

# ALL THINGS WERTICO

*by Steven Frisbie*





**P**aul Wertico, the internationally acclaimed percussionist, has a boundless enthusiasm—for music, for learning, for just about anything. And he was more than happy to talk with *On Tour with Shure* about all of it. From his work as a teacher to his most recent CD (*Stereonucleosis*); from his website (paulwertico.com) to the licks he stole from his daughter! Read on for a glimpse into all things Wertico.

**ON TOUR WITH SHURE:** Do the possibilities of machines affect the way you play live?

**PAUL WERTICO:** Definitely. Yesterday, I was teaching, and we were working on drum-n-bass—these really fast, kind of boogaloo beats. We were working on this technique where you hold the stick in the center and rotate your wrist. You get one stroke one way and one stroke the other way, so you can get going really fast. We were playing these beats on the high hat, and that is from drum machines. The machines can play these ridiculously fast, five-handed patterns, and drummers are coming up with ways to play this stuff live. I think it's great.

**OTWS:** Musicians have to listen to each other, but they also have to hear themselves. Any pointers?

**WERTICO:** Well, you hear yourself through the others. Rather than listening to yourself, with incidental sound around you, you listen to the sound around you, and hear how you sound coming through that sound. Some students say that playing a simple groove is boring. Well, if you listen to yourself, it might be boring. But if you listen to what the bass player is doing, the chord changes, the words... listen to the other stuff and see how you're fitting in; then you'll see how cool what you're doing actually is."

**OTWS:** Someone once said that the only sin is boredom.

**WERTICO:** That's for sure. I always tell my daughter, it's impossible to be bored. Even if you just concentrate on your breathing for a second, or look up at the sky. Get out of that ceiling of yourself.

**OTWS:** So much of *Stereonucleosis* has a nice reference-less quality.

**WERTICO:** Thanks. When you have the luxury of recording in your own house, you get a chance to really look at what you want to say, and how you want to embellish what you're saying.

**OTWS:** I understand that your home studio is swimming in Shure mics.

**WERTICO:** Every mic I use is Shure.

**OTWS:** Did you try any miking experiments while you were working?

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**WERTICO:** On this record, we put the overheads in back, as opposed to over the drums. So they were about shoulder width, about a foot on either side of me, pointing toward the drums. It was cool. I don't know that I'd always do it like that, but for that record, it was an interesting sound.

**OTWS:** The upright bass really speaks on the record. How did you mic it?

**WERTICO:** With KSM32s. We did that in one of the bigger rooms in my basement, and the bass and the room just fell in love with each other. And with the right placement of two KSM32s, it turned out great.

**OTWS:** What do you think makes you a good teacher?

**WERTICO:** [Pauses] I guess encouragement, which really means empowerment. If you empower people, they're able to relax and be themselves. They can say, "O.K., this may not be perfect right now, but it's going to be O.K."

**OTWS:** So part of what you do is help your students sit through the time when they're not very good?

**WERTICO:** Absolutely. I'm never discouraging. The only time I might say something is "wrong" is if perhaps physically they are doing something...

**OTWS:** ...like, "You might hurt your back sitting like that."

**WERTICO:** Right. But if someone plays something, I say, "You can do that. And here's another option." If you think like that, then everything's O.K. It empowers them, and makes the students feel great no matter where they are.

**OTWS:** Have you ever been playing a gig with Metheny, for example, and realized that you're playing something that you lifted from a student?

**WERTICO:** Never during a gig—that would be what Elvin Jones referred to as an "I thought." But in general, yes. I lifted stuff from my daughter when she was six months old. She sat at the kit and did these things, like the way she hit a drum and a cymbal. She was playing chimes and she did this sideways motion—I stole that stuff from her. It was so cool and unorthodox. With my students, I teach them things that I can't do, too. I'm going to teach them things that I wish I could have studied, or that I wish I had the talent or the discipline to do.

**OTWS:** I like that; it's the non-cynical spin on, "Those who can't do, teach."

**WERTICO:** Yeah. I tell my students, "You are what you can play, but you are also what you can't play." If there's something you want to play, it's worth practicing. If you don't have the time to practice, but you see someone with an innate talent, and you think that they could run with it, why not show them?



PAUL WERTICO	HIS	ON A BUDGET
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Snare	SM57	PG57
Toms	Beta 98	PG56
Hi-Hat	KSM137	PG81
Overheads	KSM32	PG81