

Your Career Is Over

Or is it?

Failures, humiliations, injuries and dissappointments are part of every musician's life. Whether or not they are fatal has a lot to do with attitude.

By Rick Mattingly

He can laugh about it now, but one of Emil Richards' first big breaks caused one of his biggest embarrassments. It happened in his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut, when Richards was in tenth grade.

"Arthur Fiedler was going to do six pops concerts with the Hartford Symphony," Richards recalls. "They didn't have a good xylophone player, so I got hired. At the first rehearsal we were doing 'Jukebox Jingle' by Leroy Anderson. The piece starts with a cowbell note that's supposed to sound like a nickel dropping in the jukebox. So I hit the cowbell, but Fiedler didn't like it. He really wanted it to sound like a coin dropping in a slot. We tried all kinds of things, like hitting the cowbell with a chain. Then one of the other musicians gave me a silver dollar and I dropped that inside the cowbell. Fiedler loved it.

"Now comes the concert. My mother and father are in the audience, I'm wearing tails, and I'm really nervous about playing with the symphony. I'm looking closely at Fiedler. My problem was that I was looking *too* closely at Fiedler, because when he gave me the signal to drop the coin, I missed the cowbell and the silver dollar hit the French horn player in front of me. Then it fell on the riser and started rolling. Nobody was playing anything, because when I missed the cowbell, Fiedler stopped conducting. So everyone was sitting there watching that silver dollar roll down three levels of risers.

"It came to rest right in front of Fiedler. He bent over, picked it up, and then came all the way to the back of the orchestra where the percussion section was. He handed me the silver dollar and said, 'Can we try it again now?' with a big, sarcastic smile. The whole orchestra was giggling. Man, was I embarrassed!"

Anyone who has been in music for any length of time can tell a comparable story of a moment in their career when they felt they had blown it big-time. While such an experience can seem catastrophic to the person it's happening to, other people are likely not taking it as seriously. Although Richards assumed the other musicians were laughing at him, chances are that many of them were recalling similar incidents in their own lives. Learning to deal with such public humiliation is one of the many "rites of passage" a young player must experience.

Players must also learn to handle criticism from conductors and bandleaders. "Any time you're playing with someone else, you're going to have to make adjustments of some kind," says Gordon Gottlieb, who does symphonic and studio work in New York City. "Every day you'll get the 'You're too loud; you're too soft' stuff, and you can't take it personally. Everybody gets a lecture now and then, and comments that sting. It might not feel like the end of a career, but it can sure waste the rest of the day."

In Richards' case, there was no lasting damage to his burgeoning career as a percussionist as a result of his botched attempt to drop a coin into a cowbell. In fact, the Hartford Symphony was so impressed with his abilities that he played full time with the orchestra from that point until he was drafted four years later.

Often, however, there is no immediate resolution to a failure. The player has to do some analyzing and soul-searching in order to determine why he or she did not succeed. In some cases, perhaps a change in career direction is in order. In other situations, one just needs more practice and experience.

That was the case when drummer Peter

Erskine first encountered a click track in a recording studio at a 1976 session. "I was a sideman on Maynard Ferguson's band, and we were booked to work the first day of a week's worth of recording sessions for a new Maynard album," Erskine remembers. "Harvey Mason was also at the studio; he was booked for the week. I think he was wondering what I was doing there, or perhaps wondering what *he* was doing there. At any rate, Harvey was quite gracious and helpful while the session got under way.

"Maynard's rhythm section began tracking the first song, and I was confounded by what seemed to be the click track's slowing down and speeding up. I had never imag-



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ined that my sense of time was susceptible to such tempo irregularities; I could not stay with the metronome. Yikes! But we did the best we could and wound up with a workable track."

Erskine returned to the studio the next day, anxious to hear the track he'd played on. "As the tape was being put on the machine, I saw two sets of drum tracks listed on the track sheet: mine and Harvey's—which apparently had been overdubbed after we left the studio," Erskine recalls. "The initials TBE were next to the tracks marked 'Peter drums.' I asked the assistant engineer what TBE stood for. 'To be erased.'"

Erskine describes his reaction as "chagrin and profound embarrassment." How did he ultimately deal with it? "Well, the passing of time always helps," Erskine says. "I decided to make the best of the situation by attempting to learn how not to repeat my errors in the recording studio—which is still an ongoing quest! In other words, mistakes and goofs are valuable friends in the learning process—a process that should continue for the rest of our lives. Some of the martial arts teachings show us that we can take the energy of any situation and turn it to our advantage. Sometimes we can create sweet fruit out of bitter disappointment with a quick change of mind and heart. Sometimes we have to be patient and wait for another opportunity to make our mark."

Patience can be the hardest part. The

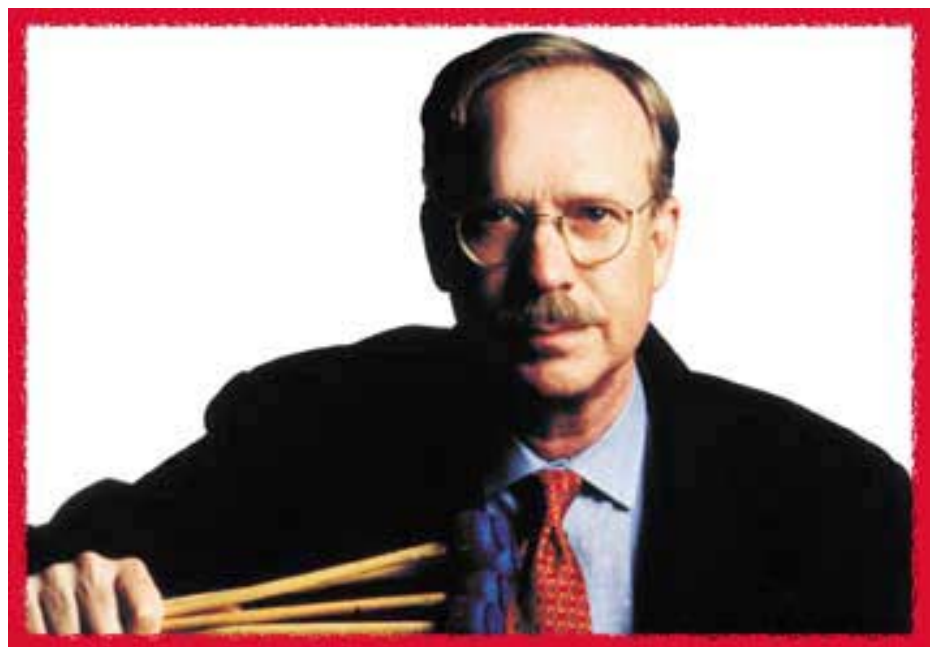
failures and disappointments that happen early in one's life can be even more difficult to deal with because of a "tragic flaw" of downright Shakespearean proportions that has to do with living totally "in the moment." Romeo and Juliet's untimely deaths were the result of their teenage inability to understand that there is a tomorrow, a day after tomorrow, and a whole lot of days, weeks, months, and years after that. Like-

wise, many young players who lose an audition, get fired from a gig, or have their spirit crushed by a harsh remark from a teacher or conductor can find it difficult to realize that the way they are feeling now is not the way they are going to feel for the rest of their lives.

It's not just the young, however, who suffer such insecurities. In a culture obsessed with "making it" while young, many people feel that if they haven't reached a particular goal by, say, age twenty-five or thirty, then it's too late. But even those who reach a certain level of success at a relatively early age are often afraid of losing it as the world changes around them.

"When I first started my own band in the late '60s, we had a burst of success," jazz vibraphonist Gary Burton recalls. "Everybody was writing about us and praising us, and it seemed we could do no wrong. But it's that way with anyone new. You're the 'hot thing' for a year or two, and in most cases that's followed by a period where you can't get coverage or attention because you've already been covered so much. So there's always that danger of seeing your career disappear after a couple of years. Learning how to sustain your career after that initial burst is a crucial phase to get through."

By 1969, the initial buzz about Burton's new group had passed and they weren't getting nearly as much press. But Burton entered the year with confidence. His group



"Although I knew that this happened to most artists, I felt totally rejected."

—Gary Burton

had plenty of gigs booked, and he felt sure that if he hung in there he would get through the slump.

"Then I was hit with a double whammy," Burton says. "The country went into a serious recession. A lot of clubs went out of business, festivals were called off, and concert dates were canceled. All of a sudden, I was looking at a year that only had a scattering of bookings. I began to feel desperate. Maybe my moment had passed and this was going to be the end of my band and of me having a full schedule of playing."

Burton wasn't the only musician facing a loss of work. "A lot of major groups were having the same problems, and a lot of musicians who had never taught in their lives were now out doing clinics and giving lessons," he says. "So I got in touch with Berklee about maybe getting a teaching position there. I thought I'd at least have some security while I tried to keep working with my band."

Burton subsequently moved from New York to Boston and started teaching at the Berklee College of Music. "I found that I really liked teaching," he says. "I've been connected with Berklee for thirty years now and it's been a major part of my life. Meanwhile, my career as a bandleader got back on its feet. So that was a scary period, but it turned out great."

Many successful musicians have learned that a key to stability is to have a multifaceted career. Playing and teaching is a popular combination, and the more one can diversify within each of those areas, the better one's chances are of working regularly. Drummer Rod Morgenstein found out the hard way what can happen when your entire career is built on membership in a single band.

Morgenstein had begun playing with the group that became the Dixie Dregs while he was still in college in the mid-'70s. The band stayed together until 1983, at which point Morgenstein and Dregs guitarist Steve Morse continued on together with the Steve Morse Band. But just after a hugely successful tour in 1986 opening for megastar rock band Rush, Morse accepted an offer to join rock band Kansas. Morgenstein suddenly faced a career crisis.

"I hadn't prepared for that moment at all," Morgenstein admits. "All those years with the Dregs and Steve my thinking was 'one for all and all for one.' I hadn't really thought about the day when I would have to fend for myself, so here I was after eleven

years of being in a band not knowing what I was going to do."

Morgenstein had developed a name for himself, however, frequently winning *Modern Drummer* magazine polls in the Progressive Rock category. Almost immediately, he was invited to join a European-based rock band called Zeno that had just signed one of the biggest record deals in history. "I saw dollar signs and thought I had really lucked into this," Morgenstein recalls. "Little did I know that the band was in debt for two or three million dollars."

Morgenstein did some touring with Zeno in Europe and the U.K., but the group's album was not meeting sales expectations. Then Zeno was scheduled for a U.S. tour with rock band Krokus. The result could have been the blueprint for the movie *This Is Spinal Tap*.

"After the European tour, I had gone back home to Atlanta," Morgenstein explains. "Then I flew to Omaha to meet the band for the first gig of the American tour. They met me at the airport and said, 'Great to see you. Tonight's gig has been canceled, but don't worry about it. This tour is going to be awesome!' So we got on a bus and drove through the night. When I woke up the next morning, we were parked in front of this rinky-dink little VFW lodge. There was a mar-



LISSA WALES PHOTOGRAPHY

"When you don't get a gig, it's disheartening. You wonder, should I look for a different career than music?"
—Rod Morgenstein

quee out front with plastic letters that said, 'MONDAY BINGO, FRIDAY FISH FRY, TONITE KROKUS.'

"Our tour manager got on the bus and said that ticket sales had been light so the gig had been moved from the theater to this place, but there wasn't room for both bands so we weren't going to play. 'And by the way, tomorrow's gig is canceled too.' So we basically drove around America not playing shows. After two weeks, during which we may have played three times, the tour was canceled."

Morgenstein subsequently moved to New York, feeling that he would have more opportunities there. But he found that his reputation worked against him at times. "I showed up for an audition with a straight-ahead rock group, and they sort of laughed when I walked in," Morgenstein remembers. "They knew about my playing in the Dregs and said that I wouldn't possibly be happy playing something as simple as what their music required. Then I showed up for a Billy Idol audition wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and these guys had all the clothes and makeup on as if they were ready to go on stage. I realized that some gigs are as much about image as music, and I didn't have the look."

"Still, when you don't get a gig, it's disheartening. You wonder, should I look for a different career than music?"

Eventually, after several experiences that Morgenstein says were "humbling but educational," he landed a gig with rock group Winger, and went on to enjoy five years of success and relative security. But then that group came to an abrupt end. (More about that later.)

"After having a couple of experiences where I woke up and my band wasn't there anymore, I realized that I couldn't, to use a cliché, have all my eggs in one basket," Morgenstein says. "So I had to figure out all the ways one can make a living as a musician. I made a list of things I wanted to do: write a drum book, make an instructional video, do clinics, get in touch with musicians I knew and admired and see if they would like to do side projects when their regular bands weren't touring or recording."

Over the next few years, Morgenstein did just that. In addition to doing regular clinic tours he now teaches part-time at the Berklee College of Music. He has authored and co-authored instructional books for Hal Leonard and Berklee Press, and written regular columns for *Modern Drummer* maga-

zine as well as various European drum magazines. He and keyboard player Jordan Rudess started their own band and released a CD. Morgenstein also tours with the group Jazz is Dead, and the Dregs have reunited for occasional tours over the past several years.

"That time right after the Steve Morse Band broke up was the roughest period in my life," Morgenstein says. "But I realized that I want music to be my career forever. The answer is to not be dependent on any one thing."

"I felt like *shit*," says jazz drummer Elvin Jones, recalling the time early in his career when he was fired from the band of trombonist J.J. Johnson. "I was depressed. I came back to New York, where I had an apartment in the Village, and I happened to run into my brother. He saw how I looked and said, 'What's the matter with you?' I explained the whole thing and he said, 'C'mon, let's have a few drinks.'"

They made their way around Greenwich Village, ultimately passing the Village Vanguard nightclub, where they encountered bassist Wilbur Ware. He was working with saxophonist Sonny Rollins that night at the Vanguard, and he invited Jones to sit in. "I just went down there to sit in with Sonny," Jones says. "I had no idea they were recording. But it brought me out of my depression, and that's one of the positive things I'll always remember about that record."

The resulting Sonny Rollins album, *A Night At the Village Vanguard*, became an important early document of Jones's innovative style and helped pave the way to more creative outlets for his playing. "Get-

ting fired from J.J. Johnson's band was the best thing that ever happened to me," Jones says now, laughing with a gleam in his eyes as though the joke were ultimately on Johnson.

Not every firing has such a quick, happy ending. Being let go from a band can feel very much like a divorce or the end of a relationship. After a painful breakup, many people are prone to such thoughts as, "I'll never find another person who will love me; I'll never get married; I'm going to be a lonely old man/woman." Similar thoughts can assert themselves when a job is terminated. Complicating the situation is the fact that getting fired can mean the end of more than just a musical relationship. It can also mean the end of a friendship. That was how drummer Danny Gottlieb felt when he was dismissed from the Pat Metheny Group in 1983.

"I had gone to college with Pat," Gottlieb recalls. "Then Pat went with Gary Burton, and soon he recommended me for the gig. We played together with Gary for a year and a half, and then we started the Pat Metheny Group in 1977. It was just four guys driving around the country in a van, and I calculated that in the first year we played three hundred concerts. So we had an intense camaraderie."

The group thrived, recording several successful albums. "Gradually, I sensed that Pat wanted to take the group in a slightly different direction, and I felt that there was a distance forming between us," Gottlieb says. "Then, at the beginning of '83, I got a call saying that Pat had decided to make a change and hire a new drummer. My first thoughts were that I knew it was going to come to this, and that now was the time to move on and play some different music.

"But then the reality hit and I was incredibly depressed and confused, not knowing what was going to happen next. Even though I had done some other playing while the Metheny Group was on breaks, for six years I'd had the security of being in that band.

"I felt betrayed," Gottlieb says. "I had put so much into that group, and suddenly it was over. And the situation wasn't handled as sensitively as it could have been."

Gottlieb credits a strong support system with getting him through some dark days. "My mom had been a part-time professional violinist, so she understood the music world. When I told her what happened, she said, 'Do you think you've taken your music as far as you can go?' And my answer was,

'I feel like I'm just starting.' When she confronted me like that, I had to really take stock and have confidence in my own ability.

"Another person who helped me was Joe Morello, who I had been studying with since I was in high school. He knew all about the ups and downs of the music business, and I remember him saying, 'One door closes and another door opens.' And he was right."

A few months earlier, during a break in the Metheny Group's schedule, Gottlieb and former Metheny bassist Mark Egan had coled a recording session for a band they called Elements. Now that Gottlieb was out of the Metheny Group, he and Egan talked of making Elements an active band. "Then Mark got a call from [singer] Michael Franks, who wanted Mark to put together a backup band for him," Gottlieb says. "Mark suggested Elements, and we did almost a year's worth of touring with Michael."

Gottlieb and Egan started working with a variety of bands as a rhythm section, including gigs and tours with singer Flora Purim and percussionist Airto, and trumpeter Randy Brecker and pianist Eliane Elias. Gottlieb also landed some significant gigs on his own.

"The reality is that I've had some great experiences in music that I could never have had if I had been on the road with Pat all these years," Gottlieb says. "In particular, I played with [guitarist] John McLaughlin for three years, which was an incredible experience. I also got to sub for Mel Lewis at the Village Vanguard and play with Ahmad Jamal, Stan Getz, and Gerry Mulligan. And I got to play for four years with the Gil Evans Orchestra, which was a profound experience and possibly the most significant playing I've ever done."

But Gottlieb almost didn't take the Evans gig. He had originally been hired to sub with the band by its full-time drummer, Adam Nussbaum. One night, Evans said that he wanted Danny to take over the gig. "The last thing on my mind was to take somebody else's gig," Gottlieb says. "That was rough because Adam and I were friends. We talked it out, and then we went to talk to Gil about it. Gil told Adam, 'Don't take it personally. I just want to try something different.' So I took the Evans gig and Adam immediately got hired by Michael Brecker, which was a great opportunity for him."

Gottlieb says he holds no grudges against Metheny. "I had some wonderful experiences in that band, so there are no re-



GENE MARTIN COURTESY ENJA RECORDS

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grets. Pat is such a strong musician and his work ethic is so high that it helped bring me to a higher musical level. And you can't fault anyone for wanting to try something different. Very few people stay with one band for forty years, especially in the jazz world. Look how many drummers worked with Miles Davis, and who knows how the endings went down. You think of Elvin and Coltrane like they were always together, but Elvin was only in that band for six years. So you just have to move on."

No matter how long one has been in the music business or how well one understands its hills and valleys, being informed that your services are no longer required is always a blow to one's ego and confidence. Such was the case when Gary Burton was dropped by his record label.

"In 1995, GRP was sold and a new management came in," Burton explains. "They decided to drop a lot of artists who were on the label. At first, they said that I was one of the artists they wanted to continue with and I should start preparing my next project. So I started making plans, and I talked to some musicians about playing on it. Then I got home from a tour and there was a letter—just one paragraph from some accountant—saying that the record company would not be renewing my contract.

"It was as cold and unfriendly as it could be, and I was rather stunned that it was handled that way. Although I knew it was common for record labels to change directions and that this happened to most artists, I felt totally rejected. I was pretty affected by it for a couple of months."

It wasn't as though the eight albums Burton had made for GRP were not successful. In fact, they all sold well, and Burton's 1989 *Reunion* album, featuring Pat Metheny, had reached the number-one slot on the *Billboard* jazz chart. "I guess GRP felt they had enough Gary Burton product in their catalog and wanted to find some new artists," Burton speculates.

"I can understand their thinking from a business perspective, but that was a small label that had a very family-like atmosphere," Burton says. "Most of the artists knew each other, and a lot of us played in the label's all-star big band, which made three albums over a five-year period. These were musicians who all felt very connected, but that 'family' feeling disappeared because the new management hadn't been part of that. To them, we were just company assets to keep or let go. It's a tough life out there sometimes."



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—Danny Gottlieb

But, as Morello predicted to Gottlieb, another door soon opened. "One day the phone rang and it was Concord Records calling," Burton says. "They were very enthusiastic about having me sign with them. The company has been a good fit for me, and I've been completely happy with being on Concord ever since. So that turned out to be good in the long run."

While getting fired can certainly be painful, not getting hired to begin with can be just as difficult to accept. "I've had the pleasure of working with some wonderful musicians and artists such as Steely Dan, Joe Zawinul, Boz Scaggs, Chick Corea, and Joni Mitchell," says Peter Erskine. "In each case, I more or less expected that I would be asked to participate in their next tour or project after having successfully worked with them, only to find out—sometimes by reading a magazine article—that another drummer was taking over the gig.

"That kind of disappointment can hurt," Erskine admits. "But there are a lot of drummers out there, each with something unique to offer, and artists like those I mentioned deserve and need to change their working musical environment—that is, the musicians they work with—in order to grow further and realize their own musical ideals.

"By the way," Erskine adds, "most all of them wound up calling again for some other project down the road."

For anyone feeling rejected or humiliated by not getting hired for a particular gig, consider what once happened to the late Jeff Porcaro, which has to rank among the definitive examples of adding insult to injury.

"I had been working with Steely Dan," Porcaro said in a 1992 interview. "I had done two tracks on their *Pretzel Logic* album, then I toured with them for a year and a half, and when we got off the road we did the *Katy Lied* album, on which I played all the tracks but one. I was really proud of my playing on that album and couldn't wait for the next one."

Steely Dan co-leader Walter Becker called Porcaro one day and told him they were doing demos for the next album. "He asked if he could borrow a set of my drums so that he could work out some ideas at home," Porcaro remembered. "So I got all excited because I figured that in a few weeks I'd be in the studio doing the next Steely Dan record."

A few weeks went by and Porcaro didn't hear a word. Then a friend of his mentioned that Steely Dan was in the studio working on an album. "I was like, WHAT?!" Porcaro said. "So I called the producer and, sure enough, they were recording *The Royal Scam* with Bernard Purdie on drums. *And they were using my drums and cymbals.*"

Porcaro admitted that his feelings were hurt. "But I didn't make a stink about it," he said. "I might have been bent out of shape if it had been someone other than Purdie and I thought it wasn't grooving. But as it turned out, I probably learned more from what Bernard played on that album with that rhythm section than I've learned from any other drummer on any album. So I now consider myself fortunate that I didn't play on that record."

Porcaro said there had been numerous situations after that when he was led to believe he would be used on a project and then found out that another drummer had been hired. "In a case like that, don't waste more than twenty seconds of your life worrying about it," he advised. "Move on to the next thing. Or get pissed off if that will inspire you to take out the pads and start practicing."

Although it doesn't carry the humiliation of being fired, the decision to leave a situation can be a frightening one, especially if there are no guarantees about the future—which there usually aren't. Layne Redmond says that when she decided to stop performing and recording with Glen

Velez, she had to face the possibility that she would never perform again.

"I had been trained by Glen just to play his style of music," Redmond explains. "It was very complex training, but it wasn't a skill that could get you any work. At that point, no one knew me except as someone who played with Glen. So leaving that situation was a very scary thing to do."

But Redmond felt that it was a step that had to be taken. "First of all, I had some ideas of my own I wanted to work on," she says. "That's often the case when you're a member of a group. You have ideas that do not fit with the leader's direction, so you need a format in which to create your own music. I tried doing a couple of projects on my own outside of the trio we had with Glen and Steve Gorn, but it became immediately apparent that my own work was going to take me away from Glen's work too much."

Redmond was also feeling the need to emerge from Velez's shadow. "*Down Beat* had reviewed our album *Internal Combustion*, which was a duo project," Redmond recalls. "They gave it a favorable review, but said it was a mostly solo album. I had played on something like forty-three minutes of this sixty-minute CD. Then there were situations where we were booked for a duo concert and we'd send a photo of the two of us, and people would actually cut the photo in half and only use Glen's picture.



"I was starting to feel like I didn't exist, which became more unbearable than the thought of not playing any more."

—Layne Redmond

That wasn't happening all the time, but it was happening enough that I was starting to feel like I didn't exist. That 'invisibility factor' was taking all the pleasure out of performing, which became more unbearable than the thought of not playing any more."

Although Redmond had faced the worst-case scenario of not being able to perform on her own, she says that she had no particular expectations. "People say you have to have goals and visualize your future," Redmond says. "I just threw myself totally into organizing and promoting my own concerts without putting any energy into thinking about whether I would succeed or fail. I just did it. I probably would not have been able to do it if I had been worried about the results."

Within a year, Redmond was paying her bills just from her musical activities. "Working with Glen had never supported me financially," she says. "Glen had other work besides our group that supported him, and I always had to work other jobs.

"If I had continued playing with Glen, I would have never made CDs and videos under my own name. So although it was a difficult decision because Glen, Steve, and I were all so close personally, it proved to be the right decision from every point of view.

"But I didn't know I was making the right decision at the time," Redmond stresses. "There was just no other direction to go. I can't even call it a 'leap of faith.' It was just something I *had* to do."

As difficult as it can be to feel that your career has ended, it can be equally frustrating to think that you are never going to have a career to begin with. When vibraphone/marimba players David Friedman and Dave Samuels first conceived of the band Double Image, they had a very difficult time getting bookings and recordings.

"People would always say, 'The music is great, but what do you call it? It's not jazz, it's not pop, it's not classical,'" remembers Friedman. "I thought having something original was a plus, but I discovered that if they can't put you in a pigeonhole, that's a minus. That was—and still is—tremendously frustrating.

"I remember going around to various record companies," Friedman continues. "I finally got an appointment with an A&R man. I assumed there was an advantage to going there rather than just sending a tape, because they never listen to those unless it's someone they know. So I'm sitting in this guy's office telling him about the



"If they can't put you in a pigeonhole, that's a minus."

—David Friedman

group, and he's sort of looking out the window while I'm talking. Finally he says, 'Let's hear something.' So he puts on the tape, and while it's playing his phone rings, so he starts talking on the phone. Then he hangs up and says, 'Let's hear something else.' So I fast-forward the tape and he listens to about two seconds of it and his secretary comes in and reminds him that he has to be at a meeting. So he tells me, 'Yeah, that sounds nice. I'll get back to you.' Of course, he didn't really hear the tape and he never got back to me."

The original Double Image, which included a bass player and drummer, eventually released two albums—one on the European Enja label and one on ECM. Friedman was especially proud of the ECM album, *Dawn*, and assumed that having an album out on a major label would enable the group to work steadily. "When the guy who was supposed to manage us heard *Dawn*, he was furious," Friedman says. "He said he wasn't going to work with us because we had made a record with tunes that were ten minutes long, and the radio wouldn't play them. So the record was never pushed and that was basically the end of the band."

Eventually, Friedman and Samuels reformed Double Image as a duo. They've re-

leased several albums (no two of them on the same label), but don't depend on Double Image when it comes to making a living. They do it for the art and depend on other projects, such as Samuels' work with the Caribbean Jazz Project, to pay their bills.

"I'm in an enviable position," Friedman says. "I have a professorship at the university in Berlin. It's a good-paying job, and I work six months a year and have the rest of the time off, during which I can go on the road. I don't have to take stupid gigs playing music I don't like or play with people I don't want to play with. I can just play the music I believe in. I still believe that's the most important thing."

The Dixie Dregs had similar problems to Double Image when they first tried to get a record deal. The group recorded a demo album and started literally knocking on doors of record companies in New York. "Within a month, we had twenty-seven rejection letters," Rod Morgenstein says. "We thought we had this really cool band, but then virtually everyone in the music business gave us lists of reasons why we were out of our minds, beginning with, 'What the hell do you call this music? It's a little bit of rock, a little bit of jazz, a little bit of country.'"

The group gave up on record companies and started sending the tape to clubs, hoping to get bookings. "We weren't making any money playing those clubs, but gradually a grass-roots following developed," Morgenstein says. "Then, one night when we were playing a club in Nashville, two members of the Allman Brothers Band came in to have a beer. They were impressed and recommended us to their record label, Capricorn. The owner of the label came to hear us and gave us a deal."

The band was sent to Los Angeles to record their first album. "Everyone dreams of recording their first record, and you just know it's going to be the greatest moment of your life," Morgenstein says. "The recording experience itself was great, but I kept hearing the expression, 'Don't worry, we'll fix it in the mix.' As a new band, we had no control in terms of being at the mix, so we trusted that these people knew what they were doing."

"When we got the first copies of our album, we were all so excited," Morgenstein remembers. "We all met at the home of the band member who had the best stereo system. We put the record on, and our hearts collectively sank at what we heard coming out of the speakers. We thought it was go-

ing to have a BIG sound. It was kind of lifeless and one-dimensional, with no presence. One of the guys was actually crying; it was that emotional."

But just having an album out on a major label resulted in increased bookings that took the Dixie Dregs from being a Southeast band to being a national act. And the quality of the compositions and musicianship resulted in some very favorable reviews—with one notable exception.

"This guy in *Rolling Stone* was reviewing an album by Stuff, which was a band of New York studio players that included Steve Gadd," Morgenstein explains. "He really didn't like it, and then out of left field he said, 'At least it's not as bad as this new band, the Dixie Dregs.' That hit us hard."

Despite the band's disappointment in the album, the group survived, making an album a year for the next six years. Each one sold better than its predecessor, and the band became a popular touring act, sharing stages with such major rock bands as the Doobie Brothers, Heart, and the Allman Brothers before breaking up.

By the time Morgenstein joined hard-rock band Winger in the mid-'80s, he knew a lot about the uncertainties of the music business. But he was still surprised as how fast things could change.

"Winger was signed to a major label, and so I thought our success was somewhat guaranteed," Morgenstein explains. "But I found out that major labels just sort of put an album out there to see what happens, and if nothing does, they let it die. That's what happened with Winger. The first album came out, and after a month, no radio stations had added it to their playlists. So the label pronounced the album dead."

Two weeks later, however, MTV started playing a Winger video several times a day, and suddenly the album started selling. "The label took note of that and started actively promoting the album, and it went on to sell nearly two million copies," Morgenstein says. "So it was fascinating to see what could happen when a record label uses its muscle."

Winger's second album also had strong sales, but just before the band's third album was released, MTV suddenly stopped playing videos by hard rock and heavy metal bands, switching the focus to "grunge" and rap artists. To make matters worse, Winger became the subject of a running insult on MTV's "Beavis and Butthead" cartoon. Winger's third album sold poorly and the band went from playing arenas to playing

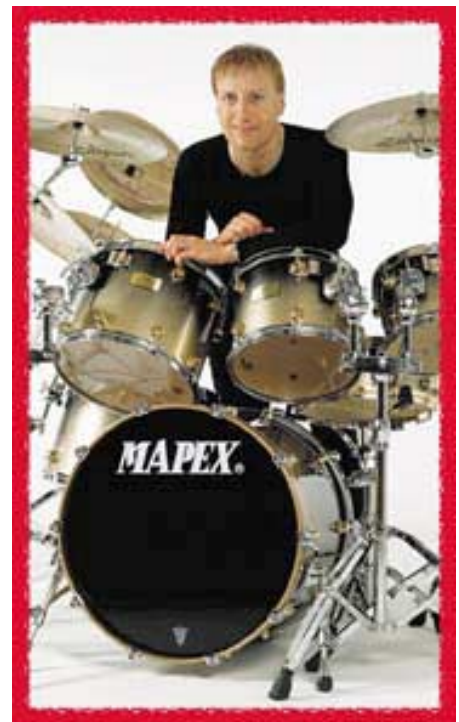
clubs. The band broke up soon afterward.

"I never took those five years of seeing Winger every day on MTV for granted," Morgenstein says. "I knew that kind of thing could only last so long. Every time we played for 10,000 people, my attitude was to take it all in, because unless you're in the Rolling Stones or Aerosmith, you don't get to have that kind of success indefinitely."

While he was in college at North Texas State (now the University of North Texas), Gregg Bissonette began to think he would never have success. Never mind getting a great gig—he couldn't even get an audition.

"I really loved the Maynard Ferguson band, and that's who I wanted to play with someday," Bissonette explains. "During my first year of college I went to see the band in Dallas. I saw a guy in a satin tour jacket that said Maynard Ferguson on the back, and I figured he was a tour manager or something. So I went up to him and said, 'Excuse me, if Maynard were looking for a drummer, how would he go about it?' He gave me his card and told me to send a tape that represented my playing. So I spent three months working on a tape and then sent it in."

About six months later, Bissonette went



"If they wouldn't even call me for an audition, what chance did I have of ever getting in the band?"

—Gregg Bissonette

to see the Ferguson band again. He was dismayed to see a different drummer playing, as he had never even been notified about an audition. Bissonette made another tape and sent it in with a note saying, "If you have an audition, PLEASE let me know." Another six months went by and Ferguson's band came through again. Bissonette went to see them and found yet another drummer on the gig.

"I got really depressed," Bissonette says. "If they wouldn't even call me for an audition, what chance did I have of ever getting in the band?"

A year went by, Ferguson played in Dallas again, Bissonette went to see the band, and still another drummer had taken over. "The new drummer was Dave Mancini," Bissonette says. "I went up and talked to him, and he was really nice. I also talked to the piano player, and he told me, 'One of the main ways that people get in the band is that someone who is already in the band recommends them.' It was an inside thing."

Ferguson was in town for two nights, so Bissonette devised a scheme by which he could get to know the band members and they would get to know him. He called Ferguson's tour manager and invited the entire band out to the club where he was working with a combo. "I'll have some friends of mine drive everyone to the club, and the drinks are on me," Bissonette told him.

"Maynard didn't show up, but most of the rest of the band did," Bissonette says. "They sat in with us and we had a great night. The manager told me that if Dave ever left, he would call me. Then Dave called one day and said that their bass player was leaving, and he asked me if I knew any good bass players. I recommended my brother, and he got the gig. Then, when Dave decided to leave, not only did he recommend me to Maynard, but I also had my brother in there pulling for me. So it really is about who you know."

Bissonette says that persistence is a big key, but quickly adds that you have to be "politely" persistent. "You can come on strong and just make people angry, and they'll never call you," Bissonette advises. "But if you're cool about it and show that you're professional and you respect people's rights and feelings, no one will get mad at you."

As he sat staring at his grades during the first semester of his senior year in college, Robin Engelman didn't think he was

ever going to have a career. "I hadn't passed a course," Engelman recalls. "I was never a good student, academically, and I couldn't take the thought of doing all the make-up work. So I went home and started packing. I couldn't imagine what I was going to do with my life. So even before I had a career, I thought it was over."

Soon afterward, though, Engelman landed a gig as a percussionist with the South Carolina Symphony. The next summer he went to the New Hampshire Music Festival, where he ran into a friend who was leaving the Louisville Orchestra and who recommended Engelman for that job. Then he found out about an opening in Milwaukee from someone he had met in New Hampshire, and when he got to Milwaukee, he met his future Nexus colleague John Wyre. When Engelman subsequently joined the Rochester Philharmonic, he met another future Nexus member, William Cahn. Meanwhile, Wyre had taken a job as timpanist with the Toronto Symphony, and when that orchestra needed a principal percussionist, he contacted Engelman, who won the audition. Four years later, Engelman, Wyre, Cahn, Bob Becker, Russell Hartenberger, and Michael Craden began Nexus, who are celebrating their 30th anniversary this year.

So Engelman found out that, despite what he had been led to believe, he did not need a degree in order to have a successful career as an orchestral percussionist. He also discovered something else: "You don't have to actually graduate in order to be eligible to receive requests for money from the alumni association," Engelman says.

Ironically, Engelman feels that the biggest threat to his career involved being honored for it. "When I found out that Nexus was going to receive the PAS Hall of Fame award, my first thought was, 'Our career is over,'" Engelman says. "I guess I felt that way because, here in Canada, if you receive the Governor General's Award of Canada or the Order of Canada, that really is the end of your career. They do that so they can get rid of you and make way for the next generation.

"The other thing is that a new style of performance has emerged. The romantic era is definitely dead, except for a few people and orchestras like the Concertgebouw and Cleveland. That style of playing has been replaced by a very pragmatic approach to music-making in which people are just playing the notes and there are no mistakes. I think recordings have

had a lot to do with that, as well as the repetitious music that doesn't allow for expression and whose primary concern is the clear articulation of patterns. Such music doesn't elicit any emotional response, and I find myself totally uninvolved in that. So I feel increasingly like a dinosaur. I don't regret it; it's just a reality. In a sense, that's like feeling your career is over."

Although there were warning signs that marimbist Leigh Howard Stevens was systematically injuring himself, he chose to ignore them. "While I was first trying to develop my career, I worked as a house painter and plasterer," Stevens explains. "In fact, I replastered most of the dormitories at the Eastman School of Music. I did a lot of overhead work for a couple of years, which caused a lot of pain in my shoulder. But I would keep working to see how much pain I could take. That's just my personality.

"Little did I know that I was doing permanent damage to my joints. It didn't fully surface until ten years later. The combination of doing some painting in my house and mountain biking all in one weekend threw my right shoulder into a severe case of bursitis that totally crippled me for weeks."

Stevens was treated with cortisone injections and avoided overhead work. "That got me through the immediate crisis," he says. "But because I started favoring that arm—not using it properly and not redeveloping the muscles—the bursitis developed into tendinitis. I really did not know if I would ever be able to play again."

He canceled a number of performances



*"I didn't know how I was going to pay my bills because I couldn't go out and play."
—Leigh Howard Stevens*

and says that his playing was impaired for nearly a year. "When I was playing I was very aware of the pain, which caused me to stand in a funny position and not be able to play up to the level I had been playing at before.

"I went to a series of doctors and got nowhere, but finally got on the path to a cure through a back therapist who taught me new ways to sit, stand, sleep, work on my computer, and do a number of other life chores. Essentially, I had to relearn how to use my body. Since that time, which was fifteen years ago, I have not had a serious incident that interrupted my playing."

In addition to the anxiety Stevens felt about the impairment of his playing, he said there was the additional pressure of feeling that he had to keep his condition a secret. "I haven't talked about this very much," he admits, "except when I come across a student or someone who is having a physical problem. I try to teach them what I learned and give them some hope that they will be able to work their way through it.

"There were some dark days," Stevens says. "I had just purchased my first house and taken on financial responsibilities that I never had before. And then within months I was stricken with bursitis and tendinitis. I didn't know how I was going to pay my bills because I couldn't go out and play."

But Stevens had a backup plan in place. "I had already started my music publishing business and Malletech, and my idea was that if I had to give up playing I would focus my energies on those businesses. But I also knew myself well enough to know that I would be frustrated the rest of my life if I had to give up playing. Fortunately, that didn't happen."

First-call Nashville session drummer Eddie Bayers faced a similar catastrophe when he shattered his wrist in 1986. Doctors predicted that he would never be able to resume his career.

"I was riding my motorcycle, and a guy ran a red light and hit me," Bayers recalls. "The impact crushed the main bone in my left wrist that gives you mobility between the hand and wrist. I was in and out of casts for eight months."

Bayers said that the ultimate day of reckoning came via a couple of artists who had come to depend on his playing. "Rodney Crowell and Rosanne Cash both called and said they wanted me on their next albums," Bayers says. "To them, feel and groove were the bottom line, and they knew I would never lose that. The Judds and Michael

Murphey called too, and so I decided that I had to at least try."

At first, Bayers made it easier on his left hand by programming some parts and playing everything else. "I had lost some mobility in my left hand, and it took another two or three months for things to feel the way I wanted them to feel," he explains. "But the body can adapt to a lot of situations, and now my left hand does whatever I want it to. I can get around the toms technically, and I can play hard for certain fills and accents."

There was no way, though, that his left wrist could endure the impact of loud, constant backbeats and rimshots on the snare drum. So Bayers taught himself to play open-handed, playing softly with his left hand on the hi-hat while slamming backbeats on the snare drum with his right hand.

Soon, he was back to a steady schedule of three sessions per day. "It worked out fine," he says, "and I couldn't be more thankful for the graciousness of the artists who supported me."

The ultimate nightmare for a drummer or percussionist would have to be losing a limb, which happened to rock drummer Rick Allen of Def Leppard in 1984. As the result of a car accident, his left arm had to be amputated at the shoulder.

"I don't think the permanence of my condition sank in until about two or three weeks later," Allen told *Modern Drummer* magazine in a 1988 interview. "But not being able to play again never really crossed my mind. I figured playing drums was the only thing I could do. When you're thrown in



"Not being able to play again never really crossed my mind. Playing drums was the only thing I could do."
Rick Allen

at the deep end, you really have to swim, and this was a classic case of *having to do that*. I don't think I ever doubted that I could do it. I was just being as positive as I could."

The electronic age was dawning, and Allen soon devised a setup that included several pedals with which he could trigger a variety of drum sounds with his left foot. Pretty soon, he was playing everything with three limbs that he had previously played with four.

Because he felt the need to overcompensate for his missing limb, Allen took a more serious approach to playing and practicing than he'd had before the accident, with the result that he feels he became a much better drummer. "My timing has never been better," he said. "Perseverance—I guess that would be the biggest thing I learned about myself. But I suppose that had a lot to do with the strength of those around me. The guys in the band said they never once thought about replacing me. They really didn't give me a choice; I had to stick around and deal with it."

Oftentimes, one has a choice in terms of how a situation is perceived. What one person considers a failure, another person sees as a learning experience. And what one person views as a compromise, another embraces as an opportunity.

The summer after his freshman year at North Texas State, drummer John Riley auditioned for and got a gig with a show band at the Astroworld amusement park in Houston. "I got fired after the first night because I wasn't prepared to do the job," Riley says. "It was a shock, because up to that point, I had been successful at pretty much everything I tried to do."

Riley says it was a classic case of the "Peter Principle" in which a person rises to the level of his own incompetence. "At that moment, I had reached that level," he acknowledges. "Sure, it was a shock to lose that job, because it was going to be a lot of playing—six or seven shows a day, every day, all summer. But I took the energy I could have spent dwelling on the disappointment and refocused my efforts on becoming a more complete musician. Losing that gig turned out to be a blessing. I spent the entire summer at home practicing, with the revelation of what I needed to work on because of the way I had failed on that gig."

When David Friedman was fired from a gig early in his career, he too learned an im-



DORIAN ROWER PHOTOGRAPHY

"I took the energy I could have spent dwelling on the disappointment and refocused my efforts on becoming a more complete musician."

—John Riley

portant lesson—but it wasn't about his playing. "I was called to play extra with the New York City Ballet orchestra," he remembers. "I was nineteen years old and a bit arrogant. They were playing 'La Valse' by Ravel, and I was playing the snare drum part. There were three rehearsals, but I didn't go to the first one. I showed up at the second rehearsal and sight-read the part, and I gave everyone the impression that I hadn't looked at the part ahead of time or practiced it. The other guys in the section, who were all older, resented my attitude.

"There is a section at the end of the piece where a snare drum pattern is repeated about sixty times. At the first performance, I got lost in the middle of that section. The other guys in the section could see that I was lost, and when I looked around for help, they all looked the other way. I played the last bar of the piece a measure too late, and all the dancers, who were supposed to freeze on the last note, all sort of lost their balance.

"The conductor immediately fired me," Friedman says. "So that was an eye-opener, and I learned to be more modest."

Drumset artist Terry Bozzio says he used to do drum clinics as a mere survival tactic when he was between major tours and recordings. But his perception changed when he shared a European clinic with Dom Famularo. "I had never met Dom before, but the things he was saying at his clinic were very positive," Bozzio remembers. "We went out to dinner after the clinic, and Dom

started talking about how lucky we were to be able to play for audiences of drummers who loved what we were doing.

"That really put things in perspective for me, because up until then I'd always felt that I was resigning myself to do clinics because my career wasn't happening. But it struck me that I am one of the luckiest people on earth because I have something I love to do, and I'm grateful to have an audience of drummers who understand and appreciate solo drum music. I realized I would rather do that than play for a bunch of teenyboppers who haven't got a clue as to what I'm doing, or a bunch of jaded critics who take the opportunity to go to the bathroom during the drum solo at a rock concert.

"Life is a process," Bozzio says. "And if you enjoy the process, you've got it whipped. The results don't matter any more. Rather than having the goal of making a million dollars, I'd much rather have the goal of doing this thing I love to do. Hopefully, I can make enough money to continue doing it."

Vibraphonist Dave Samuels contends that we learn just as much about ourselves as musicians and as people through negative experiences as through positive ones. "Can you have a negative experience with a positive result? The answer is yes," Samuels says. "In my case, when I first moved to New York and was trying to find work, someone suggested that I try subbing for Broadway shows. So I got a gig subbing for someone, and I did a really awful job. I



"I realized that this was not something I wanted to do...and it was clear to everyone around me that it wasn't something I should be doing."

—Dave Samuels

realized immediately that this was not something I wanted to do and I should focus my energies elsewhere. And it was clear to everyone around me that it wasn't something I *should* be doing," Samuels adds, laughing.

"But that was not a negative situation. Granted, it felt negative at the time, but going into a situation and finding out that this wasn't something I wanted to do taught me a lesson real fast. If we only did things we knew in advance were going to be positive, we'd never try different foods. You'd eat the same thing at every meal because you'd know you were going to like it. But life doesn't work that way. If you try brussel sprouts and don't like them, that doesn't mean you failed. You've learned something about yourself that will guide your future actions. And it can be the same way if you have a bad musical experience."

Samuels compares a successful musician to a scientist who has made a great discovery, pointing out that the scientist undoubtedly spent years testing theories that failed before finding the right formula. "Great musicians don't just appear out of nowhere," Samuels says. "It is a long, complicated progression."

Young players might assume that failure and frustrations are signs that a career is not meant to be, and that successful players have never blown a gig, recording session or audition, never been fired or dropped by a record company, never had a career-threatening injury, or never wondered if they would ever work again. In fact, successful players are those who learn to ride with the ups and downs of a career and to keep their options open.

"I once asked Louie Bellson how he managed to accomplish so much in his career," says Gregg Bissonette. "He told me, 'Well, I try to eat healthy and stay in shape, but mainly I don't let negative thoughts get me down.' How can you not let negative thoughts get to you in the music business? But with Louie, it's not an act. That's how he lives his life, and I really look at him as a role model."

Peter Erskine points out that music is not surgery. "A mistake is, ultimately, just a mistake," he says. "Try to concentrate the best you can in any work situation and be open to the possibility that your best-intentioned effort may or may not be 'on the mark'—or even appreciated! Just do the best you can, be of cheerful heart, and everything will work out in the end."

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