

## 8 Shake, Rattle, and Rolls

### *Drumming and the Aesthetics of Americana*

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So correct me if I'm wrong. Americana is folk music with drumset. COMMENT FROM ATOMICORGANIC ON DRUMFORUM.ORG<sup>1</sup>

Since its emergence as a radio format in the mid-1990s, the Americana genre has provided a unique venue for drummers to participate in a folk musical context – a space seldom reserved for percussive accompaniment, especially on modern drum kits. Closely associated with several genre categories – most notably American Roots music, as well as alt.country, jazz, rock, blues, and many others – Americana inherited a mixture of drumming traditions, each with their own percussive codes, conventions, legacies, and repertoires. These range from ‘drumless’ bluegrass to iconic rock albums and bands of the 1960s and 1970s; 1990s post-punk aesthetics; early blues and rock and roll; and the more recent revitalization of the African-American string band tradition. Much like the genre itself, ‘Americana drumming’ is difficult to pin down, but certain ideas have developed around conventionalized sound palettes, instrumentation, and performance techniques that speak to a shared aesthetic discourse. Software companies have even released drum sample packages that fetishize the timbral qualities of calf skin drumheads, citing their legendary preference among top drummers in the genre, including Jay Bellerose and iconic forerunner Levon Helm.<sup>2</sup> Apple’s *GarageBand* offers pre-assigned and genre-specific drummers such as ‘Mason’: a bearded (and possibly plaid-wearing) avatar silhouette found under the ‘Songwriter’ category who is ‘inspired by Americana and classic R&B artists’ and plays ‘loose, swaggering beats on a vintage kit’.<sup>3</sup> Such notions permeate descriptions of drumming in the genre, where the intersection of material culture, ideal drum tones, and time-feels coalesce.

As such, this chapter will explore some of the aesthetic and discursive dynamics of drumming in Americana, focusing on the work of celebrated session drummer Jay Bellerose. I argue that Bellerose’s performances help unpack some of the genre’s stylistic and temporal ambiguities, as his drumming confers both a sense of contemporaneity and, paradoxically, a proto-Modernity that spans the history of drumming in American popular

music. While I will not be able to provide an in-depth overview of Americana and all of its variegated streams and influences, this chapter will explore drums and percussion in the broader scope of Americana to help contextualize different approaches, sounds, instruments, and how they correspond to shared generic concepts.<sup>4</sup> Following ethnomusicologist Simon Keegan-Phipps and his description of tradition as ‘a way of engaging with material’, Americana similarly functions as a sign-vehicle for drummers to musically participate in a given genre by engaging in its shared aesthetic resources.<sup>5</sup>

### **Drumming Americana, Accompanying the Folk**

Sometimes criticized as the symbolic encroachment of commercial, mass-produced, or popular music styles, the drum kit rarely signifies ‘tradition’ in ways that would resonate with many folk musicians and fans. Debates surrounding the appropriateness and integrity of adding drums to various folk musics continues to circulate online, though it is certainly not new. This includes the bluegrass music scene<sup>6</sup> – a genre that is often unaccompanied by the drums and whose rhythmic texture (i.e. its characteristic ‘boom-chick’ backbeat) is already achieved between the upright bass, mandolin, acoustic guitar, or ‘chop’ of the fiddle. For instance, editor of *Bluegrass Today* John Loveless recently published an April Fool’s article detailing how the *International Bluegrass Music Awards* (IBMA) will have a new ‘Drummer of the Year Award’. It noted how Ringo Starr celebrated the announcement since The Beatles always wanted to be recognized as a bluegrass band (but stuck to rock and roll because of their controversial use of the kit). Continuing, Loveless described other IBMA events, such as a ‘round-the-clock *Will the Drum Circle Be Unbroken* jam to run in the lobby of the Marriott City Center in Raleigh from 9:00 a.m. Tuesday morning through Sunday morning 9:00 a.m.’<sup>7</sup> While such hackneyed jokes have been around for centuries, they repeat longstanding controversies surrounding the use of drums in more traditionally-coded musical contexts.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, online drum forums share advice about achieving ideal Americana sounds, pinpointing records with vintage kits, analogue recording equipment, preferences for simplified or ‘appropriate’ drum parts, and often emphasizing the importance of ‘tone over attack’.<sup>9</sup> According to one blogger, ‘every song needs a “rhythm beat” of some sort, but it doesn’t always have to come from a five-piece drum-kit’, recommending that other drummers should emphasize ‘pulses, not beats’ to support Americana compositions.<sup>10</sup> Session drummer Stephen Belans also

describes a simple ‘heartbeat’ as the foundational groove in most Americana contexts, since ‘there’s only so much space you can take up as a drummer in this kind of music and have it work out’. While admitting that there isn’t one type of Roots/Americana sound, Belans describes it as a ‘natural sound’ on record: ‘It doesn’t sound gated, it doesn’t sound crazy squished, it doesn’t have some ridiculous false reverb’. Instead, recorded Americana drums are meant to sound as if ‘you’re standing in the room’ with the drummer.<sup>11</sup> As with many styles of drumming, the acoustic parameter of *timbre* – the ‘multidimensional attribute of perceived sound comprising everything that is not pitch or loudness’ – remains a critical factor in the sound profile and description of Americana drumming among practitioners;<sup>12</sup> articulating the profound impact of learning from recordings and the enmeshed interaction that occurs between aural emulation and applied techniques.

### **Americana’s Fluidity: Mapping a Rhythmic Legacy**

According to the Americana Music Association, the genre is defined as:

contemporary music that incorporates elements of various American roots music styles, including country, roots-rock, folk, bluegrass, R&B and blues, resulting in a distinctive roots-oriented sound that lives in a world apart from the pure forms of the genres upon which it may draw. While acoustic instruments are often present and vital, Americana also often uses a full electric band.<sup>13</sup>

Reflective of the broad scope of the association’s definition, there are a number of inter-related genre streams and industry trajectories that helped collectively lead to the formation of Americana. For better or worse, many of these terms are used interchangeably, or have become consolidated under the Americana banner. This includes alt.country, Outlaw Country, Hard Country, and Roots music<sup>14</sup> – the latter being one of the more ambiguous terms, applied as a qualifier for alt.country music scenes outside the United States (such as the ‘Calgary Roots’ community in Alberta, Canada),<sup>15</sup> or as a World Music marketing strategy for diverse folk and traditional musics that problematically ‘resemble the source from which it sprang’.<sup>16</sup> There are also several other sub-genre categories and artists that have been folded into the Americana discourse, speaking to a legacy of ‘alternative’ folk and country artistry, including southern rock, country rock, folk rock, and neo-traditional country.<sup>17</sup> Many of these categories were defined largely in opposition to mainstream country and popular music, positioning artists as outsiders, firebrands, or forgotten

icons working outside the Nashville music industry (in some cases, emplacing a Roots or Americana sound onto other cities, such as Austin, Texas).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Fabian Holt distinguishes American Roots music from Americana along the lines of institutional support, noting how films and initiatives sponsored by PBS, the Smithsonian Institute, and others positioned Roots music as ‘an essentialist metaphor of timeless authenticity in the context of a common cultural history’.<sup>19</sup> Since Holt’s publication, however, I would argue that distinctions between the two categories have overlapped further: blurring the lines between Americana’s once youthful, hip ‘citybilly’ punk rock, or ‘rock influenced country’ marketability with Roots music’s shared revivalism, the collapsing distinctions between folk and popular music, and the recontextualization of blues, gospel, and bluegrass as ‘old and stable components of *the* national canon’.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, the catalogue of Americana artists and influential figures seems to grow with each passing year. Several ‘best-of’ album lists tend to distinguish alt.country albums from Roots, Outlaw, or Americana categories, but they often share many of the same names. *Paste Magazine*’s alt.country overview included Gillian Welch, Wilco, Ryan Adams, Lucinda Williams, Uncle Tupelo, Johnny Cash, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, Lyle Lovett, k.d. lang, and Sturgill Simpson.<sup>21</sup> In their ‘Story of Outlaw Country in 33 Songs’ article, *Pitchfork* included contemporary acts such as Miranda Lambert, as well as early icons beginning with Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Townes Van Zandt, and Waylon Jennings.<sup>22</sup> *No Depression*’s compilation albums and ‘bookzines’ include Johnny Cash’s ‘The Time of the Preacher’ (featuring Members of Soundgarden, Nirvana, and Alice in Chains), tracks from Whiskeytown (Ryan Adams’ early band), Neko Case, The Carter Family’s original ‘No Depression in Heaven’,<sup>23</sup> country stars Patty Loveless and Keiran Kane,<sup>24</sup> and the chamber/folk music project Abigail Washburn and the Sparrow Quartet (featuring Bela Fleck).<sup>25</sup>

*But what about the drums?* From full-volume, rock-oriented rhythm sections to minimalist kick drum, snare, and/or tambourine set-ups (i.e. early Mumford and Sons, Shakey Graves, the Lumineers); the ‘barnyard and junkyard’ sounds of Tom Waits; or the subtle percussive accompaniment on Gillian Welch’s recordings (*Revival*, 1996; featuring Jim Keltner and Buddy Harman), drums in the Americana genre have not coalesced into a definitive sound or approach.<sup>26</sup> There are, however, key precedents and signposts. Perhaps more than any other figure, Levon Helm’s work with The Band is cited as *the* pioneering example of early Americana.<sup>27</sup> His drumming was characterized by a tasteful blend of R&B, soul, early rock and roll, country, second line, and gospel grooves, often on deadened tomtoms and muted cymbals (using tape or towels) using a ‘lighter’ cymbal articulation with the tip of the drumstick. Helm was, of course, famous for

seamlessly incorporating vocals with his drumming, but he was also described as possessing a ‘less is more’ approach that ‘play[ed] for the song’.<sup>28</sup> This created space for the other instruments, while also managing to produce an incredible in-between straight and swung time feel. Retrospective tributes to the late drummer described Helm as the centre of a ‘ramshackle’ Band sound that was a ‘hybrid of blues shuffle and street-march, with a fat, whomping back beat that sat so far “behind” . . . that it nearly steps into the next bar’.<sup>29</sup> *Modern Drummer* magazine even described the seminal album *Big Pink* as ‘the soundtrack of the American collective unconscious’, focusing on ‘the deep traditions of rural America, from mountain music to gospel to R&B, rockabilly, and especially the sounds of the deep South and folk music’.<sup>30</sup> In these contexts, Helm’s straight/swung feel, vintage drum tones, Southern identification (a native of Arkansas), and The Band’s hybrid folk, soul, and rock and roll endure in contemporary discussions of ideal Americana drumming.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, there exists a more timbrally complex and esoteric stream of drumming performance in Americana – one that gestures towards the sound and minimal instrumentation of early folkloric field recordings, even evoking the percussive sound worlds of Tom Waits (a progenitor of the genre). Waits’ ‘visionary chronicles of derelict America’ have long exploited the narrative potential of timbre, including his use of ‘non-instruments’ (brake drums, chest drawers, rooster crows) and ‘unusual textures, sounds, percussion, rhythms, and recording techniques’.<sup>31</sup> Taken together, these rhythmic and textural undercurrents reflect a shared ‘sonic aesthetic’ in Americana, one that ‘emphasizes the humanity and materiality of music-making’. Here, Christine Steinbock writes how several Americana artists exploit the ‘anomalies of human-made music and the unique sonic qualities that machines cannot replicate’, such as ‘the hand clap, knee slap body percussion in Gillian Welch’s “Six White Horses”’ or ‘the abrasive attack in Justin Townes Earle’s guitar playing’.<sup>32</sup> Focusing on the music of Welch and her collaborator Dave Rawlings, Steinbock explores how the artists ‘disintermediate their relationship with listeners and express Americana’s human-centred sonic aesthetic by providing a space for the anomalies of humanmade music to flourish’, noting their penchant for recording live off the floor, as well as a ‘general eschewing’ of digital editing.<sup>33</sup> These ‘anomalies’ become authenticated, reflecting themes in Americana as off-beat, misunderstood, imperfect, and ultimately, humanized. While such concepts are linguistically tied to ideas about the more ambiguous dimensions of timbre, they lend themselves to drumming material culture and applied practice where metaphor translates into sonic palettes and performance techniques.<sup>34</sup> For drummers, what would be an otherwise

straightforward backbeat groove can be texturally enriched by the addition (or substitution) of alternative percussive elements, generating a more 'sloshy' and complex time-feel. This sound is indicative of the characteristic grooves of Jim Keltner (John Lennon, The Travelling Wilbury's, T Bone Burnett, Ry Cooder), who often simultaneously performs with a variety of shakers and tambourines while on the kit. Today, several session drummers in the Roots and Americana scenes perform in this manner using prepared kits, bells, beads, tambourines, auxiliary percussion, and shakers, including Marco Giovino (Norah Jones, Robert Plant and the Band of Joy), Butch Norton (Lucinda Williams), among many others. This approach can sonically obfuscate the more conventional drum kit 'trinity' (i.e. the kick, snare, and hi-hat) through using alternate sound sources, revitalizing both the 'contraption' element that distinguished the design of early trap drum kits, as well as diverging from more conventional drum sounds and raucous volumes.

From a marketing standpoint, these atypical percussive sounds and textures often accompany a 'refined' and mature artist narrative, particularly among repackaged legacy artists who were originally marketed as rock, blues, or mainstream country, but have since been included in the Roots and Americana fold (such as Robert Plant, BB King, Elvis Costello, Johnny Cash). The sound and production value of these recordings reveal a unique discourse of aging, memory, and what Gillian Turnbull describes as 'the aesthetic of history'.<sup>35</sup> Here, an aching beauty resides under a worn and weathered patina, expressing notes of redemption, loss, mortality, and nostalgia, often through its use of acoustic instrumental timbres and references to multiple styles of American popular music. Though problematically re-articulating the fetish of 'liveness' in rock ideology where acoustic performance functions as a 'sign of the real', it is here where Joseph Kortarba considers Americana as providing 'musical experiences that are contemporary but not pop;<sup>36</sup> meaningful but in a way relevant to aging folks; and accessible to folks who do not like their music over-amplified and or directed to some other – younger – audience'.<sup>37</sup> A prime example is Johnny Cash's later work with producer Rick Rubin in the 1990s, which engaged in a creative discourse of genre temporality. In particular, Cash's posthumous release *Ain't No Grave* (2010) sonically bookended his career by providing an almost tongue-and-cheek 'necro-marketing' of his voice from the grave,<sup>38</sup> and the song's overdubbed 'percussive chains and footsteps' reiterated the singer's longtime associations with outlaws and prisoners.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, Americana recordings can re-situate legacy performers at the confluence of old and new, producing a *sense* of temporality – what Georgina Born writes as the 'outer time of cultural history' – by engaging with a humanized (and percussive) sonic aesthetic.<sup>40</sup>

## Case Study: Jay Bellerose

One of the most prolific session drummers today, Jay Bellerose has collaborated with a who's who of contemporary artists (Ray Lamontagne, Rihannon Giddens, Alison Krauss, The Punch Brothers) and various legacy acts in the Americana genre (including Robert Plant, BB King, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, and Alain Toussaint). Far from suggesting that Bellerose's output can provide a stand-in for all forms of drumming in Americana, his work and ongoing collaborations with key tastemakers – most notably, producers T Bone Burnett and Joe Henry – situates him at the forefront of progressive folk and roots music in the United States. In recent interviews and magazine articles, the drummer has shared stories about his upbringing, key influences, as well as a fateful incident that happened while he was studying at the Berklee College of Music. The most distilled version of this narrative appears in his bio on Alison Krauss' website:

While a student at The Berklee School of Music in Boston, Bellerose had his drum kit stolen, and it is hard to over-estimate the significance of the event on his future artistry: working from a hodge-podge of drums donated by friends, Jay began to discover new sonic possibilities by assembling mismatched kit configurations that varied from song to song, setting battered marching drums and bits of arcane, vaudeville-era hand percussion devices along side more conventional modern drums. The ever-changing results revealed a signature sensibility that finds Jay compared to impressionist painters as often as to drum luminaries like Sonny Greer.<sup>41</sup>

The stolen drum kit narrative is intriguing for its way of connecting Bellerose's playing to earlier (i.e. 'arcane') popular styles, coupling his drumming with the material and cultural histories of the kit, as well as symbolically shedding the weight of modern set-ups, timbres, and conventions in contemporary music. The event was significant (and potentially ruinous) for a session drummer in the 1980s, who, according to Bellerose, was expected to 'mute the drums as much as you can and hit them as hard as you can'.<sup>42</sup> The story was expanded upon in a podcast interview with Nashville-based songwriter and producer Steve Dawson. As Bellerose explained, his stolen kit was replaced by a friend's simple, beat up Ludwig bass drum, snare, and cymbal: 'This thing taught me so much about how many more sounds are in the few pieces of a drum set that a lot of people just overlook. I was using the whole animal, I was ringing it all out'.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Bellerose connected his newfound set-up with memories from his childhood, likening it to his early interests in 'pulling sound' out of household items, including tapping on boxes, washing machines, pots, and pans.<sup>44</sup> This self-styled mythology about his intuitive interests in



everyday objects positions Bellerose as somewhat of an outsider, drumming against the grain of mainstream conventions, very much like the Roots and Americana musicians he often performs with. He experimented with various kit set-ups in his early career, even playing on what appears to be a djembe in place of a snare with Paula Cole in the 1990s.<sup>45</sup>

### **Kit Culture: On Gear**

So much interest and attention has been placed on Jay Bellerose's collection of vintage kits that many descriptions of his playing seem to erase any boundaries between the man and the instrument. Inspired by the artistry and sounds of big band drummers such as Buddy Rich, Sonny Green, and Gene Krupa, Bellerose often uses larger drum sizes from the era. Not only does this allow him to project without playing as hard, but it coincides with a certain 'touch' he developed with wooden sticks that allows him to 'keep the energy, and play quiet, and *still rock*' (citing Charlie Watts as an influential example of a drummer 'pulling sound' from the kit without hitting too hard).<sup>46</sup> Bellerose is famously known for performing without a hi-hat, opting instead for a fistful of maracas, mounted tambourines, or tying bells and shakers to his left leg. His cymbal use is often sparse, leaving considerable room for the drum's bottom end to ring out prominently. While Bellerose's patterns are not necessarily complicated (especially when transcribed on paper), they are complex: nuanced with selective fill placements and grooves that evoke early jazz records, second-line drumming, Dixieland, as well as soul, R&B, and early rock and roll. And yet, his recordings achieve something else entirely, as if providing snapshots of drum kit performance through the aperture of its weathered and gnarled history; conveying a mood with a 'subliminal kind of tone' with rhythmic phrasing that is 'something you feel more than hear'.<sup>47</sup> Live, Bellerose shakes his kit in ways that exploit its jangly artifacts, including squeaky hardware; some of his calf skin drumheads are even patched together with pieces of leather. Fans of Bellerose are often surprised when they witness him perform, as a post from Steve Krugman on the *Hollywood Drum* website describes:

It's difficult to separate hearing Bellerose play from seeing Bellerose play . . . As drummers, it's generally pretty natural to visualize a recorded performance in the mind's eye . . . Bellerose's approach to the instrument is singularly unfamiliar. To hear him without sight or see him without sound invites mystery.<sup>48</sup>

Krugman goes on to discuss the various maracas, mounted and shaken tambourines used during Bellerose's set at an LA venue with Jennifer





Figure 8.1 Jay Bellerose performing at *The York* in Los Angeles with Molly Miller (guitar) and Jennifer Condos (bass) in September 2019.

Image credit: Lawrence Buccat (screen shot of YouTube video, used with permission)

Source: L. Buccat. Molly Miller Trio, YouTube (2 May 2019), available from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpvFpTk7psY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpvFpTk7psY) (accessed 15 April 2020)

Condos and guitarist Molly Miller (see Figure 8.1), noting his effortless brushwork, constantly switching out mallets and sticks, and ‘blur[ring] the lines between conventional drumset and ensemble percussion, improvisation and orchestration’. Such observations are found elsewhere, primarily on Robert Plant and Allison Krauss’ *Raising Sand* recording (2007), which received considerable attention for Bellerose’s ‘slinky grooves’, unique drum sounds, vintage kit set-ups, and ‘shakers strapped to his ankles’.<sup>49</sup> Fans the world over have fawned Bellerose ‘loose and jangly’, ‘deep-but-dead’ Americana drum sound, which collectively accounts for both time-feel and copious vintage set-ups.<sup>50</sup>

In particular, Bellerose’s 1940s-era Slingerland ‘Rolling Bomber’ kit has achieved legendary status among collectors and fans. Known for its all-wood construction (including rosewood lugs and rims) due to metal rationing throughout WWII, the drums confer a strong sense of cultural capital, coinciding with an ‘obsessive preference for “vintage” musical technology’ among Americana and alternative country fans, both young and old.<sup>51</sup> Described as having a ‘natural resonance’ because of their construction, Bellerose’s use of the kit has inspired several others to seek them out, including Norwegian jazz drummer Erland Dahlen and *Modern Drummer* writer Patrick Berkery, who interviewed Bellerose in 2008.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, widespread interest in the Rolling Bomber kit also points to an underlying trope of Pax Americana nostalgia: a sentiment for when the United States was truly ‘great’, which persisted in country music during the Gulf War and remained throughout the Americana genre post-9/11.<sup>53</sup>

## Developing (and Producing) a Characteristic Drum Sound

According to Bellerose, the Rolling Bomber kit represents his broader interests in a more uncontrolled tuning aesthetic, as well as a willingness to adapt to changes in humidity, among other factors that affect the drums while on the road.<sup>54</sup> Admitting that he'd rather 'just change the drum' instead of tuning it, he claims that it is 'more about the character of the note and less about the pitch of the note. I love dissonance and overtones. Sometimes I like when things rub a little bit, and it doesn't sound perfect'.<sup>55</sup> Bellerose apparently developed this unconventional aesthetic from a process of listening to rare and discontinued vinyl (what he calls 'sonically-odd stuff'). This includes emulating Alan Lomax's field recordings and finding drums that similarly sounded as if they were 'distorted or . . . like they have reverb on them', comparing Lomax's recordings to 'a Tom Wait's record'.<sup>56</sup> Given his unique drum sound, vintage collection, and approach to the kit, one could read Bellerose's drumming at the primordial intersection of American popular music: a reimagined *drumscape*<sup>57</sup> that blends roots music from the pre-rock era (the 'legends of country music, blues, and the folk revival') with the sonic imprint of technological artifacts heard on early field recording devices.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, Bellerose's characteristic drum sound developed through collaborating with a long list of personnel, including record producers, engineers, mixing and mastering technicians. Eschewing the belief that he alone can recreate the 'T Bone' or 'Joe Henry' drum sound in the studio, Bellerose explains that it is 'more complex than just hiring one person from that camp, or hiring me to play drums. I mean, yeah, you're going to get shades of it. But there's a team'.<sup>59</sup> A key figure in this development is T Bone Burnett – leading authority and arbiter of American roots music, and whose work in film helped revive international interests in old time, bluegrass, and Americana (in particular, *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (2000)). In many ways, Burnett's approach to recording drums and percussion resonates with multiple facets of Bellerose's aesthetic, including his fondness for playing at quieter volumes. Burnett's interests in 'minimizing attack and maximizing tone',<sup>60</sup> for instance, focuses on room sound, reflective surfaces, and placing 'microphones so that they hear all of the tone and the overtones of the drums'.<sup>61</sup> There is also a diminished reliance on compression in Burnett's productions, which is achieved instead by playing very quietly, using calf skin drumheads, and tapping on the skins softly 'to get a much fuller sound'.<sup>62</sup> At the level of applied practice, Bellerose's atypical approach can even be connected to specific Burnett productions. For instance, the drummer recorded alongside Jim Keltner on BB King's 2008 album *One Kind Favor*, as well as on Burnett's solo record

*True False Identity* (2006) with both Keltner and Carla Azar. These multi-drummer sessions encouraged Bellerose to situate himself amongst the other rhythms, perhaps guiding his solo-drumming effort on *Raising Sand* (another Burnett production) with its prominent auxiliary percussive sounds and warm, deadened drum sounds – a ‘third voice’, perhaps, stepping out and taking centre stage. Furthermore, both Burnett and Bellerose like to challenge preconceptions about the ‘imposed role on drummers’ as timekeepers (Bellerose),<sup>63</sup> critiquing how conventionalized parts of the kit (such as the hi-hat) dictate ‘proscribed time’ in a way that ‘can make the beat stiff’ (Burnett).<sup>64</sup> Here, Burnett describes why they did not use hi-hats during the *One Kind Favor* sessions, opting instead for ‘these big shakers . . . like 10 or 15 different gourds with beads in them or nuts . . . So it expands and broadens the beat’.<sup>65</sup> This affinity for alternative percussive textures coincides with Burnett’s broader conception that all instruments are a drum of some sort,<sup>66</sup> articulating the possibility for any sound source to function as a type of percussion. In this context, backbeats do not have to necessarily occur on a snare drum (or any other conventionalized part of the kit), just ‘as long as it’s getting hit in the right place with the right meaning’ – generating a low-end and esoteric sound world through instrumental substitution that sets up the rhythms and beats ‘in the overtone structure, which creates a lot of mystery and a real sense of place’.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusions

This chapter investigated some of the aesthetic discourses surrounding drums and percussion in the Americana genre, including material cultures, performance techniques, collaborations, and key figures. Taken collectively, these dynamics ‘make sense through their interrelatedness, not as isolated events’ because ‘genre can be viewed as a culture with the characteristics of a system or systemic functions’.<sup>68</sup> Rather than trying to define Americana drumming as a clear set of techniques and approaches, I highlighted how the realms of timbre and texture give rise to complex forms of percussive musicking; generating a discourse where vintage drums, ‘warm’ tones, and behind-the-beat time feels mutually convey at least a *rhythmic* understanding of something as ambiguous as Americana.

## Notes

- 1 ‘Atomicorganic’, *Americana Drums* (18 July 2011), available from: [www.drumforum.org/threads/americana-drums.53678/page-3.atomicmorganic](http://www.drumforum.org/threads/americana-drums.53678/page-3.atomicmorganic) (accessed 12 March 2020).
- 2 ‘Organic Drum Loops: About’, available from: [www.organicdrumloops.com/about/](http://www.organicdrumloops.com/about/) (accessed 12 March 2020).

- 3 'GarageBand for Mac: Choose Genres and Drummers', (9 August 2019), available from: [https://support.apple.com/kb/PH24948?viewlocale=en\\_US&locale=en\\_US](https://support.apple.com/kb/PH24948?viewlocale=en_US&locale=en_US) (accessed 12 March 2020).
- 4 There are several studies that have achieved this kind of work, including: P. Fox and B. Ching (eds.), *Old Roots, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt. Country Music*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); A. A. Fox. "'Alternative" to What? O Brother, September 11, and the Politics of Country Music' in C. K. Wolfe and J. E. Akenson (eds.), *Country Music Goes to War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005); F. Holt. *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- 5 S. Keegan-Phipps. 'The Study of Digital Media and Creative Culture: Why the Folk Arts Are a Special Case (3) Innovation and Tradition' (5 April 2015), available from: <https://simonkeeganhipps.wordpress.com/category/research-projects/> (accessed 12 March 2020).
- 6 r/Bluegrass. 'Drums: Yes or Nay?', available from: [www.reddit.com/r/Bluegrass/comments/45hkg0/drums\\_yea\\_or\\_nay/](http://www.reddit.com/r/Bluegrass/comments/45hkg0/drums_yea_or_nay/) (accessed 12 March 2020).
- 7 J. Lawless. 'IBMA Announces New Award for Drummers', *Bluegrass Today* (1 April 2019), available from: <https://bluegrasstoday.com/ibma-announces-new-award-for-drummers/> (accessed 12 March 2020).
- 8 See M. Brennan. *Kick It: A Social History of the Drum Kit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- 9 *Americana Drums*.
- 10 B. Benediktsson. 'How to Create Rhythm without a Full Drum Kit', *Envato Tuts+* (13 April 2013) available from: <https://cutt.ly/zgQYfuN> (accessed 12 March 2020).
- 11 *Ibid*.
- 12 Z. Wallmark, M. Iacoboni, C. Deblieck, and R. A. Kendall. 'Embodied Listening and Timbre: Perceptual, Acoustical, and Neural Correlates', *Music Perception* 35:3 (2018), p. 332.
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