

Speed of Life – Kurt Reil of The Grip Weeds

Kurt Reil holds many titles: drummer, guitarist, singer, songwriter, producer and captain of the starship House of Vibes www.houseofvibes.com. HOV, as we affectionately call it, is a cozy but very well equipped hi-test analog studio tucked away in Highland Park, New Jersey. Kurt is its owner, engineer and chief of operations. I first met Kurt at HOV shortly after Peter, Bobby and Dave (the other 3/4 of the Anderson Council) were kind enough to invite me to be their drummer. When I joined the Council, they were in the midst of recording their third record with Kurt as engineer. Kurt mentioned that his band, the Grip Weeds, had released a double album (also recorded at HOV) so I picked up a copy and had a listen. The double album, Strange Change Machine, was as advertised a fantastic record end to end. I was very impressed with the songs, the band's musicianship and Kurt's drumming in particular. After the album had been in regular rotation for a week or two, I found myself returning repeatedly to track one, side one: Speed of Life. Each listen drew me deeper into what I now consider to be one of the cleverest and well executed drum tracks recorded this side of the 1960's. The 1960's were undoubtedly a great time for rock drumming and the jumping off point for the careers of many of the great drummers I grew up listening to like Mitch Mitchell, Bill Bruford and Keith Moon. These influences are ever present in Kurt's playing and his knowledge of that time and place in music history is encyclopedic. Beyond these more obvious influences, I would argue that Speed of Life also contains the sort of thoughtfully constructed themes and fluid improvisation that evokes the craft of elite jazzers that turned out more than a few master works in the same era. Drummers like Max Roach, Elvin Jones and Tony Williams. Lucky for us, these six drum-pantheon-worthy players were featured in ensembles that gave them a lot of freedom to exhibit their daunting and unique abilities as soloists. They earned that freedom because they could compose, create and improvise on their instruments as well as their band-mates, in some cases even better. More importantly, all six drummers are top shelf time keepers. Whatever complications were introduced, the song's pulse was faithfully carried forward and the groove was never diminished. Kurt is a drummer who constructs carefully thought out thematic ideas and combines them with well executed flash, often taking the drum kit into that beautiful melodic space usually reserved for other instruments. In short, Kurt really nailed it with this one. Every frenetic fill is peppered with carefully placed accents that flow beautifully with the song. The verses are powered by a thick syncopated bass snare Q and A and the transitions lend the song just the right amount of space at critical moments. If you're a drummer, this record belongs on your shelf.

–Chris Ryan

Get your copy of Strange Change Machine and learn more about Kurt and the Grip Weeds at www.gripweeds.com

Kurt's performance was transcribed by Chris Ryan, drummer for the Anderson Counsel www.theandersoncouncil.com