

Reinert momentarily transcends the physical plane while playing with Cynic in November 2008, at the Élysée Montmartre, Paris, France





P R O G ' S S E C R E T W E A P O N

WHEN CYNIC BROKE UP IN 1993 AFTER ONLY ONE ALBUM, DRUMMER **SEAN REINERT** NEVER DREAMED THE RIPPLES IT CREATED WOULD BE FELT TWO DECADES LATER. BUT LIFE IN A BAND IS ONLY ONE OF MANY PATHS FOR THIS ADVENTUROUS MUSICIAN.

NOT

half an hour before our scheduled interview, Sean Reinert cancelled on us. We weren't mad but for this seasoned professional it seemed a bit, well, random.

Turns out the Cynic drummer spaced a doctor's visit for surgery on a torn meniscus in the left knee — never a good thing for a trigger-hating double-bass wizard in the run-up to what may be the most important record of his band's career. But his worries — and ours — were premature. Like a kid with a bowl of ice cream after a tonsillectomy, Reinert is geeking on the fact that the procedure was done right there in the doc's office, no stitches or anything "They just cut a piece of cartilage out, so that's where I was this morning," he says. "I should be back playing by early next week." ▶ ▶ ▶

BY ANDREW LENTZ | PHOTOGRAPH BY VIANNEY CHASSAT

SEAN REINERT

With a new album and a tour on the horizon, plus loads of other drum activities, the knee situation cuts too close for the drummer's comfort. But who could have foreseen a secondary injury? A torn Achilles heel from over a year ago forced him to wear a full ankle boot for several months. The boot was a clunky thing that rode a few inches higher than the other leg, and so the drummer's theory is that during that time he favored the other knee to compensate for the height difference, which caused the extra stress. "There was no fall or accident. All of a sudden I'm having knee pain. The x-ray was negative, but the MRI was positive for the tear."

In the high-stakes game of prog-metal drumming, you have to be a little bit more conscientious than the average rock basher. Fortunately, Reinert is taking it all in stride. "It's been a couple years of surgery here on my vital organs: knees and feet. [laughs] So that's definitely been interesting."

THE RELUCTANT METALLER

Sean Reinert has done a lot in his 42 years on earth. The Florida native was only 16 when he co-formed Cynic with guitarist Paul Masvidal in 1988. That's a tender age to forge one of most influential technical death-metal albums of the late 20th century: 1993 debut *Focus* brought jazz sensibilities and sophisticated arrangements into a genre known for the backbeat of hair metal or the blastbeats of the metal underground. Far from the scruffy effort of kids, *Focus* came off like the work of virtuosi. "I was listening to Allan Holdsworth and Chick Corea," he says. "I wanted to put fusion ideas into the metal stuff."

Reinert has been trying to dumb himself down ever since. Only problem is that forward-thinking metal fans won't let him. "It was a blessing for me when Cynic broke up," he says "I kind of wanted to be a new kind of drummer, a session guy, and kind of leave this death

REINERT'S CYNIC SETUP



DRUMS Tama Starclassic Birch-Bubinga (Mocha Stain)

- 1 20" x 18" Bass Drum
- 2 14" x 5.5" Starclassic Brass Snare Drum
- 3 8" x 5.5" Tom (Hyper-Drive)
- 4 10" x 6" Tom (Hyper-Drive)
- 5 12" x 7" Tom (Hyper-Drive)
- 6 14" x 11" Tom

CYMBALS Sabian

- A 13" HHX Legacy Hi-Hat
- B 20" Memphis Ride
- C 17" HHX Legacy Crash
- D 21" Vault Ride (prototype)
- E 14" HHX Legacy X-Hats
- F 18" Vault Artisan Ride

Sean Reinert also uses Tama Iron Cobra Powerglide double pedal and Tama Lever-Glide hi-hat, Regal Tip 5AX Wood Tip (naked) sticks, and Evans heads.

metal legacy behind. But wherever I went somebody would always be, 'Oh, my god you're Sean from Death and Cynic.' I'm like, 'Damn it, I'm trying to be the session guy. Not just known for metal.' I wanted to be Anton Fig or the guy drumming on *Saturday Night Live*, not the double bass death-metal monster. But then it was pretty awesome to have all these drummers still to this day talking about *Human* [by Death]. They're still freaking out over that record, so it's a great honor."

Along with Cynic, Death is the cornerstone of the tech-death pantheon. Lead by the late guitar shredder Chuck Schuldiner, Death was a fairly pedestrian metal band until the guitarist hooked up with Reinert, whose academic sensibilities forged it into the technical beast it would become with seminal release *Human*, the one and only release Reinert recorded with the band.

As these things usually turn out, Reinert didn't feel the love until it was almost too late. Cynic may be appreciated these days, but when the band was forging its cerebral tech-

death style in the early '90s, the metal community wasn't down with it. "People didn't understand when [*Focus*] first came out because it was all over the place," he says. "There were so many things mixed into it. So I think that left a bad taste in everyone's mouth. For me it wasn't a midlife crisis, it was a *pre*-life crises. I'm 26 and I'm already washed up."

Reinert's reputation as a chopsmeister would precede him, and the the musical options post-Death and Cynic only pulled him deeper into the world of instrumental



A day at the rehearsal studio with Cynic

Photography: COURTESY CYNIC

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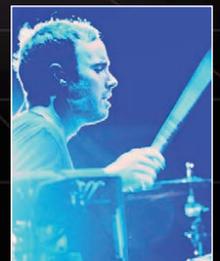
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SEAN REINERT

“WE DECIDED TO DO THIS HYBRID EP WITH MULTIPLE AMBIENT TRACKS IN BETWEEN BEFORE WE MADE A LARGER STATEMENT. BECAUSE WHEN WE GET INTO IT, WE REALLY GET INTO IT.”

prog. Gordion Knot, a project of Cynic bassist Paul Malone, features Reinert on drums on the self-titled debut album from 1999. For the second Gordion Knot release, 2003's *Emergent*, Reinert contributed V-Drums and percussion with the acoustic drums split between him and Bill Bruford. He also tracked drums on another Paul Malone project, the criminally underrated *Cortlandt* featuring some of Reinert's sickest fusion chops ever.

So if the music gods had predetermined that Reinert's drum talents were to be yoked to a band, it might as well be in a broadly accessible one, and *Æon Spoke* seemed to fit the bill in the mid '90s when shoe-gaze, grunge, pop, and other subgenres were getting blurred. “*Æon Spoke* couldn't have been further from Cynic,” he says. “It was like Radiohead/Travis heart-on-your-sleeve sad-ballad alt-rock. But still the people that were coming into shows were Cynic fans and jazz fans. Like ‘What?!’ [laughs] I guess you can't run from what you are.”

Fast forward to 2007, a friend of the band's with connections at a booking agency put out feelers about a Cynic reunion show. The interest from promoters abroad took the band by surprise, so Reinert, Masvidal, and a bassist-for-hire regrouped and went for it. Mind you Cynic was not writing new music, just doing a one-off summer festival tour. “We actually did one new tune, ‘Evolutionary Sleeper.’ And people just loved it.”

After Cynic got back from that tour the band couldn't believe the overwhelmingly positive response. They shopped around a three-song demo to see what was out there and got quite a few offers before signing with the small but super-selective French label Season Of Mist.

You might characterize *Focus*' proper follow-up, 2008's *Traced In Air*, as a sophomore effort that was 15 years late. That album was followed by 2012 EP *Carbon-Based Anatomy*, featuring various rhythm ideas from Reinert including some Indian tabla percussion that he programmed, a curious development that threw some fans for a loop. “We had some material that we were tossing around, but it all didn't make it onto [*Traced In Air*]. So we decided to do this hybrid EP with multiple ambient tracks in between before we made a larger statement,” he explains. “Because when we get into it, we *really* get into it.”

ANGLES OF REPOSE

Recorded in the Hollywood Hills at Perfect Sound, *Kindly Bent To Free Us* has all the power trio's hallmarks: guitar-

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-BRAD DAVIS (ADVENTURE DRUMS)



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ist Paul Masvidal's seven- and eight-string sinfoniettas and ethereal vocals; Sean Malone's doodling fretless bass and Chapman Stick providing the low-end (recorded separately in Florida); and, of course, Reinert's intricate parts delivered with an effortless grace that belies how physically demanding they are. From the time he and Masvidal sat down to write the music until completing the final mix last fall, *Kindly Bent To Free Us* took more than a year to complete, prolonged because Reinert ruptured his Achilles during that time. "As a drummer you are always done first so I was just champing at the bit," he says. "Literally, I was tracking this record a year ago. So aside from hearing all the details it was definitely nice to finally hear it as a whole piece from front to back."

In contrast to the digital feel that many of today's metal bands have, especially on the drums, *Kindly Bent To Free Us* was recorded on a vintage 32-channel SSL board with a sidecar that was actually a radio used in Cuba's government headquarters in the 1960s. "I s--t you not, it was Fidel Castro's Neve 16-channel board," he says. "All the little buttons were in Spanish, but they refurbished it, brought it over, resurfaced it. And drums and Neve are just a match made in heaven."

Perhaps it's counterintuitive, but Reinert's personal challenge was to downplay the technical razzle-dazzle. At this guy's level, that's a relative term though, and *Kindly Bent To Free Us* is robustly technical by any drum set player's standards. The staccato bass drum stabs, sudden tempo changes, and unpredictable accents on a tune such

A SELECTED SEAN REINERT DISCOGRAPHY



1991
Human
DEATH



1993
Focus
CYNIC



1996
Working Man: A Tribute To Rush
VARIOUS ARTISTS



1999
Gordian Knot
GORDIAN KNOT



2003
Emergent
GORDIAN KNOT



2005
Above the Buried Cry
ÆON SPOKE



2007
Formless
AGHORA



2007
Cortlandt
SEAN MALONE



2008
Traced In Air
CYNIC



2008
Prime Cuts
JAMES LABRIE



2009
Prime Cuts, Vol. 2
STEVE MORSE



2010
Re-Traced
CYNIC



2010
Avalanche Of Worms
EVAL LEVI/
EMIL WERSTLER



2011
Carbon-Based Anatomy
CYNIC



2014
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SEAN REINERT

as “The Lion’s Roar” are hardly any drummer’s idea of straight forward.

Not content to take Reinert at his word we went back and listened to “Textures” and “How Could I?” from 1993’s *Focus*. On these now-classic tracks the blitzkrieg of notes is a jarring contrast to Reinert’s current approach. Even next to something as recent as “Integral Birth” from 2008’s *Traced In Air*, where tom fills seemingly happen at every opportunity and the double-bass is slamming, it becomes clear that *Kindly Bent*’s drum pyrotechnics are more selective.

“I think the energy is there, but it’s a different kind of energy,” he says. “[The album]’s a lot of mid-tempo, and I

really held back in this recording. For me it was an interesting experience because I really thought about what I was doing. We’re timekeepers of course, but I didn’t want to step on anybody’s toes, and with slower tempos comes more opportunity to fit more notes in. So I try to resist filling all the spaces.”

The title track was the most demanding song to record. “It has the most separate motions,” he says. “There’s a double bass part that has a question-and-answer type of thing going on between hands and feet. But I think every track has its own set of challenges.” Asked if he has ever overplayed in the past, Reinert doesn’t hesitate. “Definitely,” he says. “When

I listen back, it’s like, ‘Wow! You really tried to fit all that in there.’ [laughs] But I think that’s just the nature of wanting to get better at the instrument, which means the gymnastics and the chops and all that stuff. On this new record there’s probably altogether only a few minutes of double bass, but I put it where I felt it was needed as a texture, as another dynamic level, versus a staple.”

Besides slower tempos and more dynamics, some tracks do away with drums altogether. The track “Endlessly Bountiful” only has a small drum part before it goes into a fully ambient outro. “That’s our little tribute to Pat Metheny,” he says.

For all his accolades in the music press, the modest Reinert feels privileged to be in the company of his bandmates, especially bassist Sean Malone. “He’s such monster,” he says. “He’s a doctor of music and he’s a theory professor. So he gets the form as well as the playing. It just opens things up a lot having the right bass player to complement the drums. I love the fact that you can hear the articulation of the bass on this record — I actually enjoy listening to it. I’m not going, ‘Oh, I can’t hear this [beat] or I can’t really hear that.’ I think everything is in the right spot.”

In the past, Reinert’s approach was weighted toward gonzo fills and faster double-bass parts. On *Kindly Bent To Free Us*, he triangulates fairly evenly between kick-ride-snare; tom fills; and cymbal work that falls somewhere in the large chasm between crash-riding and accenting. Although he is right-handed, he leads with his left foot on double-bass parts.

“I guess from all the years of left foot maintaining the hi-hat when I go into double bass, it feels comfortable for me to go into those downbeats with my left foot,” he says. “I guess that’s just the way it locked in. Sometimes if it’s a triplet thing and it’s at a slower tempo, then my right



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foot will be playing on the downbeats, but nine times out of ten my left foot leads.”

Seems like a harmless detail except that it was important enough for him to notate the footing — not considered essential — in the title track’s drum transcription included on a deluxe edition of *Kindly Bent To Free Us*. The left-foot quirk may or may not have something to do with the fact that Reinert’s main hi-hat pedal is placed inside the slave pedal as opposed to the customary outside placement. Again, a small thing, but unusual.

Reinert has used bass drum triggers exactly one time in his career. It was six weeks after Achilles surgery in 2011 and he had to play five songs on a Death tribute show. He left-footed most of the set but for parts requiring two feet he put the right-pedal beater close to the head so he could get a full kick tone with little pressure. “I did it that one time because it was a solution for me,” he says. “Some music calls for it — guys doing the super, super fast stuff. But they’re not something I ever needed. I’m from the old school. I hit the drum pretty hard.”

Fans of open tones will love Reinert’s toms, which sing so loud and clear you’ll think they were tuned for pitch. Tuning the top head looser than the bottom head — a couple turns just past getting the crinkle out of the skin — is part of the secret to that glorious ring. “And I mike both the top and the bottom of the toms, for sure,” he adds. “That’s really important, because that bottom note, there’s an overtone that just helps round everything out, and if you’re not getting that mike underneath you’re missing out on a lot. I think when people refer to my tom tone that’s what they’re talking about.”

SCHOOL’S OUT FOREVER

While he studied piano from ages seven to ten, Reinert begged his mom to let him play drums. She got him a snare, but he had to take lessons at the same time, as per the usual arrangement. Mrs. Reinert’s deal with her son was that if Sean’s teacher determined he was excelling in six months time she would get him a full kit. That soon changed to three months. “The teacher said, ‘Get him a drum set,’” he recalls. “It was one of those things where you didn’t have to tell me to practice, you had to tell me to stop.”

Reinert was lucky enough to know the difference between a bar and a measure and all the other terminology to keep the metal drumming world’s bad habits at bay. Even as early as high school he got reading,

ear training, and other music essentials that put him on track. After high school, he went to Miami-Dade Community College and took every music course they offered, including sound engineering, while touring on and off with Cynic. After the band broke up, he quickly exhausted the curriculum there and transferred to the University Of Miami, a top-ranked music school, where he dove deep into theory and orchestration after testing out of the prerequisites his peers were taking. “I was getting straight As, and quite honestly just a little bit bored,” he explains. “I was already used to juries and auditioning and all that stuff.” Feeling unchallenged, he moved to Los Angeles and

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SEAN REINERT

continued his studies at the UCLA extension program in film scoring. He's been in L.A. ever since.

Roughly 12 years of slogging it out at home writing and composing — whenever he wasn't playing in bands — enabled the drummer to get placement for whatever bumpers or jingles he came up with. Even then luck was a factor. "That's really what I spend most of my time doing now," he says. "[Production work] is absolutely the main goal further down the pike." Even after sharpening his writing chops, there is all the networking he had to do on top. "You can have all the skill in the world but if you don't have the connections it doesn't do you much good."

It's paying off for him lately with the History Channel mini series, *History Of Sex*, for which Reinert has composed some 30 cues, which are the 45-to-120-second pieces of music introducing a new scene or during a transition. In a show about the history of sex, Reinert's job was to make the music evoke specific time periods. For the 16th century it would be a baroque clavinet piece. For the 1920s, it's jazz. The '40s has a big-band vibe, the '60s was soul, '70s that cheesy porn music — you get the idea. "They were basically bastardized versions of these kinds of music."

Writing in Logic, Reinert used Native Instrument's

Battery or one of the many other common drum programs for the beats or simply used a DrumKAT or keyboards. "But if it was a rock tune or something that needs finesse like a swing tune or the '20s stuff I'll mike up a little 3-piece and record that."

TO GIVE AND TO GET

With the Cynic record done and the tour still to come, Reinert is pursuing other drum-related activities. He's getting ready to shoot a webinar over three days in Seattle for CreativeLive, a drum-specific tutorial on miking, how to use Toontrack Superior Drummer, editing and mixing, and so forth. Reinert is basically doing it as a favor to guitar shredder Eyal Levi, with whom Reinert collaborated on the insanely progged-out *Avalanche Of Worms* in 2011.

Reinert will be a human prop of sorts. "I'm actually going to be going over set-up, tuning, and just being the drummer there to interact with him as he goes through how he mikes a kit to get sounds, chooses different drums. If you're going to be in the studio, it behooves you to know your signal path, in-ear mix, and finding what's comfortable for you in that situation. It's more for engineers, but I definitely think drummers can get a lot out of it. It should be a lot of fun actually."

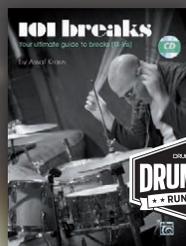
Now Cynic needs to find a touring bassist since Malone is strictly a studio cat, but it shouldn't be a problem pending Reinert's speedy recovery of his knee — knock on wood. Who would have thought in 2014 that he would be hitting his creative stride with a cult-metal favorite that dropped off the face of the earth 20 years ago? "Never say never," he laughs. "It took some of the bad taste away from before when we were shunned by the metal community. It sort of made me think, 'Hey maybe I didn't waste all those years.'" 



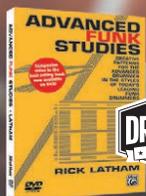
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AUDITORY ILLUSIONS

CYNIC IS NOT YOUR TYPICAL METAL band and Sean Reinert isn't your typical metal drummer. The bandmembers fuse several styles to create their unique sound — mainly fusion and metal. Surprisingly, in their hybrid style Reinert often uses ghost notes and double bass at once. He sometimes lightly dusts his snare drum or hi-hat with soft notes while throwing tom accents on top, creating grooves that closely resemble world music patterns. Reinert uses smaller toms than many metal drummers, which helps his melodic tom parts cut. Along with his textural approach the band often plays in odd times, or makes common time signatures sound odd.

“Gitanjali”

This track begins with a sixteenth-note double-bass pattern and cymbal crashes that fall on and off the beat to create an interesting groove that sounds like it is odd-meter but usually stays in 4/4. On this track he uses his crashes and China for accents.

“Moon Heart Sun Head”

This track is in 12/8, though the accents on 9 and 11 of the time signature, which end each bar, pull the feel towards 6/4. Reinert uses a couple of hi-hats (his auxiliary hi-hat is usually loose) on his kit and moves between them to create the constant and often-subtle hi-hat movement. Later, at the three-minute mark, there's a tempo change and the feel goes to a straight 4/4 power ballad groove that feels great, but then rips thirty-second note tom fills, just so you don't relax too much.

“The Lion's Roar”

This cool 12/8 track begins with syncopated offbeat cymbal crashes before settling into a half-time triplet feel. Reinert plays his hi-hat at varying volumes while playing with his pedal pressure, creating an interesting pulsation to the groove. He occasionally drops double bass drum triplets underneath.

“Gitanjali”

♩ = 98

Intro

“Moon Heart Sun Head”

Drum Entrance

“The Lion's Roar”

♩ = 142

Drum Entrance