SLAYER's DAVE LOMBARDO
THE GODFATHER OF DOUBLE BASS!

12 WAYS TO MAKE MONEY DRUMMING

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THE REBIRTH OF LUDWIG
Five years ago, speed metal's greatest drummer returned to the band that launched his career. Lombardo's work on Slayer's new album, Christ Illusion, his first with them in fourteen years, once again displays his tremendous talent.

story by Waleed Rashidi • photos by Alex Sofer
Five years ago, speed metal's greatest drummer returned to the band that launched his career. Lombardo's work on Slayer's new album, Christ Illusion, his first with them in fourteen years, once again displays his tremendous talent.

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Instead of waxing poetic about what metal drumming living legend Dave Lombardo does behind the kit—you know, those punishing 16th-note kicks at rapid-fire tempos, incredible runs across his half-dozen rack toms, spastic patterns, and awe-inspiring phrases—it might be better to start off telling you what Lombardo doesn't do.

First off, he doesn't practice...much. "The only time I practice is when I'm with the band. I should practice more, but I don't," Lombardo slyly admits during our spirited, in-depth conversation at the Modern Drummer cover shoot in Los Angeles.

Throughout our discussion, we discover another drumming routine Lombardo doesn't participate in—warming up before a show. "I'll crawl out of my bunk, slam a couple of Red Bulls, stretch a little bit, and I'm on stage," he says. No practice pad, no paradiddles, not even an air drumming session required.

It's hard to believe that one of the most important drummers of the last quarter century doesn't practice or warm up. How can someone play so creatively with so little forethought? And when you think about Lombardo's long list of outstanding recordings—many made before the advent of digital editing—including Slayer's quintessential Reign In Blood, there's no denying this man's astonishing talent. More recent killer recordings demonstrating Dave's abilities include Fantomas's Delirium Cordia and his collaboration with DJ Spooky, Drums Of Death.

Lombardo's success springs from his wildly spontaneous methodology. But also credit his relentless vitality, his glowing enthusiasm for his craft, and his keen ear for a host of styles and fresh ideas. These have all fed the forty-one-year-old father of three down a career path that, with the release of Christ Illusion, brings him completely full circle.

As the original drummer in Slayer, Lombardo built his reputation via a host of well-orchestrated albums, including 1983's Show No Mercy and 1990's Seasons In The Abyss. On those recordings Dave shattered tempo barriers and furthered double bass drum technique. Launching his recording career while still in high school in South Gate, California, Lombardo, together with vocalist/bassist Tom Araya and guitarists Kerry King and Jeff Hanneman, helped build Slayer into a flagship unit of punk-influenced speed metal and thrash.

Lombardo's stint with the act ended in 1992, but the drumming great did not remain idle. He performed with Grip Inc. and Philm, and more recently recorded and toured with Fantomas, featuring Faith No More's Mike Patton and members off The Melvins. Then, when Lombardo's replacement in Slayer, Paul Bostaph, vacated the throne in 2001, Dave was asked to temporarily re-join the act.

"It felt like no time was lost," insists Lombardo about his re-entry. "What was odd for me was being on stage and seeing those three guys in front of me. It was like, 'Whoa, this is really weird. Is this some kind of dream?'

Without a doubt, Slayer devotees were ecstatic about Lombardo's return to the band. But would he remain in the band? Well, after that first tour, all parties agreed that Dave should indeed stay.

Though Lombardo's been back in the band for over four years now, 2006 marks his recorded return to the lineup. For fans of this double-bass drumming giant, who has inspired literally generations of drummers from a variety of genres—including some as prominent as Dave Grohl—it couldn't have come any sooner.
"In my opinion, Dave Lombardo is among the top-five most influential drummers in any genre. He has a perfect balance between feel and technique. A legend of his time and a wonderful personality."

— John DeMayo, System Of A Down

“It must’ve been 1989 or 1990 when I was playing drums with Dweezil Zappa, and the Zappas had invited Faith No More over to their house. I was sixteen or seventeen years old. It was the first time I’d met Mike Bordin, and I’ll never forget him telling me how I had to check out Dave Lombardo and what he does with Slayer. Mike looked me dead in the eye and said, ‘Josh, this guy is an animal. He is a machine!’ Needless to say, I got into Slayer and Dave Lombardo shortly after that and quickly recognized him as one of the greats. What he does is astounding. He is the quintessential speed metal/thrash drummer. Mike Bordin said it best: Dave is an animal and he is a machine—and when it comes to heavy rock drumming, I can’t think of a better way to be described.”

— Josh Freese

“Dave Lombardo is the pioneer of blistering-speed double bass drumming. His fast, creative chops and fills behind the kit are amazing. He is the true ‘Angel Of Death’ himself.”

— Mike Wengren, Disturbed

“Dave Lombardo pretty much taught me how to play metal. All I used to do when I was fifteen was transcribe all the parts to my favorite Slayer songs. In my opinion, Dave plays the greatest drum fill of all time right after the guitar solo in the song ‘Angel Of Death.’ All you metal drummers know what I’m talking about. Lombardo is a sadistic surgeon of demise who yields hickory like the monarch to the kingdom of the damned.” [laughs]

— James “The Rev” Sullivan, Avenged Sevenfold

“Divine Intervention and God Hates Us All are great albums, and Dave Lombardo is an amazing drummer. He took metal drumming to a new level—truly groundbreaking.”

— Mark O’Connell, Taking Back Sunday

and he presented it to me raw. He depends on me to come up with whatever beats I want. Jeff is a bit more specific. He’ll program it all into a drum machine and then I’ll come in and put my feeling over his guidelines.

MD: ‘There seems to be some odd phrasing in “Jihad.”’

Dave: To me, it doesn’t feel like it’s in seven or any other odd time signature. It just feels natural. I thought, Okay, “Jihad” is more of a military thing, so at the beginning, I’ll make it more Middle Eastern. And then at the end, where it’s more military, I’ll bring in the double bass. That was a tune where I felt I was being a little more creative.

MD: “Eyes Of The Insane” starts with a pounding tom intro with slower 16th-note kicks, but during the solo section you start kicking with what’s going on.

Dave: Again, a lot of that was me trying to make the best Slayer record possible. I brought out all of these Slayer-esque beats. But then again, the band’s music makes me play a certain way. Certain musicians will affect you that way too.

MD: “Catatonic” hammers straight 8ths at a slower pace. Is it harder for you to
MD: **Christ Illusion** is your first recording with Slayer in fourteen years. Were you totally itching to get this album out?

Dave: Yes. It was frustrating, because Kerry and I were recording demos back in early 2003. So it's been three years of working on this stuff. We made two demos at my house and then we rehearsed the songs forever. The good part was, once we went into the studio, we were ready. I recorded the songs in like three and a half days—bam, slammed 'em out! I was almost disappointed, because I didn't get a chance to enjoy the studio.

MD: From the tracks we've heard, there seems to be more of a thrash beat being worked back into the songs.

Dave: Yeah, it's in there, but it's only at special times. We didn't want to overdo it. You want to add that sort of thing at the right time and in the right place. Slayer was originally a metal band, but we were influenced by punk, too. And that fast beat is the punk influence coming back in.

MD: You've now had a chance to reflect on all the albums you've done with the band. What went through your head this time before you started writing your parts?

Dave: Actually, I wanted to be a little more creative than I was allowed to be. There were certain boundaries I had to stay within. I've learned so much while I was away from the band, and I wanted to apply some of those concepts. But the guys didn't feel those ideas were really what Slayer is all about. So in a way, I revisited the approach I used with the band years ago.

MD: So you're saying that in a sense that you're picking up from where you left off in '92?

Dave: Yes. But there's one song where I play blast beats—and not the punk beats. I did do that, and that's just a little reminder to other drummers out there that I'm on my toes. I listen to what's out there and I know what they're doing.

MD: "Jihad" finds you incorporating thrash beats around an extended tom intro. Tell me about putting that together.

Dave: That was one of Kerry's songs,
"Dave Lombardo is one of the coolest guys in music. His manner is to put you instantly at ease — no ego, just a jovial dub.

"Early on in their career, I've seen Slayer play every set, from South Gate to Anaheim, quite often with thirty people in the club. And for those first six months or so of them, Dave was a single bass drummer. As a matter of fact, his first double bass show was at the outdoor festival in Pico Rivera on September 3, 1983, where Slayer opened for a bunch of bands, many of whom became nothing more than bit players in the metal scene.

"I suppose the stories of me holding Dave's kit in place during the recording of 'Chemical Warfare' are well documented. What kind of concrete drum closet doesn't have a drum carpet? Crazy. Anyway, I can remember standing right behind Dave, and drumming along as he tracked 'Captor of Sin,' and I believe I even whacked him in the back with an errant stick. And he didn't boot the retarded little fan boy out of his tracking space, which just showed me how cool and patient he was.

"In 2005, Strapping played with Slayer at the Gods Of Metal festival in Bologna, Italy, and let me tell you, Dave Lombardo was on fire! It was the most storming show I've ever seen him play. You could tell that the hiatus away from Slayer only honed his formidable skills. Dave is back with a vengeance.

"Dave Lombardo, manning the skins again with the mighty Slayer — everything is right with that. I wish Dave and his family the best. And may Slayer live another twenty-five years!" — Gene Hoglan, Strapping Young Lad

play slow than it is to play fast?

Dave: Yes, absolutely. Slow is always much harder than fast. It takes a certain person, a certain drummer, to play really fast. But if you take that drummer and tell him to play slow, many times he can't do it. I can play fast all day. But with slower tempos, I have to concentrate. That said, "Catatonic" was easy for me.

MD: When you started writing with the band again, was it pretty much the same as it was for previous Slayer recordings?

Dave: Their writing and approach is the same. I don't think they've changed one single bit from back then. But my approach has changed — I'm thinking about things a bit differently.

MD: In what way?

Dave: A guitar riff can have many types of drum beats, and at this stage of my playing I have a wide variety to choose from. It's cool, because I can give the guys different options.

MD: Do you think your time away from Slayer was good for you?

Dave: It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I had been a part of the greatest metal band in the world, and then I was able to venture into other styles and work...
Dave Lombardo

with very different musicians. Honestly, if I stayed in Slayer, I would never have had those incredible musical experiences. All of that experience shaped me and kind of "re-formed me" into the drummer I am now. I now feel confident jumping from one thing to another.

MD: Did you find that you had to get back into "Slayer drumming shape"?
Dave: There was no reconditioning—I think it's just in me.

MD: So what about warming up?
Dave: Absolutely nothing. You can ask any bands that I play with. I'll stretch a little before I go on, but no yoga or anything. A little bit of coffee wakes me up and gets the initial cobwebs off my face. When I get on stage, I'm fine. I have a little espresso machine on the side of the stage, so if I'm lagging halfway through, I'll say to Norm [Costa, Lombardo's tech], "Make me an espresso." And bam, I'm ready to go! [laughs]

MD: Practically every drummer who hears you wants to know how you play double bass so fast, powerful, and clean. Let's dig into your bass drum technique. Do you play heel-up or flat-footed?
Dave: Heel-up, all the way.

MD: And where are your feet positioned on the pedal board?
Dave: They're in the middle. You know when you hold a drumstick at its pivot point? That's kind of my approach to the bass pedals. Find the sweet spot, where I barely touch the pedal and it moves.

The Natural
Slayer's Kerry King On Lombardo

A sk Slayer guitarist Kerry King which tracks on the band's latest are Lombardo's best performances, and he's quick to tell you that they're all Lombardo's finest moments. "I don't want to do him an injustice by pointing out just one," he says. "Dave sounds amazing on this record.

King recalls Lombardo's re-entry into the Slayer camp in 2001—and the remarkable ease of having him re-join the act after his decade-long absence. "We had him come in, play, and try stuff out, and it was pretty awesome," King says. "It was like putting on an old pair of shoes, man. They still fit!"

So has King noticed whether Lombardo's drumming has changed much since his return to the band? "I think he does have more to offer," the guitarist admits. "But has anything changed? Not that I've noticed. He's still a world-class drummer. That said, I'm sure there are different things that he's got under his belt that he never imagined years ago."

King says that Lombardo, in a live environment, doesn't always adhere to the parts performed on the band's recordings, and that he's been known to go off on tangents, largely with great success. "Sometimes he'll start a drum roll twice as early, or one and a half times as early," King says. "You're wondering, Where is this going? Ninety-nine percent of the time, it's perfect. But it just wakes you up when you're on stage— you're like, What!"

Regarding Lombardo's lack of a pre-gig warm-up, King confirms, "He'll just come cruising in ten to fifteen minutes before a show, while Jeff [Hanneman] and I have already been in there warming up for a half-hour. Dave just gets on stage and is able to do it—amazing. It's like that baseball movie, The Natural. That's exactly what Dave is, a natural."
Dave Lombardo

MD: Has your bass drum technique changed much over the years?
Dave: I've locked it in. I was having trouble towards the tail end of my Slayer years. For instance, my playing on Decade Of Aggression sucks. I mean, the double bass was really bad, not what it is now.

MD: What happened to your playing?
Dave: I had lost contact with my drums. The techs were building my drumset to their own feel instead of to mine. The drum stool was really high, too high for me. I was bending over to play, and it hurt my back. I couldn't play double bass parts that way.

Now I have my drum stool positioned so that my legs are at a 90° angle, where it's comfortable. I can now play double bass forever. I feel like I've mastered it.

One other odd thing about the way I play is, I'm left-handed, but I play a right-handed kit. I've always played a right-handed kit. I bat right, I write left, I kick left... I'm a little ambidextrous. I always start patterns with my left foot. Those fast double bass parts? They always start with my left, which is different from most metal drummers.

MD: What are some things drummers should know in order to play fast bass drum patterns?
Dave: Some of it has to do with head and pedal adjustments, that's number one. The heads can't flutter; they have to be tight, because the beater has to bounce back. The spring tension's tight on my pedals, and the beater's "throw" is set way back. Also, the footboard's a little bit raised.

“Dave is one of the fastest drummers ever. We toured with Slayer at Ozzfest, and one of the highlights for me was standing behind him while he was waiting to play during Slayer's intro. It was mega hot that day. He turned around, saw me, and asked if I wanted a bottle of water. That was like a kid's dream come true.”

— Ben Dussault, Throwdown

“Dave Lombardo! Listen to 'War Ensemble' on Seasons In The Abyss. At about 2:10 into the song, you'll hear the coolest drum fill ever. Yeah, you could practice it for two weeks and maybe pull it off like he does. But the point is, he isn't copying anyone. Dave Lombardo will always be the original.”

— Ed Oehler, Zebrahead
Dave Lombardo

have it about a quarter-inch higher up than most people set their pedals.

I really like Tama’s Iron Cobra pedals because you can make all of these adjustments. I use the heavy-duty springs. And I rest my foot right where the Cobra is on the footplate. I sincerely recommend this pedal to anyone.

As far as developing speed, I think a drummer should use a metronome. Start with alternating 16ths at 120 bpm. Once you’re comfortable with that, slowly move your way up to 180 bpm. On top of that, play 8th notes on the ride with the snare on 2 and 4, and then move the snare drum to different parts of the pattern—on 3, on the upbeats, etc.

Keep in mind, you always have to start off slowly and then build up to speed. Every hit has to be defined. Sometimes I hear drummers do this “fluttering” thing, where it’s fast, but sloppy and uncontrolled. It’s like, “Wait, what did you just play there?”

MD: On the new Slayer disc, did you record your drums with a click track?

Dave: Yes. There was one tune where we wanted to speed up the ending, so we turned off the click at that point. But that was it. You have to be able to play to a click today. I really like using one. I think it’s helped me a lot.

MD: Besides what you play, you seem to like adding a visual element to your performance.

Dave: There’s nothing wrong with a little showmanship.

MD: Is that something you only do with Slayer, or do you apply it to any group you play with?

Dave: I’ll do things with any group. On stage, you have to be a showman. Otherwise it’s a bummer if all you see is a drummer playing with a bored look on his face. It’s like, “Come on!”

MD: You’ve had a solo percussion album in the works for a few years now.

Dave: God, it’s been forever. I don’t know, one of these days I’ll get it out. It’s close to completion. I need to do a
"All I can say without turning into a Slayer
geek is, *Reign In Blood*. The quintessential
speed metal record...end of story."
—Atom Willard, Angels & Airwaves

“In a time when I was just starting to hone
my drumming skills and in a world where
Metallica and Pantera were the definition
of metal to me, I was introduced to Slayer—and
it changed everything. I had just begun to fig-
ure out some of the more complex beats by
Metallica, and even Pantera. But then I heard
Dave Lombardo and the onslaught of speed
and power that is Slayer. Immediately, all
these questions came to mind: ‘Is this for real?
Naw, he can’t seriously do that! Wait a sec-
cond, he couldn’t possibly be that fast with
just two hands and two feet! Dave’s on a dif-
f erent level all together.’"
—Cyrus Bolooki, New Found Glory

“One of the first metal records I ever owned
was Slayer’s *Reign In Blood*. I was blown
away. Dave Lombardo had a huge impact on
my playing. Songs like ‘Angel Of Death’ and
‘Piece By Piece’ showed me you could play
fast but still have groove. Thank you, Dave!”
—Brandon Barnes, Rise Against
Dave Lombardo

bongo overdub, a timbale overdub, and a drumset overdub. The recording is essentially me in my room with a keyboard, drums, and percussion, layering parts. I'll do one beat, layer something on top, layer something else on top of that, and so on.

I've been working on this record in my free time. The problem is, I don't have a lot of free time! When I'm on tour, I really can't work on it because I don't have everything on hand. I've been doing some editing of the parts, but not any recording. When I'm home, I'm occupied with a hundred and one other things. But the record is sitting there, waiting. When it's ready, it'll be out.

**MD:** What's on it? Is it metal?

**Dave:** It's unclassifiable. Some people might describe it as world music. It could be a film soundtrack. It's definitely not metal.

**MD:** Let's talk about the *Drums Of Death* project with DJ Spooky. You did some funk drumming on there—Dave can groove!

**Dave:** My whole goal in life is to play things other than what I'm known for. It's what I have to do. I'm always labeled as a metal drummer or the drummer from Slayer. I want to be known as an all-around drummer.

DJ Spooky flew over to my house and we tracked the basic drum tracks there. He played his grooves, with tape rolling, and I played to them. So I kind of mimicked what was on there, but I played it my way. He then took that stuff back to New York, did some editing, got a couple of singers and other musicians, and put it all together. I think the best part of that record is the drum solo/DJ scratching solo, where we're going back and forth.

**MD:** You've also been working with Fantomas on and off for a few years now. What's it like working with such musical all-stars?

**Dave:** What can you say about some of the most creative musicians on the planet? I'm

“Dave Lombardo is precise and tasty, and he somehow brings dynamics into play, which is extremely rare in metal. His double bass skills are berserk. He often made me want to throw my double pedal out the window. The long fill in the beginning of 'Seasons In The Abyss' gets me every time. Lombardo kills!” — Sam Siegler, *Nightmare Of You*, Gorilla Biscuits
totally inspired by Mike Patton—by his recordings and everything he does. He’s an amazing composer, performer, and conductor. He conducts on stage when we perform. Buzz Osborne is a legendary guitar player. And Trevor Dunn, the bass player, is so good. They’re all phenomenal musicians.

MD: How does the “Fantomas Lombardo” differ from the “Slayer Lombardo”?

Dave: When I’m in Slayer, I’m on cruise control. Like Jeff says, I’m the out-of-control train that doesn’t quite derail, which I take as a compliment because I know exactly what he’s talking about. I’m playing and I’ll go into this roll that comes out of nowhere and all of a sudden, bam, I’m back on the 1. That’s how I am in Slayer.

My role in Fantomas is very different. I’m focused on what’s going to come up next. The music is so complex that I have to be on my toes. At any given moment I might be playing an involved drum part, then switching to cymbals, bells, shakers, or even a gong. It’s very challenging.

MD: Speaking of challenging music, you’ve also worked with free-jazz great John Zorn.

Dave: That was Xu Feng. Oh my God, that was an experience. Zorn had different cards with words printed on them, like soft, hard, rhythmic, arhythmic, and any other description of music you could think of. In the room were two drummers, two guitar players, and two keyboard players. He’d hold up a card and point to me, and I would have to interpret it. John would then point to a guitarist and hold up another card, and the guitarist would start interpreting what he saw and heard. And then, at a drop of a card, he’d tell some other guy to play the same thing. It was constructed noise.

When you listen to the recording now, you might wonder if the music is composed. It wasn’t. Sometimes we would lock into the same beat, but just by coincidence. I really loved that experience. It filled a void in my life musically, and I appreciated it so much.

MD: What are some of the qualities of a good metal drummer—or any drummer, for that matter?

Dave: Uniqueness. Also, the drummer’s contribution to the sound of their band. There are thousands of drummers who can go crazy soloing and playing ambidextrous rhythms, but all of that makes no sense to me unless it’s in a musical context. Fine, you can solo forever, but can you work with the musicians?

MD: Are there any particular drummers you like whose names might surprise us?

Dave: Well, Dave Grohl is amazing to me. When I first heard his drumming, of course, it was with Nirvana. I was just floored because it was straightforward, but he somehow played in a way that really delivered the message of the music. I’m also blown away that he could leave the drum stool, pick up a guitar, and front a band. That is inspiring to me. I would love to do that. I play a little guitar, but nothing to his extent. I’d also love to work with Dave someday. I think it could be interesting musically.

MD: I interviewed Dave a few years ago as a integral part of Slayer’s history vanished on May 7, when bandmembers lost valuable equipment and memorabilia after their rehearsal studio in Riverside, California was burglarized. Lombardo was one of the victims, losing two of his large Tama drum setups, including a kit he had used on the band’s recent tours for the God Hates Us All album.

The stolen kits include a Tama Starclassic in a cherry black finish. The dimensions of the toms are 8x8, 9x10, 10x12, 11x13, 12x14, 12x15, 16x18, 16x20 (custom floor tom), and there are two 18x24 bass drums. Also stolen was a Tama Imperialstar kit in a red finish with chrome bass drum hoops.

Anyone who can offer information that leads to the recovery of the stolen gear will receive, as a reward, an autographed copy of the new Slayer album, two tickets to a Slayer show (transportation not included), and the opportunity to meet the band and have their photo taken with Dave.

If you have any information regarding these stolen kits, please contact lostdrums@warnerreprise.com. No questions will be asked.
Dave Lombardo

age, and he mentioned that he loves your playing and that he'd been listening to you since 1984's *Haunting The Chapel.*

**Dave:** Really? I didn't know that.

**MD:** Are there any other drummers you find inspiring?

**Dave:** There's a band that has blown me away called The Locust. I get goose bumps when I think of them. I remember them on stage, every night, making their noise—a perfect noise. It's music on another level. And their drummer, Gabe Serbian, is phenomenal.

I also like Dale Crover of The Melvins. That guy hits hard. I was on stage with him recently, in The Fantomas/Melvins Big Band. The odd-time stuff that he does confused me at first, and it took me some time to get it down. Speaking of Dave Grohl, Dale Crover, and Gabe Serbian, they all play four-piece drumsets, and I'm impressed to hear how many sounds they can get out of a small kit.

Other drummers I've been enjoying lately are John Dolmayan from System Of A Down and Joey Jordison of Slipknot. I've toured with these guys and seen them play quite a bit. The musical contributions they make to their bands is huge.

**MD:** So you've influenced drummers who are now influencing you. What's going on here?

**Dave:** It's because I'm still listening to music. I listen to *everything.* I'm not in a closet engulfed by myself. I listen to what other people have done or are doing, and that in turn keeps me on my toes.

**MD:** What are you most proud of on the new Slayer album?

**Dave:** The thing I'm most proud of is the fact that I'm working again with my "alma mater." As for the record, the fact that I'm back doing all of the double bass stuff and playing the extended fills takes me back to when I was a kid. I was seventeen when I got into this band, barely out of high school. I'm very proud to be recording and performing with these guys again.