

NOW WE'RE TALKIN'



By Helen Marketti

A chat with Kofi Baker

As the son of the legendary drummer, Ginger Baker, Kofi has established himself as a very accomplished drummer in his own right.

Kofi was only six years old when he did his first live performance with his father on the UK television show "The Old Grey Whistle Test". At such a young age, he was already winning over audiences with his drumming talent.

Over the years, Kofi has played drum duets with his father. He has also toured with John Ethridge (Soft Machine), played shows in London with Steve Waller (Manfred Mann) and with Randy California (Spirit). He also toured Europe with Steve Marriott's Humble Pie.

Kofi runs a drum clinic in Orange, California. He also does shows with the "Cream Experience" which is continuing the legacy of the music his father helped to create.

"I have always been interested in playing the drums. A few of my favorite drummers are Terry Bozzio, Vinnie Colaiuta and Aynsley Dunbar. They all played for Frank Zappa. I am really into Frank Zappa's music," said Kofi. "I can play the keyboard, too. I usually play the keyboard when I am writing songs but I love the drums because it's a very physical instrument. Drums are more of a body instrument than a guitar, bass or keyboard. I would say those are instruments that are more cerebral. Playing the drums appeals to me because you are using all of your limbs."

Kofi has a book available, *The Forgotten Foot* (Hal Leonard Corporation) in which he describes in detail the role of the left foot when drumming. Exercises include techniques for double bass drumming and encourage independence. "If you play drums properly, you should use all of your limbs. I like the independence that you can achieve with each limb doing something different when you play the drums. It's like meditation," said Kofi. "You have to keep focused on you are doing. It's very challenging to use all four limbs at the same time to play. It's like splitting your brain four different ways. I think it's very good for your mind. I think that is what is great about playing any instrument. It provides an opportunity for your brain to form new synapses. Playing an instrument is like going to the gym for your brain."

"Each drummer has a certain way that they play. Some drummers play heel-toe, bounce or slide. I'm a slider, that's why I wear dress shoes because it's the best kind of shoe for the way I play," said Kofi. "When I am teaching drums to students at my drum clinics, I never tell them that they need to hold the drumstick or play the foot pedal a certain way. Everyone is different in how they approach technique. I travel all over the United States and Europe to hold drum clinics. I also use skype."

"It's always best to learn a bit of every music style whether it's blues, jazz, rock or metal. When you learn different styles of music, you pull a little bit from each one to establish your own playing style, which I call your voice. You can tell my dad's drumming because he has a certain style. You can tell Neil Peart's (Rush) drumming or Stewart Copeland's (The Police). I think it's very important for drummers to have their own voice," explains Kofi. "If you attend music institutes, some of those places expect you to play a certain way that has been specified in their curriculum. There isn't any wiggle room and drummers can end up sounding like everyone else. I feel that if you can teach someone to play an instrument, you can teach the exercises but they should be allowed to develop their own style. Music should be fun and about expressing yourself. I tell my students that if your only focus is to write a hit song and make lots of money



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then you are going to be a miserable person. It's never going to be enough for you. Life is not about being rich and famous. My dad is a perfect example that fame and fortune does not make you happy."

Kofi's band, "Cream Experience" continues the legacy of Cream songs, Blind Faith and some other signatures of the classic generation. "I bring in the best musicians to play. I never tell anyone what they must do. They can put their own spin on a song," said Kofi. "My dad has always told me that if he ever played the same way twice on a song that he would be pissed off. If you ever listen to an album by Cream then went to one of their shows, it was completely different. It was never the same show twice, which was one of the great things about Cream. They were all about improv. It was taking pop songs with a jazz idea. I love improvising and I love jazz. When you are playing familiar songs your own way, the audience picks up on that and likes the different style."

Sixties music continues to make an impact with fans both young and young at heart who were there for the first go around. "It's all about the music," said Kofi. "People wrote songs because they liked it. They played, they improvised and they were all great musicians. Now days, it's a cookie-cutter style. Many bands sound the same. My dad came from jazz and so did Charlie Watts (Rolling Stones). The biggest rock bands back then really knew their shit. The music had feeling. It had meaning. Those were the days when bands went into the studio together to record. Today most of us email tracks to someone so they can add their part, loop it and send it on to the next person. It's convenient when band members do not live near each other. Sure, it saves time but I don't think it's really about the music any more, it's more about making money."

"When I was younger, I was playing with Steve Marriott (Small Faces, Humble Pie) and I learned a lot from him. I always listened to everything he had to say. He was a great guy," remembers Kofi. "He was like a father to me. He was the best thing that ever happened to me when I was a kid. He took me under his wing and taught me a great deal about professionalism."

"Dad taught me a lot about drumming although it wasn't on a consistent basis. I would see him for a week here; a week there and then, I wouldn't see him again until six months or a year later. Then I would see him for a few months and not again for four years. That's how it was with my dad. I used to write down everything he said, take it all in and expand upon it with my own variation."

Kofi continues, "I didn't grow up with my dad being in my life on a steady basis. Our family was homeless when I was 14 because he didn't make the house payments. I grew up on the streets of London for a while and then lived with peace loving hippies. I encourage you to watch the documentary about my dad (*Beware of Mr. Baker*) because it will answer more questions about my family. My dad isn't a bad person but anything outside of his immediate world doesn't register. He is very self absorbed with what he is doing. We were on the phone recently and he asked me how I was doing which totally blew me away because he usually never asks. He is starting to come around. We are working on building a relationship and it's gradually unfolding."

Kofi has several irons in the fire as he continues to play with the "Cream Experience", hold drum clinics, write new music and play with other talented musicians. It's never the same day twice.

For more information: www.kofibaker.com

"Kofi Baker - Play's Cream" is on Facebook. The Forgotten Foot is available at Amazon.com

