

## Artist Profile ...



by Billy Jeansonne  
Cover photo taken at "Signature  
Sound Studios", Palmer, MA

**D**ave Mattacks is one of the busiest drummers around and has been for over 30 years. A regular attendee at vintage drum shows and other drum functions across the country, Dave has a collection of about seventy-five vintage and custom snare drums based in the UK and the United States, which allows him to always have a steady stream of snare drums to match up with his many different kits which he uses live as well as in the studio.

He has performed and recorded with a very wide range of world reknown artists and bands, and he seems to fit right in with any musical situation. His playing is strong, defined, tasteful, and very supportive.

Born in England in 1948, Dave has been coming to the United States for the past 30 years with various English groups. After recording and subsequently touring with Mary-Chapin Carpenter in '97, he finally moved to the U.S. and settled in Marblehead, Massachusetts just over a year and a half ago.

This interview took place one day before Dave left for a brief tour of England.

**B.J.** *Dave, please tell me about your beginnings as a drummer.*

**D.M.** I started playing with bongos and a pair of knitting needles and progressed to a snare drum, bass drum, and hi-hat. I started playing drums in my first band when I was about 12 or 13 years old with school chums. I had met some friends at school who had a guitar and bass, and of course whoever had the instruments were in the band. The group was influenced by "The Shadows", a kind of UK version of The Ventures. This was around the time of the emergence of The Beatles.

**B.J.** *Did you take formal drum lessons?*

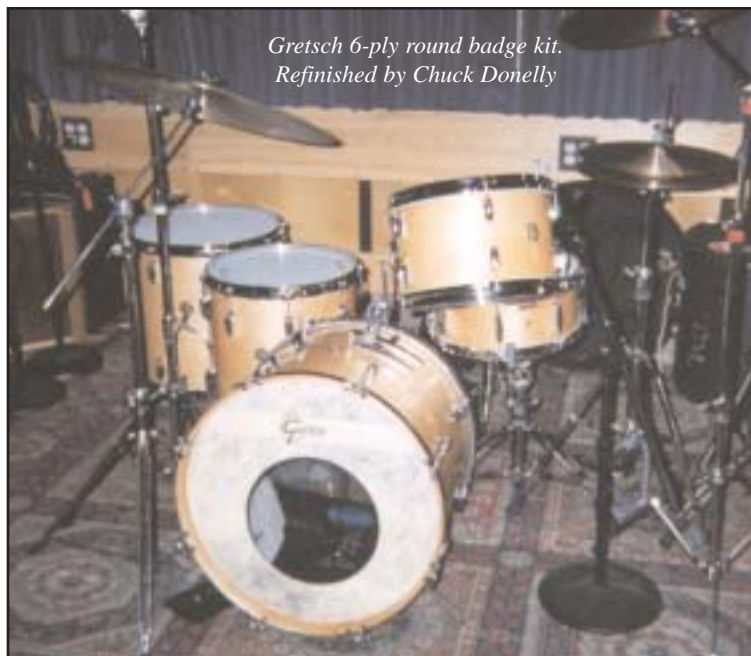
**D.M.** I did, but the lessons didn't start until I was about 15 or 16. At that time I was working in "the" drumshop in London called Drum City. It was right in the heart of the west end of London. This was where all the jazz players and session players went. This was mid sixties, I'd say. Everybody came into Drum City. I was a junior assistant and I was taught how to tuck calf heads and repair drums. I got to meet all my heroes, Keith Moon, Mitch Mitchell, Ginger Baker, and Kenny Clare. I got a big part of my drum and music education from working in that shop. The manager of the store, Johnnie Richardson, who is still a drummer and friend to this day, taught me so much about the basics of drums, of drumming, and of music. Johnnie was a big influence on the practicality of drumming. I talked to him about the musical side of things right through to the practical setting up of the drums and that was the start of my musical education. At this time, I also started taking drum



lessons with a London-based dance band drummer, Johnny Johnson.

**B.J.** *What was your first drum kit?*

**D.M.** Oh God, the first drum was the worst drum I've ever had. It was a Gigster snare drum. It made a Kent drum sound like a Craviotto snare. As soon as I saved some money, I graduated to a Premier snare drum and a Premier bass drum. I can remember getting a Ludwig 400. This was my first real pro drum. One thing that I've noticed over the years coming backwards and forwards to the States and talking to people who are into music and drums, is the "grass is greener" thing with regards to equipment. We all thought that the American stuff sounded so much better and so many Americans seemed to have thought that the English drums sounded better. We all wanted the Gretsch, Ludwig, and Slingerland drums. The first English drum that I thought sounded any good was Hayman. They copied the style of the Camco lugs and had an American style shell with glue rings. Then once Ringo hit the scene everybody wanted Ludwigs.



*Gretsch 6-ply round badge kit.  
Refinished by Chuck Donnelly*

**B.J.** *I saw a photo of you playing with Fairport Convention (Circa '70). You were playing a Ludwig kit. How did you like that kit?*

**D.M.** I'm really keen on the 50's WFL's and the transition badge kits. I've had many WFL kits and still have a WFL kit in 24", 13", and 16" sizes. These drums are just wonderful. However, there is this myth that just because a drum is old it will sound good. Vintage drums are like vintage guitars, just because they are old doesn't guarantee that they will sound good. I've never been a fan of the 60's Ludwigs with the white interiors. I had a transition badge kit when I was with Fairport Convention and added a blue/olive badge 18" floor tom. I could not get it to match up with the toms on the trans badge kit. It sounded hollow compared to the warmth and bottom end that the WFL kit had.

**B.J.** *What is your favorite drum set that you have or have had?*

**D.M.** As far as modern kits go, I love the sound of Yamaha drums and their aesthetics are very good. They are consistent, very musical, and hold up very well. I am also a big fan of the round badge Gretsch kits. I've kind of gone back to them. I juggle between round badge Gretsch sets and Yamaha sets. I've got quite a few of the round badge Gretsch sets, most

of them 3 or 4 ply with stickchopper hoops and I've got one Gretsch rocket lug kit with a 24" bass drum, 13" and 16" toms that I got through Gary Noonan in England. I used that kit on the last *Paul McCartney* album, "Run Devil Run". Ian Paice did most of the tracks on that album. *Steeleye Spans*'s "Bedlam Born" cd (released in 2000) featured the Gretsch rocket lug kit. In terms of a double headed kick drum and tom tom sound, the rocket lug kit is one of my favorites and has an unbelievable tone. I've also got round badge sets in 22", 13", 16" sizes, and a 20", 12", 14" with an extra 18" bass drum, all with 3 ply shells and stickchopper hoops that I mix and match. I tend to use the smaller sizes for jazz dates. I recently got a Gretsch round badge 6 ply kit (20", 16", 14", 12") that Chuck Donnelly in Connecticut refinished for me. He removed the plastic wrap and put a tung oil finish on the shells. He did an absolutely beautiful job of that kit. That is also a great sounding set of drums.



*Note the Camco drums*

**B.J.** *What are some of your favorite snare drums?*

**D.M.** Yamaha made me a 5" x 14" brass shell snare drum to my spec' that sounds really great. I've also got a round badge Gretsch metal shell snare drum from my early recording days that also sounds really good. It has a lightning throwoff. I've changed the die cast top hoop to a triple flanged hoop because it creates a gentler backbeat. I nearly always play a rimshot when I play my backbeat. Changing the hoop opened the drum a bit more. Another one of my favorite snares is the WFL snare drum that I got from Kenny Clare. It's a 5" x 14" brass 400 with a copper lacquer finish. I think the drum is shown in



the Ludwig catalogs from the late fifties or early sixties. Other favorites include Gary Noonan's (UK drum maker) snare drums; also I've a Craviotto, and a couple of Eames snare drums. I also have the two Zildjian Noble & Cooley snare drums. These drums are loud. I was talking to Gadd about this. He said that when the snare drum is proportionately louder than the rest of the kit, it makes you want to back off to play more musical...a very valid comment. But the Zildjian snares are good sounding drums. What I look for mostly in a snare drum is a distinct character. Touch and tuning has everything to do with the sound of a drum. I like to feel that this is part of my snare drum sound.

**B.J.** *What other snare drums are you wanting to add to your collection?*

**D.M.** I hesitate to use the word collection. All of the drums I own are for playing and have a different voice. They are not to sit in glass cases and be shown to my friends at weekends! But if I find a quality drum that I like that has a different tonal character, then I'll get it.

**B.J.** *Do you give drum lessons?*

**D.M.** Yes, I have a few students that are coming to me for lessons. I've only been living here for about a year and a half and I am gradually meeting more people from Boston and the New England area. I have a busy working schedule, but if I need a little flexibility, I will work that out with my students. But for the most part, it works out very well.

**B.J.** *Do you feel that a drummer should focus on being able to play everything from polka to heavy metal or lean more toward a particular playing style that he or she plays best?*

**D.M.** I think that even if you don't go into these different styles of music deeply, it's good to be aware of them, to have some knowledge of what the styles are about and what is required of you musically to be able to cover these things. It definitely makes you a more well rounded musician. Then I feel it's OK to lean towards a particular style. Find your own voice and try to specialize. A drummer may be able to impersonate a particular drummer playing a certain style, but it will always be an impersonation.

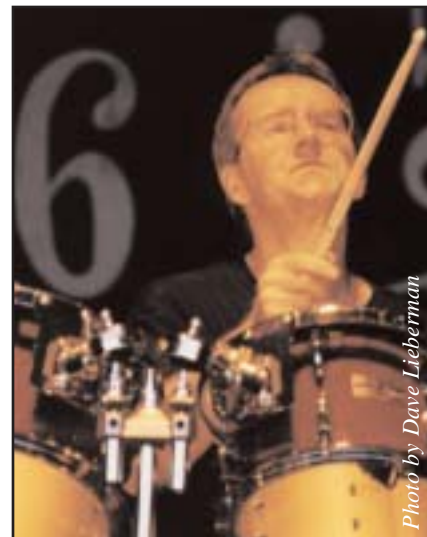


*Custom Snare Drum by Gary Noonan*

**B.J.** *Do you have a mental or psychological approach to playing either live or in the studio?*

**D.M.** No, I try to go in with a clean slate. The less preconceived ideas that I have, the better the music is going to be. I don't go in with a game plan because then you are starting to impose your own thing upon the music which is not a good thing. I let the music dictate what I play and how I play it. There aren't any rules. I play for the music, not to impress other drummers. I like to think of myself as a musician as opposed to a technician, although I do have a degree of technical ability.

Dave has an amazing discography from McCartney to Mary-Chapin Carpenter. He has a great attitude and a very professional approach to his work. He enjoys working with everyone that he has worked with. If he feels that he may not be right for a particular project, he will sometimes recommend a player he feels is more suited. Although there is an extensive array of musicians and bands that Dave has worked with, especially in England, he has not actively searched them out; the work and playing situations have come to him. This probably has a lot to do with his very sincere, professional attitude and the love of playing for the music. Dave gives his all to support the artist and the music that he is playing. He has a very positive approach with people and is a very nice guy. There is a very good chance that you will run across him at the next drum show or drum function. Take time to meet him. He is Super!



Dave Mattacks' website is [www.folkcorp.co.uk/dm/](http://www.folkcorp.co.uk/dm/). A comprehensive list of artists Dave has recorded/toured with can be found at the website [www.drummerworld.com](http://www.drummerworld.com).

Check it out!

## A Partial Discography of Dave Mattacks

Joan Armatrading  
*Joan Armatrading* (1976)  
*Shouting Stage* (1988)

Russ Ballard  
*Winning* (1976)

Mary-Chapin Carpenter  
*Place in the World* (1996)  
*Time \* Sex \* Love* (2001)

Roger Daltrey  
*McVicar* (1996)

The Dream Academy  
*Dream Academy* (1985)

George Harrison  
*Somewhere in England* (1981)  
*Gone Troppo* (1982)

Jethro Tull  
*Little Light Music* (1992)

Elton John  
*Ice on Fire* (1985)  
*Leather Jackets* (1986)

Paul McCartney  
*Tug of War* (1982)  
*Pipes of Peace* (1983)  
*Give My Regards to Broad Street*  
(1984)  
*Flowers in the Dirt* (1989)  
*Run Devil Run* (1999)

Justin Hayward  
*Moving Mountains* (1985)

XTC  
*Nonsuch* (1992)

Steeleye Span  
*Hark the Village Wait* (1970)  
*Horkstow Grange* (1999)  
*Bedlam Born* (2000)

Cat Stevens  
*Back to Earth* (1978)  
*On the Road to Find Out* (2001)

Brian Eno  
*Music for Films* (1978)

Camel  
*Single Factor* (1982)

Fairport Convention  
*Full House* (1970)  
*Meet on the Ledge: The Classic* (1999)