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# PEDRO SEGUNDO MAKING MUSIC

BY BRENT KEEFE









Typically, when people speak of a musician who plays both drums and percussion, they are often considered as a drummer who dabbles in percussion or a percussionist who plays some drum kit. Lisbon-born Pedro Segundo, however, straddles both worlds with equal success, whether playing jazz drums in the house trio at London's Ronnie Scott's, Kansas Smitty's House Band or Dennis Rollins' Velocity Trio, Timpani with the Academy of St. Martins In The Fields Orchestra, a hybrid Cajon-based percussion set up with singer/songwriters Judith Owen and Hattie Webb or showcasing the breadth of his percussive knowledge in his solo show, 'Solo Segundo'.

In his 29 years, Pedro has gained more experience than many do in a lifetime, constantly seizing the opportunity to play and learn in any musical situation, while investing in a structured and disciplined practice regime to improve and maintain his percussive skills. His love of music is palpable, both on stage and off, and his humility belies his talent.

Pedro began hitting pots and pans at two years old, subsequently demolishing a number of toy drum kits, but his musical education began in Lisbon at age 7.

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PS: I began with organ lessons at the Valentim de Carvalho School in Lisbon, aged 7, but after a year, I said, "I'm sorry, this is not for me. I would like to play drums!" To which they said, "But you can't reach the pedals." I told them, "Yes I can! Let me show you." So I went straight to the drum room and played, "You see. I can do it!"

By that time, the drum teacher, Rui Serra E Moura, had appeared and he agreed to teach me, even though the school had an official minimum starting age of 12; I started lessons at 8 and finished when I was 12, and a year after starting, my godmother Elisa helped me gain entrance into the music conservatoire in Lisbon. It was really hard to get in as there were only six places and around 120 applicants, but I auditioned and got into the classical course. I was one of the youngest and I couldn't read music. My audition was hilarious. I had only one year's experience of playing drums from the Valentim de Carvalho and in the audition room there was a lone snare drum. They asked, "Do you want to

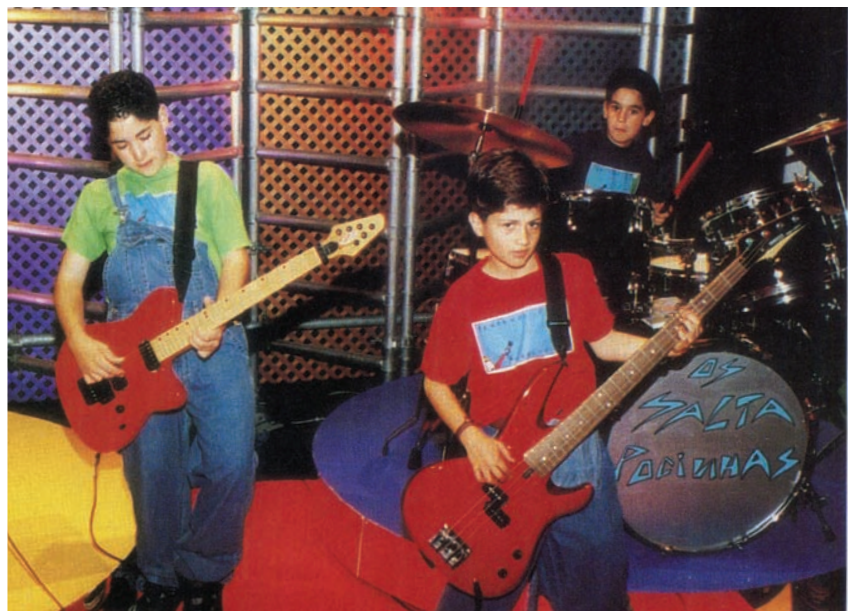
play something for us?" So I just started jamming on the snare! Then they spoke to my father and I realized I would be coming back. I only started reading a few years later. In the meantime, when I was 10, I was in the house band for *Pequenos e Terríveis*, a TV show in Lisbon; it was a kid's band and the show featured kids interviewing adult TV stars. It was great fun but we were miming and I remember that I was a little upset that we weren't actually playing live because I could already play somewhat by then. I also used to play every Sunday in my local church.

**BK: Presumably, prior to your audition for the Conservatoire, you had been taught by ear up to that point?**

PS: My first teacher at the Valentim de Carvalho taught me aurally; he showed me what he called the "stupid" rock beats and we started playing along to music. In particular, he played me Peter Gabriel's album *So* and I fell in love with Manu Katché's drumming and Peter Gabriel's voice.

**BK: If they had put music in front of you at your conservatoire audition, I assume you wouldn't have been able to read it.**

PS: No, not at all. But during my first year, they slowly tried to get me into it. Now, 20 years later, as a teacher myself, I don't think that it's really important to make a student read when they are eight years old. I think it's



## “It was totally through Afro-Cuban percussion that I came to understand Swing.”

far more important to encourage the student to fall in love with the instrument and make them want to play. The reading can come later; that's my perspective. I didn't start reading properly until I was 11 or 12. I was at the conservatoire for almost 10 years, until I was 18, but when I was 15, I started to read more because of the youth orchestra, Orquestra Sinfonica Juvenil. That's how I got my reading together. Also, I had a very good private teacher named Israel Cestinho; he really taught me more about harmony, melody, rhythm and all of the things that are essential to be the musician I am today.

**BK: When did you start playing percussion?**

PS: When I went to the conservatoire, I had no clue what percussion was! I was initially exposed to timpani, and later, marimba and vibraphone. I was also exposed to music outside the Conservatoire; I played congas in church since I was 10, while waiting for a vacancy on the drum chair in the church. I loved playing congas but had no teacher or technique. We didn't really have any drum kit teachers at the Conservatoire, so we were really self-taught in terms of drum kit, but my percussion teachers were Carlos Girao and Carlos Voss. If someone showed some natural aptitude on an instrument, they would take that role in the orchestra. I mostly played timpani and drum kit, while Marco Fernandes, played the tuned percussion. He was two or three years older than me and was amazing. He was one of my inspirations at the Conservatoire and he helped me improve my reading on tuned percussion [vibraphone, marimba and glockenspiel]. He is still in Portugal and doing very well both playing and teaching.

**BK: You must have practiced a lot at the Conservatoire.**

PS: A lot! You have to put the hours in and my normal day from age 15 to 18 would often involve playing from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m., followed by orchestra until 10 p.m.

**BK: At what age did you start gigging actively?**

PS: At 15, I joined the orchestra and the Reunion big band, which comprised older musicians who had normal jobs but were jazz lovers. We played every Tuesday at a local jazz club called Onda Jazz, and between the ages of 15 and 18, I gained a lot of experience playing modern big band charts like Oliver Nelson and Pat Metheny.

A pivotal moment, when I was 15, was attending a summer course at Taller De Musics—a jazz school in Barcelona—where I studied jazz drumming with Pablo Posa and Afro-Cuban percussion with Vicens Soler. That trip was the confirmation for me that I was definitely going to do this forever! There was no doubt because that same summer that I did the course, I also did my first youth orchestra tour and I was in heaven—I was playing Mozart *and* playing jazz. As soon as I returned in September 2003, I went every Tuesday and Wednesday to the jam session at the old basement of The Hot Club in Lisbon. That place was magical but was sadly destroyed by a fire six years ago. I was at school during

the day doing my academic studies, so I just aimed to do enough to pass in English, Maths and Portuguese, etc. I almost felt like I was doing that on the side because I really just wanted to play so much from that point on. I loved studying Afro-Cuban percussion and it was totally through Afro-Cuban percussion that I came to understand Swing. I was also jamming all around Barcelona during that month.

I also attended the Hot Club Jazz School, the major jazz school in Portugal; somebody recommended that I go to the 'Art Of Trio' class, with guitarist/educator Pedro Madeleno. He saw me play and suggested I apply to go there for combo lessons. I applied to have drum lessons there with Bruno Pedroso, a fine drummer and very dedicated teacher, and I spent a year and a half studying modern jazz drumming with him. We covered independence, soloing and a mixture of everything relating to small band setting. I was so busy with the Conservatoire, the youth orchestra and big band and also playing pop gigs in local bars, including a local bar called Speakeasy by the docks in Lisbon; I played there most weekends until around 4 a.m., playing the music of Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind and Fire and Marvin Gaye, and to be honest, I didn't really know who a lot of these people were. I was just keen to throw myself into different situations and play. Now, looking back, I probably sounded terrible on some of that stuff but the people—Yami Aloelela, amongst others, were very encouraging and I was making some money, which helped to buy instruments.

I would definitely say that my most productive years in Lisbon were between the ages of 15 and 18. I must also mention Mario Franco, who is the principal ballet dancer with the national ballet company of Portugal and also a fine double bass player. Mario took me under his wing after spotting me at the big band gig and invited me to join his trio when I was 16; we toured around Portugal for two years playing his music. He is a very fine composer and has recorded with saxophonist David Binney. So much happened in those two years, including winning a prize with the Hot Club School of Music as upcoming artist of the year; I think I won the award largely on the strength of my soloing, because I loved soloing. We also had a Brazilian ensemble, which played the music of various composers in the Brazilian idiom including Hermeto Pascoal and I began playing percussion professionally with the Gulbenkin Orchestra.

Around this time, I began to think about what I wanted to do next, and I decided to apply to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London as it had a great reputation. I wanted to enroll in the jazz course but it was full, so I applied for the classical course and gained a place there. That was in 2007, just as I turned 19. My eternal gratitude goes to Pedro Carneiro, a world-class percussionist and conductor of Orquestra de Camera Portuguesa, who wrote me a letter in order to support my application.



## "I don't think anything can replace being on the bandstand with other musicians-

**BK:** It sounds as if you packed a lifetime's experience into the previous 10 years.

**PS:** I don't think anything can replace being on the bandstand with other musicians—that's the best way to learn. And I must say that when I came to the Guildhall School, I felt, without wishing to sound arrogant, that I had much more mileage than my peers; not just in terms of playing, but also in how to organize a section or knowing how to function on a gig.

During my first year in London, I began searching for stuff to do outside of school and started going to Ronnie Scott's jams. The first time that I went to Ronnie Scott's was to see Avishai Cohen's Trio and it was thanks to Mark Guiliana, because I couldn't afford a ticket. I reached out to David Binney, who I had met through Mario Franco, and he messaged Mark and told him that I wanted to see him play, but that I couldn't afford it, so Mark then put me on the guest list. After that, I completely fell in love with Ronnie's; it felt like a second home to me. I would go to school from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. and then I would go and see the London Symphony Orchestra at 7.30, if I could. I would often try and sneak in during the second half, and then grab some food and head off to the late show at Ronnie's at 11 and play until 2 a.m., get back home at three or 4 a.m., sleep for a few hours and then do it all over again.

Being a foreign student, I really wanted to take advantage of every minute I had; my peers used to say, "You never come to the pub with us. What's wrong with you?" I told them, "I love you guys, but I have other priorities right now." I was also still trying to learn English at the time, as my English was terrible. I was trying to learn music while barely understanding English and many of my teachers had a strong English accent; especially my fantastic timpani teacher David Corkhill from the Philharmonia Orchestra. I didn't want to waste a minute of my life doing something that I thought wouldn't be relevant for my growth as a musician because being in London is expensive and my parents were helping me out in these tough moments, so I just completely worked

my ass off on being active in the scene. Show yourself! Be there! And try to improve as you go along; be nice and make contacts.

When I arrived in London in 2007, I toured Europe and the U.S. with Carmen Souza, but I had to leave the gig because it conflicted with my studies. Then, at the start of my second year at the Guildhall, I was invited to join Dennis Rollins' Velocity Trio, which was a new project. Jay Phelps recommended me, having seen me play at Ronnie's. Playing with Dennis was my first major UK gig in 2009. Then, during my fourth year, a situation arose where the house band in Ronnie Scott's needed a drummer, and as a result of being there so much, they invited me to play.

**BK:** When did you graduate from the Guildhall?

**PS:** I graduated in June 2011, receiving a distinction for my final recital, which was 45 minutes long. I played a combination of timpani pieces, marimba pieces, African percussion and solo pieces, and I also invited Dennis Rollins to play with me.

**BK:** Presumably, studying all of those different instruments, you had to structure your time very well?

**PS:** Yes and it was tough because, during my last year, I was playing at Ronnie's five to seven nights a week, and of course, I couldn't simply play the support and go home because artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Cleo Laine, John McLaughlin, Ron Carter, Christian McBride and Kurt Elling would be playing after us, so I had to stay and listen because I knew I could learn so much from them. I'm very grateful to the band members of the house band, James Pearson and Sam Burgess, for giving me a great time. I really got my trio playing together while playing with those guys.

**BK:** Would you say you are fearless or is it simply your love of playing that makes you dive into all of these musical situations?

**PS:** I think it's the second one.



**BK:** Did you ever worry about screwing things up or things not working out? You were obviously



**-that's the best way to learn."**

very experienced before you came to London, so I'm guessing that probably helped.

PS: I would say that helped a lot. In those three years before coming to London, I had some great mentoring and was also in a very stress-free environment, so I could just focus on my playing. Many people here struggle because there are so many distractions and having a decent sized living space in which you can practice costs a fortune. I'm very glad that I did that homework before coming to London. But, I'm a music lover more than a fearless guy; there is no such thing as being fearless. We all have our insecurities. All musicians have moments where they have doubts about their capabilities; that's a reality that you have to deal with. I think that the most important thing is to believe in your talent and believe why you are here, but also think about the others that will benefit from your talent. I like to think about me being in this world as a musician because I can contribute something to others; firstly to the band members and secondly to the audience. Something that stuck with me from an early age is that I'm not a drummer just for my own benefit; I'm a drummer because, with my drumming, I can help others create a sound or create something.

**BK: Did that thought come from within or is it something that had been passed on to you by somebody else?**

PS: I guess all of the experience that you have in life affects you somehow. I can't think of a specific person or moment, I just know that from a very early age I figured out that you are not alone in this and you are no one if you just think, "I play drums. I am self-sufficient." I don't see it that way. Of course, I do my own homework and I try to be as good as I can, with no comparison to others because we are all different; I hate it when people start comparing others musically, because we all have a different set of skills and we have different influences. I believe in my own sound and my own vision of how I should play my drums and I just want to contribute that to the people that I'm working with, and most importantly, on record or live, I play for the people that pay the ticket price to come and see me. We have to make sure that these people have an amazing time while we are playing.

**BK: You play jazz, rock and pop and in the classical/orchestral world. How do you switch between the**

seemingly more flexible orchestral time and the stricter time in popular music? Additionally, in classical music, you may often be following a conductor who may want you to move tempo, whereas in a pop/rock setting, the drummer sets the tempo that everybody else should be adhering to or following.

PS: How I switch between those two worlds comes down to understanding the gig and doing what's required for each gig. I remember Russ Kunkel saying something like, "Understand what's needed and deliver it." Russell is a legend and I totally agree with him, so I will steal his words if he will allow me.

Basically, when I'm in an orchestral gig, the first thing I have to realize is that it's not about me; it's not my voice there—you look at the page, understand what you have to play, do your homework if required, and just understand what the gig requires. Also, be on time and when you are performing, know how to breathe with the conductor; many drummers find that very hard. I was speaking to somebody last week and they asked me what I do when I play drums with a conductor because they found it really hard to follow a conductor. I think you need to find a common ground where you can connect; you have to build trust with a conductor, especially if you are playing timpani, as you are essentially like the second conductor. It depends on the gig, and of course, you would never tell the conductor that you are leading it but we know that, when playing timpani, we have an important role in terms of driving the band. That's my approach to classical playing. The most important thing is to know your place and to bring your musicality and all that you have in order to make the written music sound good.

When I play drums with Kansas Smitty's House Band, for instance, we have a set of songs but I'm not reading, so my focus is not on the page; it's on the band members and the audience. And I am relaxed, because there is no such thing as making a mistake; I know the songs, so I just play and enjoy it. I think that's a good comparison, and again, understand your place; your







to sound—so of course, you follow him. You don't just switch off.

**BK:** I didn't mean switch off, but when I look at some conductors, I can see how they are conducting, but there are others where the movements of their baton makes little or no sense to me.

**PS:** To be honest with you, it depends on the repertoire. If you are playing standard classical repertoire that everyone knows such as Mozart or Beethoven, then the conductor possibly doesn't have to lead too much and maybe just shapes the sound of the orchestra. For instance, if I played Mozart's 39th Symphony with Sir Neville, some readers may know that the timpani plays a very important role and leads the first four bars. The conductor gives you a reference of the upbeat of the tempo that he wants and then you play. In rehearsal, the conductor may ask for the semiquavers in those phrases to be closer together or more spaced out or some other variation. When working with good conductors, I would say it's a two-way street. But, there are some tough conductors who are very strict about things, while other conductors will actually wait for you and will go with you. Fortunately, I've not worked with too many of the former.

place in that situation is to have fun and make sure that everyone around you enjoys it. I'm not saying that you can't enjoy it when you are playing classical music but it's a different role. Also, you can bring your personality to a jazz gig.

I also treat sessions similarly to a classical gig; it's not about me. Understand what the track needs, follow the conductor and just do it. As a creative musician, it can be tempting to bring a lot of ideas, but you need to take yourself out of your creative mind and understand what the track needs. It's not your track; you are hired to do something to enhance the track and make it better. I really admire people like Ralph Salmins and Paul Clarvis. Paul is just number one worldwide in terms of understanding how to find corners in a track where he can put stuff together and elevate the track. That's what the session musician should do.

**BK:** In a pop or jazz setting, you are essentially laying down the time in conjunction with the bass player and you are predominantly in control, whereas you give that up in an orchestral situation. Is it simply just about learning to follow the conductor's baton or is it more of a two-way street? Do you follow them or do they follow you?

**PS:** I follow the conductor. Last April I toured Asia for almost a month with the late Sir Neville Marriner. It was his last tour before he died in October 2016, and he's a conductor who really knows how he wants the orchestra

**BK:** You mentioned the Dennis Rollins Velocity Trio, which features an unusual line-up of drums, organ and trombone; essentially an organ trio with trombone instead of guitar. How do you find playing with organ bass pedals, because it's a much different feel to playing with an acoustic bass player?

**PS:** It is! I remember my first gigs with an organ and I remember missing the drive of the string bass. There is definitely a learning curve when you first play with Hammond organ and I think I got my understanding by listening to Larry Young records with Elvin Jones, and more recent recordings with Larry Goldings and Bill Stewart, who I admire a lot. To solidly drive a Hammond organ trio, as I understand it, it's not about putting a lot of bass drum feathering in there but more about the ride cymbal and finding the weight on the ride cymbal. Of course, having a good organist makes all the difference and Ross Stanley is singular when it comes to Hammond organ playing.

At first, I found it hard and Dennis' music was not always swing-based; it was also groove-based, with the first album combining those two worlds. I really love that band and we toured all over the UK for the following six to eight years. It was really intense touring, and at that time, I didn't have my own kit—I was borrowing kits, and that gave me the chance to try different sounds to see what worked best. I finally decided that I preferred a

**"I hate it when people start comparing others musically ...**



...because we all have a different set of skills and we have different influences.”

small set up with an 18-inch bass drum—the 18 having a deep cutting edge sound, as you can hear on the records—and 12- and 14-inch toms.

**BK:** You said that, when playing swing with the organ trio, you tend to carry things from the ride cymbal on the top of the kit, but if you are playing groove stuff with bass pedals, you don't have the weight of bass at the bottom end to lock in with. How do you approach that?

**PS:** I'd have to listen back to the album again to hear what I played, but I just played what Dennis asked me to play. He had very clear parts for the first album, so I just tried to follow those as much as possible. There was a lot of Afro-Cuban stuff and I was trying not to be too busy even though there was a lot of space that I could have filled. I'm not a devoted chops guy, so I don't spend much time learning a lot of chops, and I like to play more melodically when soloing, often using simple melodies with a lot of space. I will often work in the opposite way to many people; I can often play busier on an ensemble section, but when soloing, I prefer to leave a lot of space. That has become my typical way of approaching solos and sometimes I'll even stop playing in a solo because silence nowadays is so underrated; we sometimes have to remember that silence is a beautiful noise and it's one of my most favorite sounds; a moment of silence can often grab people. I really love moments like that. One reason why I love jazz is because it allows you to say something in the moment. That's not something I would be able to do as a classical musician. I could not simply miss the tonic when playing “Beethoven's Fifth!” Maybe if Beethoven was still around, I could ask him what he thought of that! [Laughs]

**BK:** You have also been a member of Kansas Smitty's House Band for some time.

**PS:** Kansas Smitty's House Band is a seven-piece band, comprising bass, drums, piano, guitar and a front line of saxophone, clarinet and trumpet, sometimes also with a tuba and the group—inspired by the post-depression Kansas City sounds of the 1920s and '30s. That's our inspiration but we are not a pastiche and not purists; we write our own music based on that template and have just released our second record, *Live At Ronnie Scott's*. Also, we are very happy that we have a younger crowd, aged between 20 and 35, coming to our gigs, and they dance! We play some New Orleans funk, influenced by The Meters, but we are mainly a swing band. We have played most of the major London venues and we also have our own venue, called Kansas Smitty's.

**BK:** Is that where the name of the band came from?

**PS:** Actually, no. The bar, which is in Broadway Market, East London, came after the band was formed. We created the band and then decided

that we needed a house to be our own club. It's a vibrant, creative hub in the heart of East London, and it's run by us. Giacomo Smith, the band leader, and our manager Jack Abraham, deal with most of the running of the bar and we invest our time in rehearsing and creating new repertoire for the band; that's how we contribute to the business.

**BK:** Does the band play there every night?

**PS:** No actually, we don't play much in our own bar! Each of the seven members of the house band will bring different projects to the club, so I got the chance to bring Ross Stanley to play in a duo with me twice last year. It's a great place to try out new projects and it's also a great rehearsal space for us. In fact, I have just recorded the live album of our Hammond Organ Duo there. That will be released this year.

**BK:** When did you become involved with Kansas Smitty's?

**PS:** I was very involved in Ronnie's house band by 2012, and at that time, Giacomo Smith had a day job at a university in West London. Giacomo plays clarinet and sax and loves playing the music of Sidney Bechet and other clarinet masters, and Django Reinhardt. He started inviting me to his flat on Sundays when I wasn't working, and he would cook pizza and pasta—he's an American Italian from upstate New York—and we would jam. I really enjoyed playing with him and I was getting exposed to some different tunes, because at Ronnie's, I was playing





**Russ Kunkel:** “Pedro is a breath of fresh air on a desert of overplaying just because you have the chops.”



in a piano trio setting with repertoire including Ahmad Jamal, Oscar Peterson and so on. With Giacomo, we started getting this sound together and I was there pretty much at the beginning of Kansas Smitty's in the kitchen of his flat.

In 2013, he quit his job and we began to get a few slots at Ronnie Scott's and the band gradually began playing more and more. Then I realized that I really wanted to give more time to this project because they were *my* generation and *my* age group. At that time at Ronnie's, I was playing mostly with people who were 15 or 20 years older than me, so in Kansas Smitty's it was really nice to be able to play swing music with people of my own age. Also, we were playing gigs in all these quirky places and there was always a great reaction. That helped me to be less centred at Ronnie Scott's. We all know that Ronnie's is the Mecca of jazz in London, but there is also so much more outside Ronnie's and I was concerned I might reach a point where I didn't know anything else other than Ronnie's.

**BK:** Although you are still with Kansas Smitty's House Band, the gig with Judith Owen has been keeping you busy recently. Did Judith first see you at Ronnie's?

PS: No. In 2012, the cellist/curator Gabriella Swallow saw me playing with Lizzie Ball at the Classical Kicks night, which is a crossover classical night at the bar upstairs every Sunday at Ronnie's. Gabriella had been playing with Judith Owen for a number of years and when Judith was looking for a percussionist, Gabriella

recommended me. We first tried to do something together in 2012 but that didn't work out because Judith's father passed away. However, she called me back the following year and we did a summer concert at The Pheasantry in Chelsea, featuring a trio of Judith, Gabriella and myself, and of course, Judith's husband, [bassist/actor/comedian] Harry Shearer, guested on a few numbers. We did what Judith does best, which is arrangements of covers mixed in with her original songs and I loved it. That was the start of the relationship, and again, I was really happy to be doing something different because it was nothing like Dennis Rollins' Velocity Trio, Kansas Smitty's, Ronnie Scott's or the classical gigs I had been doing as a guest with the Academy of St Martin-in-The-Fields.

Then, in 2014, Judith invited me to play with her at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival with Lee Sklar and a month later she asked me to do the East/West Coast tour of America.

**BK:** You met Judith prior to *Ebb and Flow*, the album she recorded with Lee Sklar, Russ Kunkel and Waddy Wachtel?

PS: Yes. After we first played in the summer of 2013, she went back to L.A. and recorded with those guys, but I was unaware of that until the record came out. I had only played a few tracks, including “In The Summertime,” at an acoustic gig at Air Studios in London with Geoff Gascoyne on double bass and Gabriella on cello. When *Ebb and Flow* came out in 2014, we had to tour it; initially we were just a trio but later that year I played with Judith, Russ Kunkel, Lee Sklar and Waddy Wachtel when we played support on the Bryan Ferry tour.

**BK:** What were your thoughts prior to playing the Cheltenham gig, given that Lee has played with Billy Cobham, Jeff Porcaro, Vinnie Colaiuta and many of the world's great drummers? Were those thoughts in your mind at all?

PS: For most of my career up until this point I had been so busy playing and practicing that I hadn't had much time to research who has played with who or played on what. I had been really focused on trying to do what I could so, to be honest, I wasn't as aware of Lee's discography as I am now. Once I started working with Lee, I soon had the desire to learn more about him, as I did with Russel Kunkel; I knew his name but I really didn't know how much Russ had done.

When I first played with Lee, I just treated him like a seasoned musician and someone I could probably learn a lot from; I soon discovered that he is the nicest man in the world and a very sincere, genuine person. I was very pleased to bond well with Lee at that gig because I also had to play Russ Kunkel's parts, as Russ couldn't be there. For me to suddenly play not only the percussion setup, but also incorporate Russ's parts, was very new



for me and I had to figure some things out. First of all I thought, “Okay, it’s just a drum kit sound,” but no, there is so much more to what Russ Kunkel does. You have to get the right sounds and the right feel and I really needed to practice that, which I did. Then Judith said, “I really like the way that it sounds on the album, but can you try something different?” So I started putting together what we called the hybrid kit—on certain songs I would play a Cajon where there had been drums on the record and vice versa. We had just a couple of day’s rehearsal with Judith, Lee and Gabi at Bush Studios in West London and the rehearsals went well. Then Judith asked me to do another tour of America in a trio format with her and Lee.

**BK: What were the biggest challenges in incorporating Russ’s drum parts into your percussion setup? What things did you have to practice?**

PS: Some of it was about getting comfortable with the new setup I was using, because I would have to sit on the Cajon and have my percussion setup accessible while having a drum kit right in front of me with cymbals, hi-hats and everything, and to be able to switch from one to the other, as I was playing drum kit and percussion. For example, the song “Hey Mister” is a big fat song for Russ on the record and I had to decide whether to start on the Cajon and open up later or go straight to the kit. I had to work out a lot of choreography and make sure that I stuck to that choreography; I couldn’t just make it up as I went along because there were too many set parts that I needed to play. On “Train Out Of Hollywood,” at first I tried it on drums, playing Russ’s parts, but Judith asked me to try something different. She said she wanted my input, rather than simply replicating Russ’s parts, which was very kind of her. We tried many different ways and decided to not use drum kit at all on some gigs. The challenge for me then became to play *Ebb and Flow* from a Cajon and percussion perspective; there is nothing that can replace a bass drum sound and

skins—that’s a unique thing. Even though you may have a great sounding Cajon which is well miked, it’s still not a skin. It’s wood and the way you play with your hands can be critical to the sound. It was a challenge but I think I came up with nice parts and I’m very happy with how it came out.

Going back to your question of playing with Lee, I really love playing with him, and for me, in the early stages of my career, it’s very reassuring to be able to share the stage with someone like Lee, who has so much experience; it makes you reassess your quality as a musician and conclude, “Okay, I can actually stand next to these amazing, legendary musicians,” and it humbles me to be in that spot. It’s also great to be able to share not just the stage but also the backstage, especially with Russ Kunkel; I’ve learned so much from Russ. He’s the sweetest man on earth; very unassuming, very humble and one of those guys that I really aspire to be like.

**BK: What exactly have you learned from Russ and Lee?**

PS: On this latest European tour, I had the chance to see them host a workshop in Italy at a music school. It was great to hear them in another light because, when you are touring, you are their colleague, although you obviously admire and respect them and their careers. I was brought up in a culture of respecting your elders; I was sitting in a chair in the front row with my camera and I learnt so many great lessons in that hour and a half. There was no playing, just discussing examples of how to play in different situations and Russ, of course, mentioned the importance of understanding what’s needed and then delivering it. The best lesson I’ve learned from hanging with Russ is how to be professional; Russ is the ultimate professional. He understands his place and the importance of contributing to the overall vibe and how to make the artist feel good, because if there’s no artist, then there’s no gig. You are there for a reason; understand your reason. It’s not



**Lee Sklar:** “I have had the great pleasure of working with Pedro Segundo for the past couple of years with Judith Owen. He is a true gift to a bassist. I have known few percussionists that are as musical as Pedro. He is an endless well of creativity. We locked together from the very first note we played and I look forward to many more years of collaborating with him.”





about you, but you do have a contribution to make, so it's important to know your talent and understand your value. It's very important to not undervalue yourself. It's a fine line and these guys are incredibly good at that. That's why they are very successful; they understand that there is a business side and a music side and they find the line in the middle. Lee, of course, is also the ultimate professional and he also has this capacity of lighting the room. Whenever he walks in, it just makes you feel good and I never felt any kind of superior attitude with him. It never felt like, "I'm Lee Sklar and you are just a young up-and-coming musician that no one knows." That would never happen with Lee; in fact, it's the opposite; he bigs you up to other people and makes you feel welcome; he makes sure that people are aware that you are around and he tries to really say good things about you and that's an amazing thing. At the end of the day, we are the best agents for our fellow musicians; that's something I've learned. You are actually responsible to big up your peers if you believe in their work because there is no one else who is doing it. It's hard for musicians to blow their own horn.

Russ also taught me to not lose my own musical voice and to make sure that I also pursue my own wishes in music.

**BK: In general or in the context of somebody else's music?**

PS: In general. He really understands where I come from and he thinks that I'm pretty unique in making the transition between drums and percussion in terms of the information I've absorbed about percussion in general. He's been very encouraging in suggesting I should set up projects where I can showcase my own ideas and talents like the 'Solo Segundo' project which I did last year at the St. James Theatre in London. When he saw it, he said, "Pedro, this is incredible. You should not forget about this. Please don't let this fall by the wayside. I know you have to work but keep pressing on with this because it is very special." He's a very inspiring man and he gives you lots of options. He's almost like a father, as he helps you find the possibilities within yourself or in your career.

Drum-wise, we talked about how he tunes his drums low, about cymbals, favorite records, how much he admires Vinnie Colaiuta, Ringo Starr and Gene Krupa, and how he played jazz in his earlier days. He also helped me get into production during the tour. I had been meaning to study Logic and he helped me put some tracks down. He also shared a lot of music with me from The Section, as did Lee. There was a very good camaraderie in that band, as we've been playing for almost two years now, on and off. It's pretty rewarding to be in that situation.

**BK: Judith's new CD *Somebody's Child* will be released in the U.S. in 2017; you will be touring there to promote it.**

PS: Yes. *Somebody's Child* will be released in America in 2017. It was recorded in L.A. with Russ, Waddy and Lee, plus myself, Gabby and others including saxophonist Tom Scott. On the track "That's Why I Love

My Baby," I brought this swing kit to it but when playing it live, I had to translate that to my percussion setup. The live dates will be on Judith's website [[www.judithowen.net](http://www.judithowen.net)] and on my website.

**BK: You have also recently been working with another singer/songwriter, Hattie Webb.**

PS: Yes, Hattie recorded and toured with Leonard Cohen for many years and she recently invited me to record her latest album, *To The Bone*, which was released in May 2017, on a break from touring with Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers. I had the chance to see them twice in America and meet/hear Brighton's drum legend, Steve Ferrone. I'll also be playing some live dates with her, probably using a similar setup to the one that I use with Judith. I'm very proud of the work she has done with the album. It sounds immense.

**BK: You mentioned your solo percussion show, *Solo Segundo*. Does that showcase everything that you do?**

PS: Not everything, but the show is a celebration of all of my major influences in the percussion and drum world—incorporating classical, world, jazz and traditional African drumming, and more recently, some electronic technology.

It incorporates the Ghil from Ghana, multiple percussion pieces by Iannis Xenakis, the Greek composer; a solo vibraphone piece specifically dedicated to the refugee situation that took place (and keeps rolling) in 2015, a tribute to the drummers I love and some Steve Reich adapted for the drum kit. That diversity makes it logistically very challenging. I also sing and chant but the most rewarding part about *Solo Segundo* was having the chance to give a workshop afterwards, where the participants literally ranged in age from eight to 80. The first thing I said to them was, "You've just seen a show full of instruments, but we can be here and make music from nothing other than our own bodies." Body percussion is a very current thing and I tried to get them to understand pulse and time and how to make different colors and understand call-and-response, because that is an essential element of improvisation as a jazz musician. I loved connecting with the public afterwards and answering their questions about the show and percussion in general. I'm very proud of creating *Solo Segundo* and it's ready to go at any given time, but at the moment, it's a matter of fitting it in around my schedule. I don't want to sacrifice a full tour with Judith in order to do one or two dates with *Solo Segundo*, because *Solo Segundo* is not really a project that you could tour for a month. At least for now.

**BK: Is it something that you can easily dip in and out of on a technical level or do you need some time to refresh yourself with the repertoire and layout of the instruments?**

PS: I need at least two days to refresh myself because it's technically very demanding and I have to switch my

**"If there is no conductor, then the drummer has a very important role."**



**“Sometimes I’ll even stop playing in a solo because silence nowadays is so underrated.”**

mind set, because I am performing alone. That was daunting at first, but that’s one reason why I love it. To be honest, I was completely scared about being on stage on my own, but then I said to myself, “Why are you scared? You love soloing.” I was scared because I had to present the show and engage with the audience.

**BK: I would imagine you are really good at that.**

PS: I got better. I must say that by the last performance—at the London Jazz Festival—I felt, “Okay, I can do it!” On the first show, you never know what’s going to happen; it went well, but it was a lot of pressure having to set the whole thing up by myself. Just performing is hard enough but also having to set up a hundred instruments is even more challenging.

**BK: Did you film the show?**

PS: Yes, there is a promo video clip of the show and I have a complete audio recording. I might release all or part of it but I haven’t listened to it since recording it because I’ve been so busy.

**BK: Do you find it challenging switching between the classical world, Kansas Smitty’s, playing percussion with Judith and changing hats, so to speak? Do you ever need to regroup yourself in order to jump from one to the other?**

PS: Yes, I do have to ground myself. For example, if I suddenly have a gig on timpani, as a guest with the Academy of St. Martin-in-The-Fields or another orchestra, I try to spend maybe a day or two with the timpani because it’s totally different to the other disciplines. Also, for the performances with the Academy of St. Martin-in-The-Fields, I use classical drums; the drums are not modern and smaller than normal, so you have to adapt to that. I learned about that from the great Adrian Bending, the London-based percussionist/tympani player. He has been very important teaching the new generation of players in London. I studied with Adrian when I was at the Orchestra Age Of Enlightenment Academy in 2013, which is a very important academy of period-informed performance. Of course, the most important thing is to know the music and I try to always have the score with me to study and to learn who else in the orchestra is playing what.

**BK: So that you know the whole piece and not just your own part?**

PS: Yes. If you only know your own part, then it’s not going to work. Also, this orchestra is known for playing



without a conductor, so you really have to know the music.

I have great memories of touring Europe with the violinist Joshua Bell, playing “Beethoven’s 5th,” “Beethoven’s 7th” and Max Bruch’s “Violin Concerto”—with Joshua conducting from the violin, as there was no conductor.

Returning to your earlier question regarding who leads in terms of conducting, if there is no conductor, then the drummer has a very important role and Adrian Bending, who has been a big inspiration for me, also taught me how to deal with that situation.

**BK: Do you see yourself as more of an orchestral guy or a jazz guy? Who is Pedro Segundo?**

PS: It’s very hard to label yourself. I see myself as a drummer and percussionist who is versatile in the classical, jazz and world music fields. I couldn’t just say that I’m a classical percussionist, a jazz drummer or a session guy. How would *you* describe Pedro?

**BK: Versatile, spirited and musical, from what I’ve seen of you. You cover a greater area than almost all of the other people I’ve interviewed. And you do it all very well.**

PS: I might describe myself as open, versatile and a lover of music making. I think that’s the ultimate thing. I LOVE making music. People can follow my Instagram feeds, as I share my adventures in music, and they will see that what I love doing is just making music.\*

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