



The Julie Ruin's **Carmine Covelli**

by Marian Li-Pino

The multitalented drummer with a penchant for science and technology brings us the affirmation we've been waiting for.

Carmine Covelli, drummer for Kathleen Hanna's latest project, the Julie Ruin, has some very important news for us: Drummers are smart. Smarter than everybody else.

Prior to our interview, Covelli did a quick search online to see what sort of information about drummers was available. Among other things, he found a scientific article stating that drummers have intrinsic problem-solving abilities, in addition to scoring higher on IQ tests than the general population. Covelli embodies the essence of these findings, as he is not only a musician but also a performance artist, filmmaker, science and technology aficionado, and general DIY handyman. This eclectic background makes for a broad-thinking drummer. You can hear Covelli tastefully and

dynamically utilizing his experience in theater to infuse danceable rhythm into the Julie Ruin's garage-pop tunes, while mixing in elements of his metal and punk foundation.

MD first spoke with Covelli last year, on the brink of what was to be an extensive series of national and international tours with the Julie Ruin, which Carmine—no surprise—was booking. Unfortunately, due to an ongoing battle with Lyme disease, frontwoman Hanna was forced to cancel the dates and lose some of the momentum the relatively new band had gained after the September 2013 release of its debut album, *Run Fast*. Now that the initial shock has passed, Covelli fills us in on his latest activities and plans for the future.

MD: How did you fill up your time after the cancellation of the tours?

Carmine: When I got the news, we were talking to Kathleen, and each of us felt so bad for her. Is it terrible to cancel two European tours and some really great U.S. gigs? Absolutely. I was the main person dealing with the booking agents, so seven months of a lot of emails and talking about logistics disappeared within a week. But there were still things on the books that I had. I went to Bonnaroo with my friend Bridget as part of her band called the Tender Moments. Then I went to Hamburg for an arts, music, and theater festival. I did five theater shows where I would act and drum.

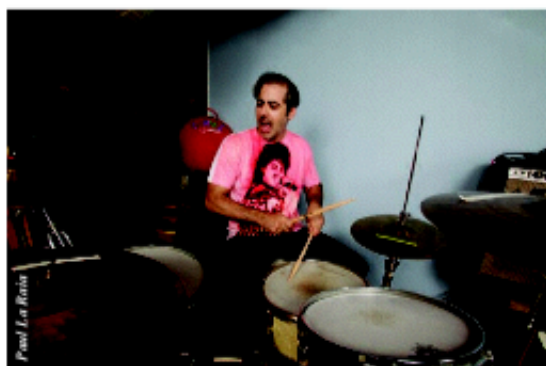
Then I'm working on *People Are Detectives*, a Web comedy series that I thought of four years ago. They're twelve three-minute-long episodes I filmed with my friend Neal. I initially wrote the first eight episodes back in 2010, and we just shot them a few weeks ago in Queens and Brooklyn. We both play detectives, using the premise that we're always on a stakeout having weird metaphorical, avant-garde, abstract conversations that actual detectives would probably never have. But that's what I imagine detectives talking about when they're in a car after the eighth or twelfth hour of being on a stakeout. If you could just be a fly on the wall and listen to that—that's kind of my starting point when I write the episodes.

I also work a couple of days a week at a children's museum. My main job is to design computer-based interactive exhibits. Sometimes they're mechanical, but I mostly deal with computer stuff. Taking stuff apart, fixing it, repairing it, modifying it.

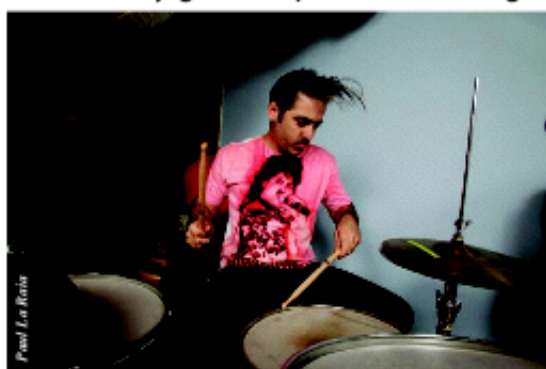
MD: You weren't kidding—you really can do a lot of things.

Carmine: That's what I'm saying! That's what drummers can do. Even if I don't know what the hell I'm doing, I bet I can figure it out. I'm really good at that stuff, and I love problem solving.

MD: Long-term, would you prefer touring and focusing on drumming, or would you rather



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keep busy with several activities?

Carmine: I like doing it all. Do I want to be touring more? Yes, I do. But I also want to have time at home where I can work on art, or building projects, or writing comedy shows. I think it's good to have a bunch of things to do—at least for me that's what works. To keep me interested and engaged and feeling enthusiastic about different things, I need to have different outlets.

MD: How did you become involved with all your projects?

Carmine: It's interesting, because it's hard for me to remember some of the origin stories. It's one of those things where you live in a town long enough and you meet a circle of people that overlaps with another circle of people. To me, theater and the music scene are certainly pretty different, but some of the same people who are in bands also play music for theater, and some of those same people write music for TV stuff or film. It's one of those things where if you're interested in something, you have to make it known.

For a while, when I first moved to New York, I just made myself say yes to a lot of stuff—even if I had no idea what the person was talking about. It's like, "I don't know what that is or if I'll like it, but it sounds like something I'm kind of interested in, so I'll just say yes and see what happens."

MD: It's been said that drummers are the biggest gearheads, because we're interested in how everything sounds and works. Since you're drawn to technology and taking things apart, do you feel that applies to you?

Carmine: Funnily enough, I don't care much about drum gear or guitar pedals at all. I'm more into bass stuff, I think because it's rhythmic. I mostly like writing songs on bass, and I've always been drawn to really bass-heavy bands. I find myself humming those lines in songs more than the vocal melody. I'm like, "Are other people noticing this? That without this bass line the song would not be as good?" I wonder the same thing with drums too. I think people take that for granted—going back to that article about

how great drummers are. People don't quite understand how important drum parts are.

MD: Speaking of songwriting, what is the process for the Julie Ruin? Do you jam, or does one person come up with an idea that the band builds on?

Carmine: We fully have those moments where we're all playing and goofing around and making fun of ourselves, but then some of our songs came out of those jam sessions and we can't make fun of it too much. We'll be playing something and everyone will be shifting around what they're doing and end

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

"I have a 1969 champagne sparkle Gretsch kit that I bought when I was twenty-three years old for \$700," Covelli says. "It's a 20" kick, a 13" rack, and a 16" floor. I love it. I usually bring two snares with me on tour: a 6x14 black wood DW and a 6.5x14 white marine pearl wood 1954 Ludwig. My hardware includes three Tama Roadpro straight cymbal stands, Roadpro snare stands for my snare and my rack tom, a new Pork Pie throne that I'm getting used to, and a DW 5000 kick pedal. My cymbals are 16" and 20" Zildjian A series Medium Thin crashes, a pair of 14" Zildjian hi-hats made up of a K series top and a Z series Dyno Beat bottom, and a 22" Sabian AA El Sabor ride—it's the oddball, but I've had it forever."

up in a totally different, possibly horrific place where we're like, "This sounds terrible and like a song we'd never write." But you've got to just keep going and allow yourself to be a little bit foolish, even if

you're worried that the band in the next room can hear it. To me, it's a good character element; it means you're okay in your own skin and you're confident and competent enough to know that, sure, most of it was bad, but there was a section in there that you really liked.

MD: It's important to push yourself out of your comfort zone and be comfortable in that unknown space.

Carmine: Yeah, then you know what you don't want to do. You can say that you at least did it and tried it. So, that's one way we'll write songs. Then either Kathleen or I will bring in a little looped sample that we pitched down or altered in some way. I brought in about six different loops when we were writing the album, and two or three of them became songs. "Oh Come On" has a loop from an old '60s song, "Just Like Me" by Paul Revere and the Raiders. It's this one little section from the intro that I slowed down and pitched up. It was an eight-second loop that I Frankensteined together into a thirty-second section. It was mostly just about the rhythm.

MD: How was the transition from having the summer off from the Julie Ruin to now playing a bunch of shows again?

Carmine: We're just gearing up for shows now. The summer was pretty great for me. I was building this tiny off-grid workshop cabin thing in upstate New York. That was not part of my plan until the touring got canceled, but things happen and you have to make the best of it. And the free time obviously gave me time to shoot the *Detectives* series, so I feel good with what I accomplished over the summer. I only made it to the beach once, though. Boo. But rehearsals are going well. We are shaking the rust off.

MD: Would you book the tours again?

Carmine: The week after it imploded, I had to take a break from thinking and stressing about it. At the time I didn't want to do it again, but I do enjoy it. I like working out logistics—it's the problem-solving thing. Until it gets beyond what I can handle, I'll probably continue to do it.

MD: Any last words for our fellow drummers?

Carmine: Drummers are smart. Smarter than you.

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