

For Serbian-born drummer Marko Djordjevic, playing in odd meters has never been...well...odd. At an early age he assimilated the ethnic rhythms and melodies of his homeland. It wasn't until he began to write music several years ago for his jazz-based group, Sveti, that Marko realized how deeply he'd absorbed Southeastern European rhythms into his musical subconscious.

Today Djordjevic is a resident of New York City, where he's a highly respected jazz drummer/bandleader/sideman, and where he teaches odd-meter drumming at famed music school The Collective. Marko's no one-trick pony, though; his chameleonlike ability to convincingly play many styles has landed him prestigious gigs with Wayne Krantz, Jonah Smith, Eli Degibri, Gary Willis, The Itals, Eric Lewis, Herbie Hancock guitarist Lionel Loueke, John McLaughlin bassist Matt Garrison, Aaron Goldberg, The Mason Brothers, Clarence Spady, Lucky Peterson, Chris McDermott, and Carolina Brandes.

At age sixteen Djordjevic was accepted at Berklee School Of Music in Boston. It was there that he was able to put in the playing and practice time he needed to refine his already advanced rhythmic skills and to apply them to his unique jazz style. A veteran soccer player, Marko is an athletic, soft-spoken gentlemen who speaks articulately in English, displaying a deep passion for music and drumming.

On his outstanding instructional DVD, *Where I Come From* (Firma Video Ent./Alfred Publishing), Djordjevic stresses the importance of musicality in drumming and breaks down his musical concepts in terms of the mechanics required to achieve his advanced level of polyrhythmic expertise. When you watch him perform several Sveti pieces with bassist and

fellow Berklee alum Janek Gwizdala, it's interesting to note the contrast between his athletic physique and his sensitive and dynamic touch. (Think burly Aaron Neville singing a tender "Ave Maria.")

For another glimpse of his world-class musical approach and individualistic style, check out the YouTube clip of Marko's duet with Lionel Loueke. The playful, ever-smiling drummer dances around the melody with a sophisticated musical approach reminiscent of the early bebop greats. Rebound is king and balance is essential for Djordjevic. When it comes to his advanced technical abilities and musical approach on the drumkit, he credits his first Serbian drum teacher, Miroslav Karlovic, for all the good habits he's developed. He also acknowledges David Moss, a drummer from Chicago who came to Serbia, for opening his mind to a wider scope of music and musical ideas on the kit.

A major buzz surrounded Marko following his 2008 performances at the Percussive Arts Society convention and the Montreal Drum Festival. And, after listening to his recent Sveti CD, like his video titled *Where I Come From* (myspace.com/svetimarko), it's easy to see why he's fast becoming a sought-after clinician on the international drumming scene and an in-demand player in the Big Apple.

Djordjevic is currently organizing his thoughts for a future instructional book on internalizing subdivisions, which he believes is at the core of great drumming technique. Where he comes from geographically and musically has informed Djordjevic's discipline, dedication, and love for his instrument. It's also what has set him on the path to where he is today: a true innovator in melodic drumset technique.

MD: How did you develop your musical concepts on the drumkit regarding traditional Serbian music, which, as opposed to Western music, is mainly based in odd meters?

Marko: Traditional Serbian drummers use the drums to re-create the melodies by playing them in unison with the rest of the band. The traditional Serbian bass drum is called the *tapan*, and it's played with a mallet on one side and a twig on the other. This gives you the variation of a deep tone on one side of the drum and a funky high-end tone on the twig side. They use their discretion to interpret the melody, but rhythmically they play in unison with the band.

There's an interesting parallel to this in contemporary music with great composers like Frank Zappa on songs like "The Black Page" and "Mo 'N Herb's Vacation," where the drummer interprets the melody in unison with the lead instrument. What interested me about this concept was how the drummers would play interesting variations of the melody and freely improvise around it. This began my quest to develop the ability to play freely over the barline, regard-

less of the time signature.

MD: Do you sing the melodies in your head while playing?

Marko: Yes, I believe you have to be able to internalize the melody and then externally create rhythmic concepts over the melody. A good example of this would be to internally count in 4/4 and then play a five-note grouping over the four in your head. What sparked my interest in this concept was when I heard the Sting song "The Lazarus Heart" from his *Nothing Like The Sun* CD. In the middle of his solo, the sax player plays a three-over-four grouping and the entire band shifts to this rhythm, which suddenly makes the straight quarter-note dance groove sound like a shuffle. This sounded magical to me, and I had to figure out how this rhythmic shift was created.

MD: You use this concept extensively in your compositions for your band, Sveti. Can you explain the time shift in the track "Dundjer," from the CD *Where I Come From*?

Marko: "Dundjer" is in 17/16 and was constructed from the bass line. I wrote this in 1992, when my drum technique was not

as advanced as it is now. So, fifteen years later I'm able to create more interesting drum concepts over this time signature by singing the bass line in my head while I base my melodic drumming structure over the concurrent 16th-note pattern that flows throughout the song. Knowing that the 16th-note structure is constant allows me to subdivide the patterns freely while I internalize the 16th-note pulse.

Subdividing the pulse into thematic motifs is the key to my current playing style.

MD: Does your drumming inspire your writing, or vice-versa?

Marko: Halfway through my time at Berklee, I took about a year-and-a-half-long break to tour with a reggae band called The Tribulations. This helped me break away from the studying and put me in the real world of gigging, touring, rehearsing with a band, and recording. This was an invaluable experience as my first real touring gig, which allowed me to finally express musically many of the things I had learned and studied over the years. When I left the band, I returned to Berklee