time, the reality was that the surface of what was out there had been barely scratched, especially when it came to international samples from places like Brazil or Japan, which would eventually see themed break compilations put out decades later. So as rare sample sources continued to be a primary source of inspiration, most “original break records” would fall by the wayside.

Vargas and Bess

One glaring exception to this was the work of two New Yorkers who put out two drum records that would go on to be sampled hundreds of times, at least in terms of uses that were legally documented (Goins). Ralph Vargas, drummer, and Carlos Bess, drummer and producer, created a series that attracted the attention of the local NY hip-hop scene enough to sell out all copies (Goins). It began with Bess, who, learning to be an engineer with his mentor T-Kae in Harlem, spent time playing drums himself and finding mic setups that worked (Tripro). Later, he got a job at Firehouse studio, eventually meeting Wu-Tang Clan, for whom he would later work as an engineer. As Bess cut his teeth, he met with like-minded drummer Ralph Vrgas who had learned of FIrehouse Studio being a rapper’s choice through album liner notes. In 1993, The first volume of *The Funky Drummer* was released, boasting 18 different drum tracks, some from Vargas, some from Bess (“Ralph Vargas & Carlos Bess – Funky Drummer Vol. 1”). A sensation at local stores, only 2500 copies were made, and they sold out quickly , which was followed by an even bigger success when Volume 2 sold all 3000 copies (Goins). What propelled The Funky Drummer series, as it was called, was primarily the involvement of Wu-Tang Clan. They eventually hired Bess in the mid 90s, who had landed a job at Firehouse Studies, as their

drummer-engineer outright (Tripro). The Funky Drummer series went for four volumes, but Bess and Vargas were only a team on the first two, which were released on small hip-hop label JBR Records ("JBR Records"). After Vargas left the series Bess kept the series going, bringing in DJ Choco to curate more rare drum samples to release alongside his own original drum recordings ("Carlos Bess & DJ Choco (2) – Funky Drummer Vol. III"), before calling it quits as his time was being devoted more and more to studio mixing and engineering (Tripro).

TUFF CITY

Tuff City Records, a New-York-based label, had released two break-oriented DJ mixes by NY legend DJ Mark the 45 King, entitled *Breakmania Vol. 1* and *2*. The early 90s saw them follow up with a new format: an album of horn samples recorded expressly for sampling by funk giants Maceo Parker and Fred Wesley. This was also released alongside recordings of high-profile rhythm section players Wilbur Bascomb and Bernard Purdie, featuring original drum breaks and bass riffs. Soon after, a young drummer named Camille Gainer would become a highlighted talent on the label, releasing three drum LPs. Gainer began with 1993's *Real Funky Drums* as The Funky Drummer, before releasing two volumes with Joey Cavaseno AKA G-Clef on saxophone: *G-Clef Meets Funky Drummer Camille - Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, both released in 1994. At this time, Tuff City had almost completely switched over from being a rap/hip-hop label to being a sample provider, with their "...Riffs For DJ's" series covering several instruments from bass to horns to keyboards and featuring legendary greats such as Maceo Parker, Wilbur Bascomb, and Eddie Bo ("Tuff City"). These "Riff" albums would go on to be sampled by influential producers, for example Madlib's use of Dexter Wansel's Rhodes piano riffs in his 2008 track "Yo Yo Affair Pt. 1 & 2 ft Frezna" (The Realness). However, the series never became a household name that boasted more than a handful of documented samples, even when the majority of musicians brought to Tuff City were known veterans who were already part of the sample lexicon.

This establishment of samples as a new market experienced a bit of a rocky relationship with hip-hop artists over the decades. In addition to the *Riffs* and *Funky Drummer* records, the label spent the early 90s acquiring the rights to many classic funk and soul tracks that were already being sampled heavily at the time - including Eddie Bo's 1969 classic "Hook and Sling," the sampling of which caused Tuff to file a lawsuit against Kanye West over his 2010 use of the song (Hogan). In 2012, Tuf America (a subsidiary of the Tuff City Label) similarly sued the Beastie Boys but lost, due to not holding exclusive rights to the recording that was sampled (Gardner). However monumental these cases may be today, the danger of Tuff's license lawsuits was recognized as early as 1996: "According to the late scholar William Eric Perkins in his 1996 book *Droppin' Scienc*e, Fuchs sued the [LL Cool J and EPMD] over their separate uses of a Tuff City drum track from the Honeydrippers' 1973 record 'Impeach the President'" (Hogan). Wrote Perkins at the time, 'If Fuchs wins this suit, recording and producing rap as we now know it would become financially impossible, given the prohibitive costs of clearing rights to use samples'" (qtd. in Hogan). It's hard to say if Tuff City's attitude towards sampling hampered the success of their *Riff* series, but despite the impressive output of both drum and other instrument recordings they never reached the level of Bess and Vargas.

UBIQUITY RECORDS

As Tuff City was changing the state of hip-hop with their acquisition of classic sample sources, another label was out trying to bring those sources back into the studio similar to the *Riffs* series. However, San Francisco-based Ubiquity focused solely on legendary drummers, starting in 1990 by bringing in Bernard Purdie, a hugely prolific studio drummer whose work covered hundreds of jazz, funk, soul, and rock records, many of which were already being sampled heavily. The Ubiquity series, titled *Master Drummers*, consisted of 4 albums: two volumes from Purdie and then one each from Mike Clark (session drummer whose credits include Herbie Hancock and Betty Davis) and Babatunde Lea (famous for his contribution to the

1975 classic *African Rhythms* by Oneness of JuJu) (“Mike Clark (2).”; ParisDJs). Ubiquity’s *Master Drummers* series was leaner than Tuff City’s *Riffs* series, having a catalog of only four albums, with far less variety of sound (“Master Drummers”; “Tuff City”). Additionally, each record had the words “Contact Ubiquity Records, Inc. for sample clearance” emblazoned on the back cover, which may have had a chilling effect on curious DJs, deterring them from buying Ubiquity and instead pushing them to find old samples even more obscure.

The hypocrisy was also somewhat obvious when Ubiquity started putting out break compilations such as the *Drum Crazy* series, which, starting in 1995, compiled pre-looped, uncredited samples from unlicensed drum breaks from all manner of old recordings (“Drum Crazy”). Years later, they followed in the footsteps of Tuff City and again put out their own “original breaks" series, called Ape Breaks - the brainchild of drummer-producer Shawn Lee, first released independently on CD as the *Planet of the Breaks* (Morrison). Lee made it clear up-front that as long as it was used transformatively, any sample could be used without any clearance necessary (“Shawn Lee – Ape Breaks Vol 1 (Master Release)”). Running for five volumes, the series was released in 2002 and 2003 (“Shawn Lee”), the start of a new era when use of drum breaks was seen as a “90’s throwback” (Truss et al.).

TURN OF THE DECADE

As the 90s wore on and the hip-hop industry grew, the crate digging, sampling, and DJ culture that formed the foundation of hip-hop became less of a focus, and while breaks were still being used, there would be fewer big labels hyping up the latest compilation or studio release. In 1996, drummer Cherron Moore, who had drummed on Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic* (“Dr. Dre – The Chronic”) released a breakbeat LP featuring live drums on one side and programmed beats on the other ("Cheron Moore – Give The Drummer Some (The First Episode)"). The album was named after a certain famous Jams Brown quote; *Give the Drummer Some (The First Episode)* was unfortunately a bit of a misnomer as it was never followed by a second release. A year

later, French DJ and producer Kif Kif put out a record, featuring the French drummer Noël Grosson, called *Kif Kif Beats* in the U.S. on his own Private Kif Kif Productions label (“Kif Kif – Kifkif Beats Vol. 1 - 10 Rhythm Loops.”). The album came and went with little fanfare, with its second volume adding fellow French drummers Claude Sarragossa and André “DD” Canet, releasing a year later on the French label Chroniques De Mars (“Kif Kif - Kif - Kif Beats Vol. 2.”). It was at this time that the original “funky drummer” Clyde Stubblefield, who had still never seen a cent for his contribution to hip-hop, released his own *The Original Funky Drummer Break Beat Album*, released in 1998 on vinyl and CD through the label Music of Life (York; "Clyde Stubblefield – The Original Funky Drummer Breakbeat Album").

Several drummers would still fill the gap at the turn of the century. One drummer, Stix Bones, released an LP, also in 1998, featuring a more minimal style of drumming that reflected the more stripped-down aesthetic the genre was moving towards (“Stix Bones”). Bones was originally from Brooklyn, and he received a bachelor’s degree in jazz studies from Purchase College. Bones independently released the solo smooth jazz album *Groove Like This* in 2006, and he now releases music with the group Soulfege (“The Power of Music - Interview With Stix Bones.”). Having drummed on tracks by DJ Maseo of De La Soul, Lyricist Lounge, Dres of Black Sheep, and Rahzel of The Roots (“Jazz, Funk, Soul, Hip Hop Drummer Stix Bones Interview”), he released a vinyl LP in 1998, *Bones Beats Vol 1*, on Bomb Hip-Hop Records (“Stix Bones”). Stix has since released digital sample packs that can be purchased on the website Splice. In 2020, he released the neo-soul album *Breaks from the Soul* and followed up with a *Vol 2* in 2022 (“Stix Bones”).

While some breakbeat drummers were entering this new format from the hip-hop side, finding a platform for their talent on independent hip-hop labels, someone from an established modern funk ensemble would go on to produce a series of break albums known as the *Illy B Eats* series (IllyB). Illy B, a moniker for drummer Billy Martin of jazz-funk group Mediski, Martin and Wood, put out three volumes of drum breaks, ranging from hard-hitting funk grooves to

reggae and dub. Each volume was released on vinyl and CD, and the first, *Illy B Eats Volume 1: Groove, Bang And Jive Around,* was released in 2001 and was followed by a remix album the next year ("IllyB – Illy B Eats Volume 1: Groove, Bang And Jive Around."). 2002's *Drop The Needle* was released as a double CD and featured underground DJs and producers such as DJ Spooky remixing, sampling and repurposing Illy B's drums for a collaboration that was released under Illy B's name, with the second disc being essentially a reissue of *Illy B Eats* ("IllyB – Illy B Eats 2."). A second volume of remixes, *Antidote Illy B Remixes Volume 2,* came out in 2003 before the next volume of Illy B drums came out in 2004 (IllyB). The second volume Illy B Eats followed the remix idea further, containing instructions for usage printed on the album itself: "*Illy B Eats* is a series that invites DJs, instrumentalists and producers to collaborate using these break-beats as a basis for compositions or musical ideas to be submitted for inclusion on upcoming remix and *Turntable series* projects on Amulet" (Illy B). What followed was an address and instructions encouraging artists to submit ideas (preferably on CD) and to "Check the Amulet website periodically for updates on this contest. There is no official deadline at the time of this release" (Illy B). While this attempt at marketing using early viral internet strategies seemed like a possible solution for sample-hungry artists who could not afford expensive clearances for older records, the formula did not result in much use out of the *Illy B Eats* series, with no known usage being listed on Whosampled (usage from the remix series itself isn't yet cataloged). It was a clever idea for self-promotion that intended to showcase emerging talent and generate enthusiasm for the series, but only one more volume was released in 2005 before the series ended with an abridged compilation box set in 2006 (IllyB). Another idea that didn't pan out was the decision to include bonus drum tracks on the CD versions, encouraging their sale over the vinyl albums, which signified a decline in interest in vinyl during the early 2000s ("IllyB – Illy B Eats 2."; "Illy B – Illy B Eats Volume 3."). This formula of incentivising CD sales was mirrored in the *Apes Breaks* Series which also included CD-exclusive bonus breaks ("Shawn Lee – Ape Breaks Vol 1 (CD)"; "Shawn Lee – Ape Breaks Vol 2 (CD)"; "Shawn Lee –

Ape Breaks Vol 3 (CD)"; "Shawn Lee – Ape Breaks Vol 4 (CD)"; "Shawn Lee – Ape Breaks Vol 5 (CD)").

The late 2000s showed a bit of a gap in the output of studio-made breakbeat LPs, but it saw two breakbeat projects started by 1990s indie rock drummers. The first was a two-album series by the drummer from the band Eels, Jonathan "Butch" Norton. Both volumes of *Butcher Beats* were released in 2006 on Jew Jitsu records ("Jew Jitsu Records"). The year 2007 saw three percussionists from post-rock outfit Tortoise release *Bumps* on Stones Throw Records (Patrin, "Bumps"). Whilst the exact nature of the project isn't defined officially on the cover sleeve, the Stones Throw release page for *Bumps* includes an excerpt of an enlightening quote from a *Pitchfork* interview: "the possibility of Bumps becoming the go-to sample source for a new generation of hip hop heads is mighty intriguing. The three-piece suit could become the new gold chain" (Stones Throw). The *Pitchfork* review itself is a bit lukewarm, as it judges from a casual listening standpoint, but it does commend the idea:

> [I]t makes a certain kind of sense, depending on how much it'd cost to farm these out to producers. Samples aren't exactly like fossil fuels-- they're not finite, for one thing-- but they do share the quality of being a lot more expensive than they used to be, and there's been a decade-plus groundswell of visionaries who've spent a lot of time developing inexpensive alternatives. (Patrin, "Bumps")

Bumps never saw a sequel, and Stones Throw, while being a staple of independent hip-hop, didn't foster much of a demand for more breakbeat albums, if their output is anything to go by.

The evolution of hip-hop production in the early 21st century moved further and further from breaks in the 2010s, and the tradition of crate digging became practiced much more heavily online than in record stores. Over the decade following its debut, YouTube became crowded with rare groove playlists, as vinyl rips became commonplace, and previously unobtainable sample sources were suddenly available for anyone with internet access. Even the

idea of drum break compilations could be considered quaint compared to playlists of hundreds of rare songs containing open drums. In addition to the proliferation of rare vinyl rips, more legitimate sources of samples were overtaking the “crate digging” approach to sampling entirely. In the world of traditional drum sampling, a digital market was formed by producer Travis Brady: hiphopdrumsamples.com AKA The Drum Broker (Rindner). This website works with many artists and has a prolific output of digital drum packs including breaks, one shots and more. While a few physical releases have been made available here, the majority of what The Drum Broker has to offer is digital files that still capture the sound fans of older hip-hop look for. Says Brady:

> I've always been a fan of dope drums. As a beatmaker and producer, it’s kinda hard to ignore some of the amazing talent out there when it comes to drum programming and selection. The Drum Sample Broker website started as a fusion of my USB Flash Drive business with the distribution of Illmind's Blap Kit. The pet project has turned into a full fledged mission to be the #1 source for dope drum samples for producers and beatmakers. (qtd. in Praverb)

When asked about the demographic for this website, Brady says:

> I like to tell people we appeal to Boom Bap & Hip Hop producers and beat makers, however, the sounds span cross genres [sic] and can be used in any type of production including Electronica, Musical Scores, etc. I try my hardest NOT to appeal to musical trends, i.e. dub step, trap muzik, etc. (qtd. in Praverb)

While the decade saw the emergence of genres that used samples but relied less on sounding “old” such as trap and to a lesser extent “lo-fi,” producers and drummers were still trying to provide new breaks. Many of the more modern, less break-focused hip-hop drums come from sample packs developed by producers and released for other producers to make tracks with. These sample packs will often contain loops of various electronic effects, including synth leads, pads, bass lines, chord sequences, as well as electronic drum sounds. Many will

also contain more traditional instruments such as pianos, organs, or even electric pianos but will still have a more modern synthetic quality to them that fits most modern radio styles.

Trends do change, however, and in the latter part of the decade many of these have trended towards sounds and styles that once defined the crate-digging era of hip-hop: soul and jazz grooves, real vintage gear such as Rhodes or Hammond keyboards, and live drum breaks. While much of this new content is strictly digital, some underground drummers still sought to keep the vinyl tradition going, and some even released cassettes. This new wave was in part spearheaded by older producers whose work dated back to the end of the golden era, including a rapper-producer who left the hip-hop recording industry to become a funk drummer and release drum break records instead. Jay Mumford, AKA J-Zone, released a handful of rap records in the late 1990s, 2000s and early 2010s before his first breakbeat album, *Lunch Breaks,* released in 2014 on Redefinition Records, before releasing its follow-up, *Backyard Breaks*, on his own label Old Maid Entertainment a year later . In 2016 he formed the funk band The Du-Rites, the same year as releasing his final rap album, *Fish-N-Grits*, and a 7-inch double album of drums called *Guerilla Breaks*, released on Old Maid in 2018 . The following year the label put out *Break Bonanza*, another double-seven-inch, and in 2021, a twelve-inch LP entitled *Concussion Percussion*, was released (“J-Zone”).

Redefinition Records, owned and operated by Damu The Fudgemunk, featured other break albums alongside J-Zone’s output, including rare break collections curated by frequent collaborator K-Def (“Redefenition Records.”). A long time archivist and collector of breaks, Damu himself contributed an originally recorded library *Brakes [sic] With Mistakes*, featuring himself at the kit for a full album’s worth of drumming (“Earl Davis - Brakes With Mistakes”). Session musician and LA-based producer Pat Van Dyke (known for his musical contributions to *VICE* magazine) and in 2016 released the first volume of *PVD Breaks*, a series which he has followed with eight more volumes, albeit in digital form only after 2017’s *Vol 2* (“Pat Van Dyke - Bandcamp”). Most of his focus is on his output as a composer, but he is a believer in the

resurgence of vinyl culture: “I’ve always been a fan of tangible items…something that you can hold in your hands, read the liner notes, and see who played what” (Van Dyke). When asked about his recording process, Van Dyke relies on a combination of analog and digital recording gear, specifically, a Tascam 338 ¼ in tape machine, and popular digital DAW Ableton Live (Jameson).

As the resurgence of breaks grew, so did an interest in vinyl in general (Resnikoff). As early as 2015 an observation of vinyl sales creeping back up could be made (Resnikoff). And as the digital sample market increased, the number of vinyl releases did as well, including *Bobo Breaks*, by Bryan Arnold of Will Sessions (“Bryan Arnold - Will Session Presents : Bobo Breaks”); the *Glass Breaks* series by Will Glass, with two volumes released in 2012 and 2013 (“Will Glass”); and *The Breaks Collective*, a break LP from MSXII Sound Design, who mostly deal in the digital sample market (“MSXII Sound Design – The Breaks Collectiv.”). Some other releases of note are the Serato-?uestlove collaboration *Sufro Breaks* in 2017 (“?uestlove – Sufro Breaks”), the KicDrum *Flexi-Disk Drum Break Series*, featuring a different drummer on each of three volumes, curated by producer Dustin Venuto AKA Drumat!c (“Kicdrum Products”), and the releases from KingUnderground label, which has put out two break records from two drummers, Simon Plays and *In The Pocket* by Jonny Drop (“Simon Allen (6) - Simon Plays (A Drum Break Record)”; “Jonny Drop - In The Pocket”). Other artists of the decade include Te’Amir Sweeney, Jake Najor, and Plutonic Lab (“Te'amir – Tiger Breaks”; “Jake Najor – D$rty M$ney Breaks”; “Plutonic Lab – Lunar Breaks”).

Otter Breaks

When I set out to make my own breaks record, I set some artistic goals for myself, the first being wanting it to sound like it was recorded during the 60s or 70s. Knowing I wanted to record to tape was going to be tricky, but I had a few possible plans to source a machine. In the end, I bought a TEAC A-6010, which gave me that analog grit I was looking for. I also wanted to

make sure that the sounds did not become too redundant. One issue with some break albums I have explored is that they differ only in pattern, and other factors like room, microphones, sticks, and drum kits are not fully utilized. I knew I had limited resources but focused heavily on trying to create deceptively simple grooves that would change patterns up in subtle ways - and then, if I could, really get the technology to vary the texture through microphone choice/placement and in the final mix. These are all things I considered in 2019, but my entry into the field of drum break producing began slowly, starting with a brief session at the Bothwell Arts Center in Livermore on a loaned tape machine, an Akai. A friend, Mitch Meyer, and I played drums in a rather large room, facing the corner stage that had a heavy curtain at a 45-degree angle. We used a combination of 57s, some vintage Realistic and/or Radioshack dynamics, and a kick mic: the Tascam PE-250. The results, while decent, did not have the type of sound I was looking for yet. I wasn't sure what was missing, but seeing as this was just a few weeks into a semester of leave, and unbeknownst to me, just before the pandemic, I thought I would be able to get some experience to figure it out.

When Covid hit, my production ground to a halt, but I managed to slowly get through the rest of my remaining classes over the next few years and return to in-person learning in Spring 2022. During this time an uncertainty about sourcing a reliable tape machine arose, and finding one in decent enough shape that I could pick up locally ended up happening through a Sweetwater listing, but when my TEAC A-6010 was brought to campus in summer 2022, the machine failed to record. After researching a Vallejo-based repair service through the tapehads.net website, a 5-month delay followed before the bad relay was replaced. I ordered a freshly made tape reel on Amazon.

In February I finally brought the repaired TEAC to CSUMB, and the first thing MPA studio technician Drew Lassen did was take some stand-in digital audio and run it through the machine just to test its basic record function. Playing the tape back we found out that the left channel was having problems, we considered recording mono, or simply just taking from the right channel.

However, most of my influences in terms of drum breaks are in mono, so I decided to go ahead and not worry about stereo. Thankfully in the end enough of the stereo field was intact. Co-producer and drummer Bryan “Brewski” Brewster was sick at the time that the TEAC was first fully functional. So not much drumming was recorded, but most of the effort was just getting the whole thing hooked up properly and getting something recorded to start with.

Later, having gotten over a few weeks of illness myself, I planned a three-day stay March 21-23 and managed to fill most of my reel, with Drew, Bryan, and me drumming without a metronome. In terms of performance, I ran into my limitations pretty quickly, but I honed a few different unique grooves and came up with some various percussion patterns and accents - shaker or tambourine instead of hi-hat, vibraslap on one beat, and on some of Bryan’s performances, adding accents with various percussion including conga.

On the hi-hat we used an Akai “dictaphone” mic, a cheap microphone used for voice memos via portable cassette recorder. This mic was old enough to use a quarter-inch jack so we had to use a DI box. When the track was soloed on Pro Tools, we were able to listen to this mic and hear how extremely thin the frequency response was. There was some texture in there, but not a lot of crunch to add to the hi-hat. I also pointed it at the hi-hat at 45 degrees, so in the future I pointed it straight down directly at the top cymbal to get a brighter sound. We also used the same Tascam kick drum mic I used in Livermore, which provided a very rich and punchy low end.

The final selection ended up being a total of 42 breaks, not including alternate mixes. 26 of these were my own performances, and 16 were of Bryan. There was probably over an hour of drumming total, but much of the material was repetitive so the best selections were chosen. I decided to source some of these breaks from the tape itself (one session was re-ripped on separate occasions) and not fader mixes of the session files. We tried to have options while still keeping things simple - two overheads, a room mic, close mics on kick snare and hat, and even a 57 used as a mono kit mic for one session, just to see how things compared. I didn’t get to

fully appreciate these options until weeks after the sessions when doing the mixes with a clear head. The tape rips varied in quality from session to session, with one having an unfortunate buzz that to some would be intolerable. Another session had bleed from backing tracks that was audible, making it difficult to find usable portions. Other problems included buzzing and ticking caused by phones and unconventional choices such as using a Talkboy as a room mic. Some problematic issues did lend to a raw and “dirty” quality that did add to some of the selected breaks, such as the apt-named “Dirt Chronicles,” which at about seven full minutes has bits of polish showing through the grime. From a cassette made back in 2019, four breaks were salvaged from a recording session of local drummer and CSUMB alum Aaron Hipschmann, with one of those four performed by myself. The idea at the time was to do mixes of digital recordings and lo-fi cassette tapes, but a hard drive crash in 2020 meant all that was left was what I could rip from the tape.

In the end it ended up being the rawness and not post-processing that actually added variety. Because of issues in the tape machine, some of the recordings had strange artifacts that didn’t render things completely useless, like the strange panning phenomenon that features in the break “Goes Down Sideways (Acid Reflux C).” Some of the tape recordings came out exactly as expected, and as much was taken as possible without getting too redundant. Some of the breaks were from digital recordings that I ran through the machine and its vintage preamp and then into Pro Tools. Mixes were made in Audacity and started as fader mixes, and it would usually be the choices involving overheads or the room mic that would decide the textural difference in two breaks from the same session. As I mixed I tried to keep the raw quality of some but change things up as much as possible. Minimal EQ was applied for most, though some breaks needed a boost to low end. Use of soft and hard limits helped keep levels under control, and Audacity’s cubic curve distortion was used, mostly on snare tracks, to add a bit of “bite.” The only reverb came from the room mic.

In the end, I was pretty happy with the result. I found that at least with the selections I made for release, there were endless possibilities, and I spent an hour just slicing my favorite loops out of about a dozen different breaks. Bryan and I aren't drummers by trade, and there were plenty of mistakes in the playing, hiccups in tempo or missing a beat, but that really adds to the charm of the whole thing. However, depending on the context of future albums, I'd want to get some more polished drumming styles to showcase. The TEAC was great to work with, and I got the satisfaction of finally hearing the sound I wanted to record since learning about Portishead's recording technique back in 2008, exactly fifteen years ago. The exploration of analog drum recording spurs me to continue practicing drumming and drum recording, but also to make beats, which I haven't felt stimulated to do much since losing a hard drive in 2020. The value of drum breaks still doesn't feel fully explored to me, both personally and out in the music world, but with an increase in releases and usage over the last decade, I think that the possibilities are just beginning. It will be interesting to see how the idea of sampling changes with new challenges to the idea of originality, be it artificial intelligence, tighter regulation due to said AI or unfortunate copyright court cases, or maybe the loosening or reformation of intellectual property law, with services like Tracklib or even future legislation that could open up the world of old recordings in a way that hasn't been seen since 1991. What remains clear is that the demand for gritty, old-sounding drum recordings is still here, and if need be, drummers and those who record them will have a service to provide. Otherwise, it's back to the crates to dig even deeper.

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