

Great Seventies Rock Drummer

ROGER EARL

by Bob Cianci



As a journalist and author, I have had the privilege and opportunity to meet and interview many well-known musicians over the years, most of them drummers. Some were gracious, some were pleasant, and some were polite but disinterested. There have been very few who are as generous, genuine, down to earth and just plain *nice* ('nice' is such a clichéd word, but in this case, it's appropriate) as Roger Earl, who has anchored the drum chair in Foghat since 1971, and is perhaps one of the most criminally underrated rock drummers of our time. Today, as the only original remaining member of Foghat, a band that has gone through many personnel changes and the legal battles that sometimes accompany the rock music business, Roger, along with his lovely and highly capable wife, Linda Arcello-Earl, manage the band's business affairs and run the show.

Always a strong timekeeper and a simple, uncluttered and highly musical drummer, Roger is playing with more intensity and fire than ever before as he approaches his sixtieth birthday, and he seems totally relaxed behind his DW

drums. His timekeeping is unrelenting, yet tempos inevitably stay right in the pocket, and his fills are always spot-on and appropriate for the song at hand. In that way, he could be compared to Ringo Starr or Charlie Watts, both of who "play for the song." Roger has always favored the hi-hat as his main timekeeping vehicle, moving to the ride cymbal for a chorus or guitar solo, yet he sports a wide array of Paiste crash cymbals, which he uses liberally.

But before we go any farther with Roger's current activities and equipment, let's look at his background.

Roger came from a highly musical English family that encouraged his participation in and pursuit of music as a profession. His father and older brother Colin (who played in Mungo Jerry and scored a one-off US hit with *In The Summertime*) played piano. The family had a love for early American rock n' roll, including that of Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly and various blues and R&B artists as well.

"There was always music in our house. My father brought home the 45 rpm record of *Great Balls of Fire* and took us to see Jerry Lee Lewis in Croyden. That night was magic for me. I liked Jerry Lee's drummer and decided not to play piano. I took drum lessons for two years and saved enough money doing odd jobs to buy my first drumkit, a black pearl Premier set with Zildjian cymbals. The drums lasted in the house for about two weeks. Then we moved them into my father's shed!"

Roger, who was also influenced by Muddy Waters' drummer Francis Clay, and Bernard Purdie, joined his first band, The Tramps, at age seventeen and did a little freelance work as well. He got his first break by joining Savoy Brown when he was

twenty. There, he met guitarist Lonesome Dave Peverett, bassist Tony Stevens and eventually, guitarist Rod Price, who played in a rival band called Black Cat Bones. After three years and five albums, Roger, his two band mates and their new friend, formed Foghat in 1971.

"Tony Stevens had been fired from Savoy Brown and then Dave and I quit. Kim Simmonds (leader of Savoy Brown) prevented us from working in England for years. No agent would touch us and every record company turned us down, except for Albert Grossman, Bob Dylan's manager, who had just started Bearsville Records. Our first album charted in Detroit, New Orleans and several other places. We were on the road constantly and spent most of our time in the USA, which was where I wanted to be anyway. America was always the place I knew I wanted to live. All my musical heroes were Americans. Foghat's greatest success was in the USA and we spent so much time here, it made sense to move here permanently."

After several years of non-stop touring, Foghat finally hit the jackpot with the single "Fool For The City" and the album of the same name, which enjoyed platinum sales. "Slow Ride" was also a hit, and both tunes are staples of classic rock radio to this day.

In 1986, Dave Peverett grew tired of the grind, left the band, and returned to England to live. Roger toured with other musicians as Roger Earl's Foghat and eventually Dave returned and formed his own version of Foghat.

"There were two Foghats for a while. Dave and I arm-wrestled for a couple of years, but we finally resolved any issues we had. I own the name today in conjunction with Dave's estate." Lonesome Dave passed away in 2000.

"In 1993, noted record producer Rick Rubin suggested we put the original band back together for a CD, and that was the 'Return of The Boogie Men' album. We



toured for a while with all the original guys until Rod Price decided he'd had enough and wanted to play straight blues." Rod Price died in 2005 after suffering a heart attack and falling down a flight of stairs.

Today, Foghat plays an average of eight to ten shows a month, where and when they please, in the USA and occasionally overseas. Lonesome Dave and Rod Price have been very ably replaced by singer/guitarist Charlie Huhn, formerly of Ted Nugent's band, and lead/slide guitarist Brian Bassett, formerly of Wild Cherry and Molly Hatchett. Former bassist Craig MacGregor recently returned to the fold.

Live, Foghat plays a variety of old and new material and they're a very exciting and tight band with a dedicated and vociferous fan following. They play mostly rock festivals, casinos, biker events and even the occasional private party, but generally stay away from clubs.

"Every date we do is a fly-in. We do assorted gigs down south in the winter, mainly in Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. I'm very reluctant to do clubs. Been there-done that."

Foghat's latest CD is titled "Family



Joules" and is available, along with concert DVDs and merchandise, through their website, www.foghat.net. For further information on the band, go to www.foghat.com. As of this writing, Foghat is mixing their next CD, a live disc, and are planning on recording new material this winter.

As far as equipment, Roger started with Premier drums and Zildjian cymbals as mentioned, but eventually bought a Gretsch set that he used at the beginning of



"That set was stolen, so I called Gretsch and they told me it would take about six to eight months to get another set to me! I had gigs coming up. I knew Carmine Appice and he arranged for a Ludwig set for me in a matter of days. I was a Ludwig endorser for twenty-five years. I also had an old set of Slingerland Radio Kings, but they were stolen too. I went to DW in 1996, because the quality was so high and the drums sounded great right out of the box. When I went out to the DW factory in California, John Good, the vice president, said, 'Make out a wish list.' I've been with DW for ten years now."

Roger still owns a red lacquer Ludwig set with twin 26" bass drums that is in storage. His primary DW set is white marine pearl with black hardware, with two 24" kicks, 8," 10," 12," 13," 14," 16," and 18" toms and various snares, including a 6.5 x 14" Edge snare, an aluminum model, and one in black satin lacquer. When I saw Roger recently in concert, he used a black wrapped DW set with one bass drum and four toms that was supplied as part of the band's "back line" rider on their performance contract. Roger eventually discarded the second bass drum as part of his normal setup and now prefers a double pedal. In the studio, he uses a four

or five-piece kit to record.

Roger's choice of drumstick is the oak or hickory Pro-Mark Roger Earl model, and his cymbals have been Paiste for twenty years.

"I was with Zildjian for the longest time, but I'm now with Paiste, which are much more consistent in terms of sound and are easy to replace if they break."

Like many experienced musicians, Roger has hearing loss and wears two hearing aids. He's not vain and accepts it.

"I love my job and my life. If this is what I need to do my job and get on with my life, that's the way it is. I'm in a great rock n' roll band with great players, guys who aren't complainers. I've gotten to meet my heroes; I played drums with Muddy Waters for a night and got to jam with people like Paul Butterfield and others. I'm married to a woman who was my friend for thirty years before we got together, and she and I manage the operation. I have three grown daughters and grandchildren. I'm very lucky."

