

BILL BRUFORD

And there was light

After a sixteen-year absence, the great English drummer is finally back on stage. He will be performing at the Triton on May 10th as part of guitarist Pete Roth's trio.

by Fred Goaty / photo Rob Goldsmith



In France, your name is much more familiar than that of your new leader, Pete Roth...

Bill Bruford Pete is a versatile artist and accomplished session guitarist born in Germany, where his musical journey began, in a family deeply rooted in music. He has been playing since the age of 11. He was initially inspired by the raw emotions of blues and the energy of rock. His musical horizons, however, broadened when he came to study jazz in England. There, he immersed himself in the rich complexity of the genre, drawing influences from Joe Pass, John Scofield, and Julian Lage. After leaving the Academy of Contemporary Music (ACM) in Guilford, he embarked on a solo career and recorded two albums for MGP Records.

How did you meet him?

Pete was my student at the ACM. I was looking for a drum tech for a tour with my band Earthworks, so we spent two happy years together: driving around in my Mercedes Benz with my drum kit in the trunk. We talked guitar for hours. Twenty years later, when I decided to play local again-

Then I thought, "Who could I ask to come play and work on a couple of things around guitar?" and Pete's name came to mind. We live in the same area, and I was amazed at how much his playing had matured.

What's really exciting about playing in a trio with a guitarist again after working with Steve Howe, Allan Holdsworth, Ralph Towner or David Torn?

Today, I'm less interested in what you can do with an instrument than in what you can get out of it in real time by playing with me. The idea of a group as an organism, the interaction between those who compose it, comes first. It's a story of dynamics within the same system. My concern is that the Pete Roth Trio works in its natural environment, small theaters, clubs and cultural centers. Yes, the key is interaction, in this environment called jazz.

How does it feel to be a sideman again after all these years?

A huge relief! It's always intimidating to be the name out there. And most interactive music companies don't have a high-earning manager, so everyone

"Non-instrument" work – visas, finding gigs, permits, travel, van rentals, babysitting, repertoire, finding a replacement... – takes up a lot of time.

I've been on the verge of burnout more than once...

Why did you wait so long to play live again?

I wasn't expecting it! I stopped performing in 2009, published my autobiography, and completed a PhD in musicology at the University of Surrey under the brilliant guitarist and composer Milton Mermikides. My book, *Uncharted: Creativity and the Expert Drummer*, is the result of that work. During my research, I only encountered great musicians: Peter Erskine, Chad Wackerman, Cindy Blackman, Thomas Strønen, Mark Guiliana, and the late Martin France, among others. During all that time—nearly ten years—I didn't touch a drum kit. After Covid, I suddenly, and completely unexpectedly, felt a spark: to play again. I had sold all my drums and gear at an online auction – Tool drummer Danny Carey bought a lot of that gear, and he's currently touring with Beat [Adrian Belew's project, editor's note], so he's replaying King Crimson music with his very capable hands! But I did keep a small Tama kit...



You recently released a compilation album covering most of your work from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. Do you plan to record again or release a new album?

Not now. We're taking it one step at a time, experimenting, refining the style that suits us best. Music has migrated online, and the cost of recording and distributing remains prohibitive, unless you're Fleetwood Mac. We're not ready to record; we're at the most exciting stage, the work-in-progress stage. The best time to listen to a band is before they've really figured out what to play, when the body needs to feed off its environment to grow!

CONCERT May 10 at Les Lilas (Le Triton) with the Pete Roth Trio.