

The Genius of Meg White

Drumeo, presented by Brandon Toews

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I don't think she understood how important she was to the band, and to me, and to the music. She was the antithesis of a modern drummer. So childlike and incredible and inspiring.

—Jack White, Pitchfork

JACK WHITE: I think the biggest misconception is probably that every single thing about The White Stripes is premeditated. The music is really completely in charge of us.

SCOTT LIPPS: The grooves feel good, man. I saw them play three or four times, and I just love her drumming. Some of the choices that she makes elevates the song.

JACK WHITE: If I'm not locked in with the drummer, everything else is kind of useless at that point.

SPEAKER: Watch her play. It does not look like she's exerting any sort of effort.

MEG WHITE: There's only two of us up there.

SPEAKER: But you close your eyes and you listen, it's just like, she's killing it.

BRANDON TOEWS: She's a founding member of The White Stripes and one of the key artists in the garage rock revival of the 2000s. Her powerful, quirky, and instantly recognizable drum sound was essential to The White Stripes' success. She's a six-time Grammy Award winner, she's ranked amongst Rolling Stone's 100 greatest drummers of all time, and The White Stripes rank as their sixth greatest duo. Join us as we dive into the genius of Meg White.



BRANDON TOEWS: From the very first track on The White Stripes' self-titled debut album, we immediately hear the one-of-a-kind personality in Meg's drumming. Her seemingly simple but powerful choices shaped the foundation of the band's sound. "Jimmy The Ex-

ploder” introduced the world to the unique sound of Meg White.

Meg’s less-is-more approach to playing the drums combines power with an abundance of space. “The Union Forever” is a great example of this, with cymbal hits punctuating the kick and snare drum only. This type of playing makes the groove all the more dramatic when combined with her heavy fills in the song’s transitions.

This is something we hear Meg do quite often in her grooves. She only chooses a handful of cymbal hits to include, where most drummers would opt to play every note of the bar. There are tons of great examples of this in the music of The White Stripes, like the way she punctuates Jack’s syncopated guitar line in “Icky Thump.”

Or the way she alternates between heavy downbeat crashes and more subtle offbeat crashes in “Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground.”

In “Blue Orchid,” Meg drives Jack’s guitar line with a heavy quarter-note kick drum that erupts into a crash groove in the choruses. Not once does she break from the quarter-note theme, and the result perfectly complements the song.

Meg is a master of building energy in a song by making simple changes to her parts as the song progresses.

Sometimes starting a song with something as simple as keeping time on the tambourine. This is a level of restraint that's rare amongst drummers. In the song "Rag And Bone," she starts with playing only on the rim. Then she adds the kick. After that, she adds the floor tom. And finally, launches into a full groove. By the time "Rag And Bone" gets to the full groove, the song sounds massive, all built off a single theme through Meg's use of layering.



JACK WHITE: The structure of the song doesn't really happen until Meg joins in, and that becomes the most important part. What she brings to it makes it—gives it the simplicity, I think.

BRANDON TOEWS: The way her accents follow the guitar line, in addition to her use of space, can feel like just as much of a hook as the guitar line itself. In "Seven Nation Army," she plays a driving quarter-note groove through the first half of the chorus, then follows the guitar punctuations every other phrase.

It's abrupt, it's unusual, but it suits the song perfectly, and it's a classic example of the kind of character Meg brings to the band.

A really striking aspect of The White Stripes' music is that Meg's parts are almost always full of choices that most drummers wouldn't make, yet they suit the band perfectly. Take "Fell In Love With A Girl," for example, where there's only one groove throughout the entire song.

In the song "My Doorbell," she plays a funkier, slightly syncopated groove with a tambourine stick, first matching with the floor tom, then transitioning to the hi-hats.

We also hear this kind of syncopated cymbal groove in the track "Catch Hell Blues."

In the track "White Moon," Meg accompanies acoustic piano using only the kick, shaker, and crash cymbals. The dynamic choices are surprising, and they once again bring Meg's one-of-a-kind character to the forefront of this track.

A lot of drummers would shy away from playing something as simple as only using the kick, shaker, and crashes, yet Meg still finds a way to perfectly support the music, even if she's using less than that, like you hear in other songs like "Your Southern Can Is Mine."

And if you thought that was sparse, check out the track "Little Room," which is kick drum and hi-hat.

That's it. Any of you who play drums know that it takes a lot of discipline to be able to do this for an entire track.



BRANDON TOEWS: One of the most distinctive aspects of Meg's drumming is the use of space in her grooves. Now, over the years, Meg has received a lot of criticism for her drumming abilities, but her iconic drum sound has been praised by legendary musicians like Tom Morello, Questlove, Margo Price, and Butch Vig.

Now, speaking of Meg's use of space, check out what she plays in the song "Ball and Biscuit."

This same groove appears in the song "The Denial Twist" with a key difference: she has a tambourine attached to her right drumstick, like you heard in the song "My Doorbell" earlier.

There's a rare level of maturity and restraint in the notes she chooses not to play. Meg leaves out even more in the song "The Big Three Killed My Baby." Just kick, floor tom, and snare. But in the verse, it's only kick and crashes.

Another interesting groove that's full of space is "There's No Home For You Here," where Meg chooses to accent 16th notes along with Jack's guitar line while

leaving the rest of those beats empty. Also check out the left-foot hi-hat in this one. This is another common theme in Meg's grooves. Where a lot of drummers would leave out their left foot entirely or stick to more standard timekeeping, Meg often doubles what her other limbs are doing on the hi-hat foot.

The White Stripes have a unique writing style that frequently changes feels and tempos within their songs. Meg's pounding grooves and unique phrasing provide a foundation that really supports their unpredictable arrangements. For example, check out Meg's use of rim clicks to bridge two heavy sections in the track "Hello Operator."

And there are a lot of White Stripes songs that feature stark tempo and feel changes. In the song "Black Math," Meg complements Jack's heavy, swung guitar in the opening with a straight-ahead drum part. Then in the middle of the song, they slow down for an even heavier half-time section.

Then there's the song "Bone Broke," which has several distinctly different feels. The verse groove features lots of space with a unique feel to the beat. The snare flams are swung, and the crashes come out straight. In the choruses, they slow the tempo down for a heavier

feel. And Meg continues to build tension through the solo section where she's only using the kick and crashes.

This kind of abrupt shift between a wide range of dynamics only serves to amplify the heavier sections of the song. Like in "Red Rain," where Meg alternates between light ride cymbal time and heavy cymbal punctuations.

BRANDON TOEWS: All right, there you have it, the genius of Meg White. Hopefully you enjoyed this deep dive into Meg's drumming and learned something along the way that you didn't know before.

