QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE & JOSH HOM & JOEY GA
EAGLES OF DEATH METAL’S
MESTILLO

Story by “Pistol” Pete Kaufmann
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Between multitalented rock hero Josh Homme and storm-bringing journeyman Joey Castillo, there’s enough high-performance drumming to power two supercharged bands.
It's the middle of winter, and it's eighty-five degrees. I'm in L.A., fresh off the plane from a very cold NYC, driving up the freeway to Pink Duck Studios to meet Josh Homme and Joey Castillo from Queens Of The Stone Age. Castillo holds the drum chair in Queens, and Homme (rhymes with Tommy) is the band's leader, singer, and primary guitarist. Josh is also a unique and creative drummer.

Homme plays down his kit abilities, but don’t let his humility fool you. Besides being extremely involved in the drum parts on Queens records, he’s the main drummer and co-creator, along with lead singer Jesse “Boots Electric” Hughes, of the band Eagles Of Death Metal.

Homme’s drumming has been described as quirky, unconventional, original, and even “ass shaking” by some of the biggest musicians in the industry. EODM songs like “I'm Your Torpedo,” “Prissy Prancin’,” and “Tight Pants” move to an oddly funky variety of desert rock ‘n’ roll drums, born from a distinctive songwriter’s imagination and delivered by an old-soul basher who knows exactly what he wants to hear in a drum performance.

Given Homme’s hectic schedule, he’s able to tour with Eagles Of Death Metal only when time permits. That’s where things get interesting, if not a little confusing, as Castillo handles a big part of the gigging duty with EODM—when, of course, he and Homme aren’t on the road or in the studio with Queens.

Castillo’s enthusiasm, work ethic, and talent have taken him precisely where he wants to go, and he’s filled some pretty big shoes. Joey took over the QOTSA drum chair when Dave Grohl went back to Foo Fighters after recording and touring behind Queens’ 2002 album, Songs For The Deaf. Castillo is grateful and honored to be playing in two of his favorite bands, but he’s not phased by it. Listen to his playing on the Queens recordings Lullabies To Paralyze and Era Vulgaris to hear the ideas, the groove, and the commitment this mighty drummer brings to everything he plays.

Castillo is happy to go from one gig to next with very little rest, because he doesn’t think of it as work. QOTSA and EODM are much more than two successful bands; they’re part of a musical family tree whose branches are way longer than the average group’s: Grohl, Jack Black, Josh Freese, Samantha Maloney, Claude Coleman Jr., Dean Ween, PJ Harvey, Billy Gibbons, Peaches, Mark Lanegan, and Rob Halford are just a few of the friends and guests they’ve worked with. If this were a high school gym class, theirs would be the team you’d want to play on.

As I pull up to the studio, Brian “Big Hands” O’Connor, bassist for EODM, lets me in through the gate. (I told you these guys are a family!) Inside, I run into Jesse Hughes and we catch up about life, music, and what it’s like playing with two completely different drummers in the same band. Hughes says he’s probably one of the luckiest men on Earth to be doing what he does and collaborating with such great talent.

Just as Hughes begins playing a few new songs for me, Homme and Castillo enter. We say hello, the two drummers begin setting up their kits for the photo shoot, and I jump in and get the interview rolling. After all, it’s not every day that you get to enter the kingdom of the Queens and soar with the Eagles.

**Josh And Joey's Favorites**

**Josh**

Devo: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo! (Alan Myers)
AC/DC: Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap (Phil Rudd)
Black Flag: all (Chuck Biscuits, Robo, Bill Stevenson)
Led Zeppelin: Led Zeppelin II (John Bonham)
Band Of Gypsys: S/T (Buddy Miles)

**Joey**

Buddy Rich: all
Led Zeppelin: all (John Bonham)
Fear: The Record (Split Shit)
The Damned: Damned Damned Damned (Rod Scabies)
Chuck Biscuits: all
**MD:** Eagles Of Death Metal’s first album, *Peace Love Death Metal*, is so stripped down and raw—the drums sound as if they were played on buckets, pots, and pans.

**Josh:** That album was done in two days. Taylor Hawkins gave me this kit I’m using, this little Ludwig that was in his house. I’ve never tuned it, and I’ve never cased it. Before, I was playing with pieces of stuff that Jesse and I had.

With the Eagles we kind of knew what detractors were going to say and what people who were into it were going to say. The detractors, not knowing that Eagles predates Queens Of The Stone Age, were going to be like, ‘What’s this side project?’ Why is Josh on drums, and who’s this guy with the moustache riding coaster? It’s very natural for us to do, and Jesse’s moustache is not ironic.

**MD:** When I was touring with Amandla, the late New Orleans drummer specific about the parts they want on that album was done in two days. I also think the mystery of tuning drums is not really that big of a mystery. They key is to have a sound in your head that you’d like to hear. Otherwise, you’re not quite walking toward something. If you have a specific sound in mind, you have a destination you’re heading for.

**MD:** Speaking of sounds, it appears you have a concept in Eagles—a lot of woodblocks, shakers, tambourines, and unique drumbeats. It sounds very thought-out.

**Josh:** It is. I’ve always had a close relationship with the drummers I’ve played with. [Former Queens bassist] Nick Oliveri and I got to jam with Hunt Sales [Iggy Pop, David Bowie, Todd Rundgren] when we were looking for a drummer for the Queens, and Hunt said something that’s always stuck with me: “Decent drummer, good band. Great drummer, classic band.”

Regarding the drum parts being interesting, I’ve always played guitar like a bass player, so the notion of hi-hat in the verse and ride in the chorus doesn’t mean anything to me.

**MD:** Drummers who start on a melodic instrument often play differently from the last of a dying breed of drummers who propel, push, and drive, punching you through the back of your head. It’s a ragging sonic force. I don’t play any games on the bandstand—it’s freakin’ war— and neither does Joey. You can hear his drums coming off the stage acoustically, even under 8 million decibels of sound out of the front of the house.

**Claude Coleman Jr.**

My favorite drummers have always been songwriters who can put it down pretty confidently on the kit, like Todd Rundgren, Stevie Wonder, Dean Ween—and Josh Homme. Their approach in many ways is beyond that of drummers who only play kit, and they’re usually very specific about the parts they want on their music, down to the fills. And as a drummer, Josh is putting the roll back with the rock—getting the music to move that ass like it should be doing in the first damn place.

I’ve always felt a kinship with Joey. He’s the last of a dying breed of real rock drummers who propel, push, and drive, punching you through the back of your head. It’s a ragging sonic force. I don’t play any games on the bandstand—it’s freakin’ war—and neither does Joey. You can hear his drums coming off the stage acoustically, even under 8 million decibels of sound out of the front of the house.

**Samanta Maloney**

Josh Homme’s approach to the drumset is different from your average drummer’s. He comes to the kit with the mind of a guitarist, so his fills sometimes don’t make any sense as a “drummer” would play them. At times they feel awkward to play—so wrong, yet so right—because you can no longer rely on your instincts. For me, playing drums for EODM was pure fun and also bizarrely a challenge—sometimes it was so “easy” that it was actually hard.

**Dean Ween**

I’ve gotten to work with Josh on four different albums over the years, and I like the way he uses the studio. There’s a big contrast between recording and playing live, and Josh will try anything in the studio to see what happens. This is very similar to how Ween does things, so I feel right at home when I work with him. He’s a very good engineer and could probably work as a producer full time if he wanted to. *Songs For The Deaf* is one of the best-sounding rock albums of the past twenty years, and a lot of those sounds came from Josh playing around with strange mics andamps and generally knowing his shit.


Queens of the Stone Age, “Little Sister,” *Lullabies To Paralyze*, played by Joey Castillo

This is the signature Queens beat (what Homme calls “the white man’s groove”), with lots of offbeat 8ths on the bass drum, a Jam Block used as an alternative timekeeper, and very tight drumming during the verses. The bass drum plays the “&” of beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. Variations of this beat can be heard on the Queens songs “Regular John,” “In My Head,” and “3’s & 7’s.” There’s very little downbeat here, which creates a momentum that pushes the beat forward like a train with no brakes.

Eagles of Death Metal, “I Want You So Hard (Boy’s Bad News),” *Death By Sexy*, played by Joey Castillo

Castillo shows off his powerful single-pedal mastery by playing constant 8th notes on the bass drum around beats 2 and 4 on the snare. A great example of Joey’s musical drumming, it’s a busy approach that nonetheless doesn’t get in the way of the music. Played fast, this beat is a real workout for the bass drum foot. Another great example of Castillo’s single bass drum skills can be heard on “Sick, Sick, Sick” from Queens’ *Era Vulgaris* album.

EODM, “Flames Go Higher,” *Peace Love Death Metal*, played by Josh Homme

This is a funky simple groove with a lopsided feel, and it’s a perfect example of Homme’s “less is more” playing. Notice the tambourine on the “&” of 4, another signature sound of the Eagles. Josh barely strays from the beat and plays no fills. Ain’t it funky now!

EODM, “Kiss The Devil,” *Peace Love Death Metal*, played by Josh

A musical display of Homme’s unconventional drumming style. The right hand plays beats 1, 2, 3, and 4, alternating between the snare and floor tom, while the left hand stays on the hi-hat, filling in the “&” of every beat. The bass drum plays quarter notes to anchor the pattern, while the hands do all the work. Be careful, though: If you play this beat too fast, you might fly away!

EODM, “(I Used To Couldn’t Dance) Tight Pants,” *Heart On*, played by Josh

You can hear Homme’s evolution as a drummer in this song. Check out his great linear playing—very James Brown–influenced and groovy. The hands are busy playing alternating 16ths (RLRL) between the hi-hat and snare, and the right hand comes back over to the snare to accent beats 2 and 4 for the backbeat. All other notes on the snare are ghosted. The bass drum is minimal, playing beat 1, the “&” of 3, and the “e” of 4. Homme considers “Tight Pants” some of his best drumming to date, and we agree.

QOTSA, “Run, Pig, Run,” *Era Vulgaris*, played by Joey Castillo

Castillo says this beat, which appears during the verse, is one of the harder patterns on Vulgaris to play. A workout of 16th-note hand and foot combinations broken up over the kit, it creates the illusion of a double pedal. Though Joey used a double pedal for this song’s chorus on the recording, he plays a single pedal live.

EODM, “Stacks O’ Money,” *Peace Love Death Metal*, played by Josh

Honne plays a broken-up pattern between the hi-hat and snare, never using both sound sources together. Check out the full quarter-note duration of the open hi-hat, reminiscent of a guiro pattern. This is one of those deceptively easy beats; try to play it consistently for three minutes straight and you’ll see what we mean. Make sure your hi-hat foot is down tight until you have to open the hats—a subtle touch that makes a huge difference.

ones who start on drums and play only drums. Did you start on drums or guitar?

**Josh:** When I was about eight years old, I started begging for a drumset. I would play with chopsticks on wicker trash cans. My old man told me he’d buy me a guitar, and in five years if I became an accomplished guitar player then we’d talk about getting drums. The running joke was, “Am I good enough yet?” By fifth grade I could play the set and had the coordination with my feet.

**MD:** Drummers who play another instrument also don’t overplay as much.

**Josh:** I call that a misplaced sense of vitality. I always swore I would never play with a drummer who didn’t play another instrument, up until I played with Joey. Joey plays a little bit of guitar, and he would rip balls on guitar if he played all the time. He’s got an absolute musical sensibility, and he plays with his head up.

**Joey:** I’m especially like that in Queens. It’s an unspoken language when we’re up on stage. Somebody takes the lead, somebody follows, and we go for X amount of bars. It’s something you have to be aware of.

**Josh:** You have to be able to talk songs.

**Joey:** Exactly! I learned to play by listening to records. So it was always important to me to understand what a song...
was about—what’s happening, and why.

**Josh:** We need to be able to change it up night after night, so we don’t get bored.

**Joey:** When we do rehearsals or try to work things out for “in-stores” or something, it’s often without a kit. It’s with a tambourine, a pair of sticks, a snare—or a chair. I recently did an in-store with the Eagles where there was supposed to be a drumset, but nothing was there when we showed up. There was a wooden stool, a pair of sticks, and a tambourine, which I taped to the chair. We did six songs that way. You’re forced to make something out of nothing.

**MD:** When I think of the Eagles sound, I think of early New Orleans or vaudeville, when drummers would create kits by mixing and matching various percussion instruments to come up with a new sonic palette.

**Josh:** The key thing about the Eagles that permeates every instrument is that rock ‘n’ roll is supposed to be fun. We had to start out with the worst stuff possible to prove we didn’t take ourselves too seriously, and to overcome limitations. For a while I was using a drum rack, only because I can’t stand them. I also have Rototoms because that absolutely made no sense to me at all. That’s how the whole China cymbal thing started. I was always like, “China is a country.” Now it’s my favorite cymbal of all time. It’s the most expressive.

**Joey:** It’s a signature of the Eagles, absolutely.

**MD:** Former EODM drummer Gene Trautmann said it was the life of the Eagles sound.

**Josh:** It’s the one thing that can’t be missing from the Eagles. Let’s not just use the things we dislike the most, let’s lean on them. On the verses let’s look for something else to play other than hi-hat, another white noise to keep the time that’s different from what’s used all the time. These other percussion things don’t take up the same amount of space. They’re your “drinking buddies” all of a sudden. And then going into the chorus, the change is huge! There’s a dramatic dynamic shift that happens when you’re using less.

**MD:** Sometimes it’s hard to tell what you’re riding on—a rim, a closed hi-hat, a dead-sounding floor tom…. When I saw Joey recently with the Eagles, I was like, Oh, so that’s how it’s done.

**Josh:** I like to find ways that are fun to play and specifically patterned. The kick and snare relationship is more important to me than fills. To me fills should sound like an old man falling down the stairs. They need to be funny, but not in a silly way. A fill has to make me chuckle, like, “You badass!”

**MD:** Joey, you recorded the last two Queens albums, *Lullabies To Paralyze* and *Era Vulgaris*, but there were several great drummers in Queens before you—Alfredo Hernández, Gene Trautmann, Nick Lucero, Dave Grohl…. **Josh:** And none after—ha, ha, ha!

**MD:** You play all their parts authentically, like a studio drummer.

**Josh:** The hardest thing for the drummers before Joey was to respect what the other person did and be able to switch stylistically from song to song without mowing down everything—to play respectfully and be your own person at the same time. One of the things I
said to Joey after Songs For The Deaf was, “You know what we need to do? Nothing.” I asked Joey to pull back, pare down, and serve the song harder. I knew everybody was going to try to compare Joey to Dave [Grohl]. But Joey was never worried.

Joey: Well, I was a Queens fan since day one. My old band Sugartooth played with [Homme’s former group] Kyuss. All those drummers ahead of me, I’ve seen them with the band, respected them, and appreciated what they did. When I came into Queens, I wasn’t trying to outplay those guys, I was just grateful for the chance to be playing some of my favorite songs with my favorite band. I wanted to do the best job I could and put a bit of me on it.

Josh: We don’t do open auditions, so when we needed a drummer it had to be someone we knew or who someone close to us knew well. We jammed with three or four other drummers, and I was ready to hang it up. It’s hard to find someone to play with. When Joey came by, I kept saying, “Dude, you gotta come in,” and he kept saying, “You do this tour first, and then I’ll start learning stuff.”

Joey: Because it was a lot!

MD: Where you nervous?

Joey: Of course.

Josh: No one could play it all. No one could do what the other guys were doing and be themselves. No one was even close. You know in about fifteen to twenty seconds. When Joey came in, we played “Avon” off the first Queens record until we made a mistake, which was at the very end. I said, “Stop right there. I’ll be right back.” And I left the room.

Joey: Which I thought was the end.

Josh: I went outside and called the dude we had been jamming with and said, “I’m sorry, it’s over. It’s not personal.” We had eight hours to go before we left on tour. That’s how much I believed I made the right decision with Joey.

Joey: Songs For The Deaf was just coming out, and Grohl played his balls off on it. I had a copy of the CD for two days, and it was a bit of a scary jump, but I was ready to take it.

MD: And all the Queens songs have very distinct parts and arrangements. You can’t fake it.

Joey: There’s no jumping in and thinking you’re going to cruise through this. And I knew the history of the band. I knew the four guys that came and went before me. [laughs]

MD: And you were thinking you didn’t want to be the fifth.

Joey: I told Josh that in the beginning: “You know, you have the worst rep for beating up on drummers.” And he was like, “Really? I do?” [all laugh]

Josh: I think we should all try to be the best we can be and serve the song. I’ve never questioned that, but I’ve been around people who have.

Joey: That’s just it. I was coming from Danzig, who is also somewhat of a drummer and a fan of the drums. I replaced Chuck Biscuits, who was my idol.

Josh: Biscuits was rad.

MD: Joey, you got a lot of your schooling playing in punk rock bands.

Joey: Yeah, my first band was Wasted Youth.
MD: How did you adapt to a band as versatile as Queens? On Era Vulgaris alone, one song can be R&B oriented, like “Make It Wit Chu,” which is like an Al Green/Al Jackson Jr. groove....

Joey: That’s exactly what I was going for when I played that.

MD: But then you have to switch it up, like for "Battery Acid," which has an industrial kind of sound. And on "River In The Road," your beat is meringue/calypso oriented. Your musical vocabulary is very good for someone coming from a punk background.

Joey: My roots are in punk, but my playing on “Make It Wit Chu” and “River In The Road” is influenced by my love for lots of other kinds of music. I was learning how to play in Wasted Youth, but my parents listened to everything, including soul music. And in this band, everybody listens to all kinds of different things. It’s not about rock, or punk, or this and that. That’s boring.

MD: Era Vulgaris almost reminds me of a Ween album—each song is different from the others in style and sound.

Josh: We have more in common with Ween than any band out there. Because Ween plays whatever they want, whenever they feel like it, and they play it well. All I’ve ever wanted to do is be in a band that plays like a record collection, like a good mix tape. Era is supposed to be like a Leatherman: You can use it anywhere.

The reasons there have been so many drummers in the group is that you keep having to up the ante, and that cancels some people out. That’s the gamble of trying to do what you don’t see being done. There are people who aren’t into the Queens, and that’s totally fine. But you can’t say we don’t try hard, and with the Eagles it’s the same thing. It ain’t a joke, brother! [all laugh]

Joey: So many drummers think it’s a walk in the park to play with the Eagles, but it’s not. It’s a real challenge to be refined and make things count and be part of this magic that happens. Josh will be the first to tell you. There’s nothing more amazing in the world than an Eagles audience dancing and partying.

Josh: It’s unreal.

Joey: You gotta be able to work that machine. Josh: Girls don’t dance to fills. With Eagles, I love playing a straight beat. I could play it for hours without going into something else, because it feels good. It gives me a weird rush. Joey understands
that philosophy so well, and he does it so much better than I do.

Joey: Honestly, it’s from playing with Josh and knowing him as long as I have.

Josh: It’s about what you don’t do, which is the hardest thing to do.

Joey: Of course, the drums are a blast, and you want to go off and show people what you have.

Josh: And you can be tempted to play more, especially when it’s simple. There are times when I have to tell myself, Don’t! Because it isn’t necessary.

Joey: Phil Rudd has made it work for AC/DC. He’s always been one of my favorite players, because he’s so solid and in the pocket that when he does change it up, it’s explosive.

Josh: The funny thing is, you get the sense from hearing Phil Rudd talk that people have said to him for years, “Dude, why don’t you go off?” I always imagine that he just looks at the person and walks away. That would be just like his drumming style.

Ninety-nine percent of what makes up a person is the same as everyone else. That’s how we relate to each other. But it’s the one percent that’s different that matters. Finding that one percent is the challenge.

Joey: I remember Mike Bordin, back in the Faith No More days, telling me when I was touring with Danzig, “If you just keep doing what you’re doing, you’re going to be fine.” He said that once I accepted the fact that I was who I was and stopped trying to be just like everybody out there, I’d come into my own and people would accept me and appreciate that.

Josh: It’s the endurance that people end up respecting. I love that people understand Joey now.

MD: Fans are still getting to know Joey and hear what he’s got. Like on “Suture Up Your Future,” from Era Vulgaris, he plays some nice Bonham-influenced doubles on the bass drum. And “Into The Hollow” is rockin’ hard and has an R&B groove, reminiscent of “I Want To Take You Higher” by Sly & The Family Stone. It makes you want to dance, like old records did.

Josh: It has to be that. We’re working through these songs, trying to write parts together. I write a part, Joey writes a part, and it’s got to be this symbiotic thing. It’s about pieces that work well together.

MD: Joey, on the live Queens DVD, Over The Years And Through The Woods, you dig hard into the hi-hat. It really seems to anchor the groove.

Josh: The shoulder swing! It’s like the way Marky and Tommy of the Ramones would play.

Joey: With the Queens, it sometimes doesn’t get translated correctly, but there’s a certain stiffness that turns into a groove.

Josh: I refer to it as “the white man’s groove.”

MD: Queens has a signature sound, and that carries over to the drums. There’s a lot of upbeat 8th notes on the bass drum that push the groove forward, and a lot of the fills and kicks are syncopated and over the barline. There are also tons of signature fills that stem from the first Queens album. The drummers have changed over the years, but the drum parts have a consistency.

Josh: “Regular John” is my favorite beat.

Joey: That song in general is the Queens groove.

Josh: That’s why it’s the first song on the first album. For me, arguably, it’s our best song. That song basically says, “It goes like this.”

MD: Alfredo Hernández was the drummer on the first album. Did he create that beat?

Josh: No. I wrote that first record, and the focus was on making the drums and guitar the same thing, like a broken factory—making the same wrong thing, over and over.

MD: Isn’t that what you dubbed robot rock?

Josh: Yeah, because I didn’t want to be in a “stoner” rock situation, and I knew that with “the white man’s groove,” if everybody played stiff and mechanical it would become so funky and unstoppable.

MD: Songs like “Little Sister” and “In My Head” have that clear and precise robot rock beat, with the bass drum playing the “&” of beats 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Josh: It’s gotta be danceable. That
upswing really makes people dance.

**MD:** That’s more common with jazz and funk than with rock music. In rock, crashes and fills generally end on the downbeat, most commonly on beat 1. Queens tends to hit the “&” of 1 more often, creating a feeling that’s like someone hitting you with a left hook when you’re expecting a right.

**Josh:** There’s a lot of that in the Eagles stuff too, like “Miss Alissa,” off *Peace Love Death Metal*. There are cymbal shots where there’s no kick or snare. That’s one of my favorite songs to play. There’s no fill the whole song, but it’s a nightmare because the hi-hat is closed so tightly that it doesn’t even wiggle when you hit it. When you take your foot off, it barely opens or moves.

**MD:** You can hear the evolution of the Eagles. On *Peace Love Death Metal*, it sounds very stripped down and bare. On the second album, *Death By Sexy*, you guys still have that Chuck Berry rock ’n’ roll sound, but Josh, your drumming gets a bit more adventurous. Joey, you played on a few songs on that album as well, right?

**Joe:** I played on “Shasta Beast,” “Boy’s Bad News,” and “Chase The Devil.”

**MD:** Josh, I love your drum part on “Cherry Cola” on *Death By Sexy*. The drum parts are more involved than anything on *Peace Love Death Metal*.

**Josh:** For Eagles I’ve been taking advantage of where Jesse’s at. With *Peace Love Death Metal*, Jesse was totally green, and it was such a beautiful moment, so I just played green. We kept it as raw and simple as possible. We made a three-record plan, which we did with Queens also. The third record, which would become *Heart On*, was supposed to be our version of *Back In Black*. The production level and songs are meant to be deeper and more involved.

**MD:** “High Voltage” and “I’m Your Torpedo” sound like cosmic funk, like a spaceship landed in the desert, picked up the boys, and went to outer space.

**Josh:** That’s what it is, the spaceship Funkadelic. Jesse is a huge Parliament fan, and so are Joey and I, so that influence started creeping in. You don’t need to shift out of it till it’s the right moment.

**MD:** To me, Queens and Eagles are kind of like that deodorant, Secret: “Strong enough for a man, but made for a woman.”

**Josh:** You don’t know how many times I’ve said internally that we need to be like Secret. That was the whole mantra for *Rated R*. You just made me really happy!

**MD:** A lot of bands that focus on technical ability attract mostly musicians and dudes. Queens has a great balance of songs and musicianship, and at shows there’s an equal blend of men and women.

**Josh:** I’ve always played for respect; I don’t want anything else. But when it changes from the respect of men to the respect of ladies...

**Joe:** Big difference! [all laugh] “Turnin’ On The Screw” on *Vulgaris* is a perfect example. It’s got heavy drums, distortion, synths, and cool drum fills, and the girls love dancing to it.

**Josh:** That’s the secret!
MD: Tell us a little about that song.
Joey: It petrified me. I could not hear where Josh was playing the main riff.
Josh: [Guitarist] Troy [Van Leeuwen] and Joey heard it on the other side of the beat, flipped. These guys hated that song because of that.
Joey: It sounded like a hillbilly melody!
Josh: But I didn’t know they were hearing it that way, so I’d switch it around, and they would switch it around on me again. I kept asking, “Why are you doing that?” Then I played it while tapping my foot, and it made sense to them.
MD: Joey, how did you come up with that drum part? The timekeeping is all tambourine, right?
Joey: At a rehearsal we were trying to keep the volume down, listening to the riff to hear what was happening, so I started riding the tambourine. Josh was like, “That’s it! Stay there!”
MD: So that tambourine part wasn’t overdubbed?
Joey: No way, dude. I played it in the studio the same way I do it live. We don’t make it easier in the studio. That’s the challenge.
Josh: We do it like that ‘cause it’s supposed to be hard. I don’t want to take the easy road, and Joey doesn’t either. It should kind of hurt to play Queens songs.
Joey: Troy actually threw out his back playing “Everybody Knows That You Are Insane.”
Josh: If something isn’t bleeding, you should try again. [all laugh]
MD: I’ve heard that with Queens all the cymbals are overdubbed.
Josh: We’ve done that since Rated R.
MD: What do you hit instead of a cymbal?
Josh: It started out with towels on the cymbals, but now we use V-Drum pads, because then you’re hearing cymbals in your head. We still need something to hit because it affects the groove.
The challenge separates the men from the boys. I started doing it because of a conversation I had with engineer Chris Goss six years earlier: “What if we had no cymbals and then you overdubbed them?” You could do things sound-wise to the drums that couldn’t normally be done. On “Better Living Through Chemistry” from Rated R, we pull the drums out and the cymbals are still there. Then we bring ‘em back in and it’s like, “Hey!”
MD: Joey, do you find it tricky playing those quirky Eagles drum parts?
Joey: It’s starting to become natural. I understand why Josh is doing those parts; I know why he’s stripped it down. “Anything ‘Cept The Truth,” from the last Eagles record, is one of the most fun songs to play. I wouldn’t have played it that way, but watching Josh do it, and then having to replicate it, is a blast. And it’s made me a better drummer.
MD: What were some of the more challenging songs to play on Era Vulgaris?
Joey: “Run, Pig, Run” was tough because it was very physical going back and forth between the hands and feet, plus there are quick breaks. We recorded that live, except for the cymbals.
MD: It sounds like you’re playing 16th notes on a double pedal in the chorus. I don’t recall you normally playing a double kick.
Joey: I use a single pedal live, but I used a double pedal for just that one part on the album. The verses are
MD: On the live DVD, "Song For The Dead" looks like boot camp training for drummers. It’s got Grohl’s parts—which are tough to play to start—plus a pretty involved arrangement and a drum solo over a vamp. By the end you look exhausted because the band is playing it a lot faster than on the album.

Joey: Josh doesn’t like it to be one way. He likes to push, he likes to pull, and I have to be able to move with him. I can usually read his body language pretty well. "Song For The Dead" is very physical, and obviously you can see that. We’ve pulled tempos back since then, though it depends on how the band is feeling.

MD: On “Sick, Sick, Sick” from Era Vulgaris, there’s a lot of nice bass drum work, especially that four-on-the-floor part during the breakdown. How did that come about?

Joey: Josh said he wanted to do something with no fills at all. Just kick and snare. But he wanted it to be somewhat of a conversation between his guitar and the drums. I think we did that song in one take.

MD: Two Eagles songs in particular come to mind in terms of creative drum parts. "Kiss The Devil" from Peace Love has a really cool 16th-note pattern broken up between both hands on the hi-hat and snare. Did you take a similar approach to the song “Tight Pants” from Heart On?

Josh: I wanted to funkify it. The roots of the song come from Jesse, who is heavily influenced by funk. “Tight Pants” was kind of my triumph for this record. It feels so good to play that beat. Same with “Kiss The Devil,” where the left hand is on the hi-hat and I’m just alternating my right hand between snare and floor tom.

MD: Josh, when you first started touring as the drummer, did you have any problems because of lack of endurance?

Josh: Yeah. We rehearsed for hours and hours because I needed to get my wind up to play full shows. Joey really helped me because I was holding the sticks the wrong way and getting a crazy pain that was shooting through my wrists. I was having to tape the drumsticks to my hands because the pain made my hands want to open.

MD: Early on, did you hit any serious clams or have any major train wrecks?

Josh: Some, but you just keep going. But to be honest, I never care about that, and the Eagles audiences never cared either. They’re like, Don’t worry about it, just go! And it doesn’t really happen anymore.

MD: You’ve become a better drummer since the first Eagles album.

Josh: When we did Peace Love Death Metal, I didn’t have the opportunity to play all the time, and that’s why I was so excited about it. Now that I have more chances to play, I take it. It doesn’t matter that I’m not the world’s best drummer, I just like it. And that’s how I feel about the Eagles in general. To dissect the Eagles is far beyond a waste of time. The relevant question is, Do you like it? And at this point in my life I’m only focused on pursuing the things I love.