

PERSONAL HISTORY

## THE FUN STUFF

*My life as Keith Moon.*

BY JAMES WOOD

I had a traditional musical education, in a provincial English cathedral town. I was sent off to an ancient piano teacher with the requisite halitosis, who lashed with a ruler at my knuckles as if they were wasps; I added the trumpet a few years later, and had lessons with a younger, cheerier man, who told me that the best way to make the instrument “sound” was to imagine spitting paper pellets down the mouthpiece at the school bully. I sang daily in the cathedral choir, an excellent grounding in sight-reading and performance.

But what I really wanted to do, as a little boy, was play the drums, and, of those different ways of making music, only playing the drums still makes me feel like a little boy. A friend’s older brother had a drum kit, and as a twelve-year-old I gawped at the spangled shells of wood and skin, and plotted how I might get to hit them, and make a lot of noise. It wouldn’t be easy. My parents had no time for “all that thumping about,” and the prim world of ecclesiastical and classical music, which meant so much to me, detested rock. But I waited until the drums’ owner was off at school, and sneaked into the attic where they gleamed, fabulously inert, and over the next few years I taught myself how to play them. Sitting behind the drums was like the fantasy of driving (the other great prepubescent ambition), with my feet established on two pedals, bass drum and high hat, and the willing dials staring back at me like a blank dashboard.

Noise, speed, rebellion: everyone secretly wants to play the drums, because hitting things, like yelling, returns us to the innocent violence of childhood. Music makes us want to dance, to register rhythm on and with our bodies. The drummer and the conductor are the luckiest of all musicians, because they are closest to dancing. And in drumming how child-

ishly close the connection is between the dancer and the dance! When you blow down an oboe, or pull a bow across a string, an infinitesimal hesitation—the hesitation of vibration—separates the act and the sound; for trumpeters, the simple voicing of a quiet middle C is more fraught than very complex passages, because that brass tube can be sluggish in its obedience. But when a drummer needs to make a drum sound he just . . . hits it. The stick or the hand comes down, and the skin bellows. The narrator in Thomas Bernhard’s novel “The Loser,” a pianist crazed with dreams of genius and obsessed with Glenn Gould, expresses the impossible longing to become the piano, to be at one with it. When you play the drums, you are the drums. “Tom-tom, c’est moi,” as Wallace Stevens put it.

The drummer who was the drums, when I was a boy, was Keith Moon, though he was dead by the time I first heard him. He was the drums not because he was the most technically accomplished of drummers but because his joyous, semaphoring lunacy suggested a man possessed by the antic spirit of drumming. He was pure, irresponsible, restless childishness. At the end of early Who concerts, as Pete Townshend smashed his guitar, Moon would kick his drums and stand on them and hurl them around the stage, and this seems a logical extension not only of the basic premise of drumming, which is to hit things, but of Moon’s drumming, which was to hit things exuberantly. “For Christ’s sake, play quieter,” the manager of a club once told Moon. To which Moon replied, “I can’t play quiet, I’m a rock drummer.”

The Who had extraordinary rhythmic vitality, and it died when Keith Moon died, thirty-two years ago. I had hardly ever heard any rock music when I first listened to albums like “Quadrophenia” and “Who’s Next.” My notion of musical vol-

ume and power was inevitably circumscribed by my fairly sheltered, austere Christian upbringing—I got off on classical or churchy things like the brass last bars of William Walton’s First Symphony, or the densely chromatic last movement of the “Hammerklavier” Sonata, or the way the choir bursts in at the start of Handel’s anthem “Zadok the Priest,” or the thundering thirty-two-foot bass pipes of Durham Cathedral’s organ, and the way the echo, at the end of a piece, took seven seconds to dissolve in that huge building. Those things are not to be despised, but nothing had prepared me for the ferocious energy of The Who. The music enacted the mod rebellion of its lyrics: “Hope I die before I get old”; “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss”; “Dressed right, for a beach fight”; “There’s a millionaire above you, / And you’re under his suspicion.” Pete Townshend’s hard, tense suspended chords seemed to scour the air around them; Roger Daltrey’s singing was a young man’s fighting swagger, an incitement to some kind of crime; John Entwistle’s incessantly mobile bass playing was like someone running away from the scene of the crime; and Keith Moon’s drumming, in its inspired vandalism, was the crime itself.

Most rock drummers, even very good and inventive ones, are timekeepers. There is a space for a fill or a roll at the end of a musical phrase, but the beat has primacy over the curlicues. In a regular 4/4 bar, the bass drum sounds the first beat, the snare the second, the bass drum again hits the third (often with two eighth notes at this point), and then the snare hits the bar’s final beat. This results in the familiar “boom-DA, boom-boom-DA” sound of most rock drumming. A standard-issue drummer, playing along, say, to the Beatles’ “Carry That Weight,” would keep his 4/4 beat steady through

*Moon at his last Who concert, at Shepperton Film Studios, outside London, in May, 1978. Photograph by Ross Halfin.*



the line “Boy, you’re gonna carry that weight, carry that weight, a long time,” until the natural break, which comes at the end of the phrase, where, just after the word “time,” a wordless, two-beat half-bar reads itself for the repeated chorus. In that half-bar, there might be space for a quick roll, or a roll and a triplet, or something fancy with snare and high hat—really, any variety of filler. The filler is the fun stuff, and it could be said, without much exaggeration, that nearly all the fun stuff in drumming takes place in those two empty beats between the end of one phrase and the start of another. Ringo Starr, who interpreted his role modestly, does nothing much in that two-beat space: mostly, he provides eight even, straightforward sixteenth notes (da-da-da-da / da-da-da-da). In a good cover version of the song, Phil Collins, a sophisticated drummer who was never a modest performer with Genesis, does a tight roll that begins with featherlight delicacy on a tomtom and ends more firmly on his snare, before going back to the beat. But the modest and the sophisticated drummer, whatever their stylistic differences, share an understanding that there is a proper space for keeping the beat, and a much smaller space for departing from it, like a time-out area in a classroom. The difference is just that the sophisticated drummer is much more often in time-out, and is always busily showing off to the rest of the class while he is there.

Keith Moon ripped all this up. There is no time-out in his drumming, because there is no time-in. It is all fun stuff. The first principle of Moon’s drumming was that drummers do not exist to keep the beat. He did keep the beat, and very well, but he did it by every method except the traditional one. Drumming is repetition, as is rock music generally, and Moon clearly found repetition dull. So he played the drums like no one else—and not even like himself. No two bars of Moon’s playing ever sound the same; he is in revolt against consistency. Everyone else in the band gets to improvise, so why should the drummer be nothing more than a condemned metronome? He saw himself as a soloist playing with an ensemble of other soloists. It follows from this that the drummer will be playing a line of music, just as, say, the guitarist does, with undulations and crescendos and leaps. It further follows that the

snare drum and the bass drum, traditionally the ball-and-chain of rhythmic imprisonment, are no more interesting than any of the other drums in the kit; and that you will need lots of those other drums. By the mid-nineteen-seventies, when Moon’s kit was “the biggest in the world,” he had two bass drums and at least twelve tomtoms, arrayed in stacks like squadrons of spotlights; he looked like a cheerful boy who had built elaborate fortifications for the sole purpose of destroying them. But he needed all those drums, as a flute needs all its stops or a harp its strings, so that his tremendous bubbling cascades, his liquid journeys, could be voiced: he needed not to run out of drums as he ran around them.

Average musical performance, like athletics and viticulture, has probably improved in the last century. Nowadays, more pianists can brilliantly run off some Chopin or Rachmaninoff in a concert hall, and the guy at the local drum shop is probably technically more adept than Keith Moon was. YouTube, which is a kind of Special Olympics for showoffs, is full of young men wreaking double-jointed virtuosity on fabulously complex drum kits rigged up like artillery ranges. But so what? They can also backflip into their jeans from great heights and parkour across Paris.

Moon disliked drum solos, and did not really perform them; the only one I have seen is atrociously bad, a piece of anti-performance art—Moon sloppy and mindless, apparently drunk or stoned or both, and almost collapsing into the drums while he pounds them like pillows. He may have lacked the control necessary to sustain a long, complex solo; more likely, he needed the kinetic adventures of The Who to provoke him into his own. His merry way of conceding this was his now-famous remark “I’m the best Keith Moon-style drummer in the world.”

Keith Moon-style drumming is a lucky combination of the artful and the artless. To begin at the beginning: his drums always sounded good. He hit them nice and hard, and tuned the bigger tomtoms low. (Not for him the little eunuch toms of Kenney Jones, who palely succeeded Moon in The Who, after his death.) He kept his snare pretty “dry.” This isn’t a small thing. The three-piece jazz combo at your local hotel ballroom

almost certainly features a “drummer” whose sticks are used so lightly that they barely embarrass the skins, and whose wet, buzzy snare sounds like a repeated sneeze. A good dry snare, properly struck, is a bark, a crack, a report. How a drummer hits the snare, and how it sounds, can determine a band’s entire dynamic. Groups like Supertramp and the Eagles seem soft, in large part, because the snare is so drippy and mildly used (and not just because elves are apparently squeezing the singers’ testicles).

There are three great albums by The Who, and these are also the three greatest Moon records: “Live at Leeds” (1970), a recording of an explosive concert at the University of Leeds on February 14, 1970, and generally considered one of the greatest live albums in rock; “Who’s Next” (1971), the most famous Who album; and “Quadrophenia” (1973), a kind of successor to “Tommy,” a rock opera that nostalgically celebrates the sixties mod culture that had provoked and nourished the band in its earlier days. On these are such songs as “Substitute,” “My Generation,” “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” “Baba O’Riley,” “Bargain,” “The Song Is Over,” “The Real Me,” “5:15,” “Sea and Sand,” and “Love Reign O’er Me.” There is no great difference between the live concert recordings and the studio songs: all of them are full of improvisation and structured anarchy, fluffs and misses; all of them seem to have the rushed gratitude of something achieved only once. From this exuberance emerges the second great principle of Moon’s drumming; namely, that one is always performing, not recording, and that making mistakes is simply part of the locomotion of vitality. In the wonderful song “The Dirty Jobs,” on “Quadrophenia,” you can hear Moon accidentally knock his sticks together three separate times while travelling around the kit. Most drummers would be horrified to be caught out on tape like this.

This vitality allowed Moon to try to shape himself to the changing dynamics of the music, listening as much to the percussive deviations of the bass line as to the steady, obvious line of the lead singer. As a result, it is impossible to separate him from the music that The Who made. The story goes that, in 1968, Jimmy Page wanted John Entwistle on bass and Keith Moon on drums when he formed Led Zeppelin; and, as sensa-

tional as this group might have been, it would not have sounded either like Led Zeppelin or like The Who. If Led Zeppelin's drummer, John Bonham, were substituted for Moon on "Won't Get Fooled Again," the song would lose its passionate propulsion, its wild excess; if Moon sat in for Bonham on "Good Times Bad Times," the tight stability of that piece would instantly evaporate.

Bonham's drumming sounds as if he'd thought about phrasing; he never overreaches, because he seems to have so perfectly measured the relationship between rhythmic order and rhythmic deviation. His superb but tightly limited breaks on the snare and his famously rapid double strokes on the bass drum are constantly played against the unvarying solidity of his high hat, which keeps a steady single beat throughout the bars. (In a standard 4/4 bar, the high hat sounds the four whole beats, or perhaps sounds eight beats in eighth notes.) That is "the Bonham sound," heard in the celebrated long solo—one of devilish intricacy—in "Moby Dick," on the live album "The Song Remains the Same." Everything is judged, and rightly placed: astonishing order. Moon's drumming, by contrast, is about putting things in the wrong place: the appearance of astonishing disorder. You can copy Bonham exactly; but to copy Moon would be to bottle his energy, which is much harder.

The third great Moon principle, of packing as much as possible into a single bar of music, produces the extraordinary variety of his playing. He seems to be hungrily reaching for everything at once. Take, for instance, the bass drum and the cymbal. Generally speaking, drummers strike these with respectable monotony. You hit the crash cymbal at the end of a fill, as a flourish, but also as a kind of announcement that time-out has, boringly enough, ended, and that the beat must go back to work. Moon does something strange with both instruments. He tends to "ride" his bass drum: he keeps his foot hovering over the bass-drum pedal as a nervous driver might keep a foot on the brake, and strikes the drum often, sometimes continuously, throughout a bar. When he breaks to do a roll around the toms, he will keep the bass drum going simultaneously, so that the effect is of two drummers playing together. Meanwhile, he delights in hitting his cymbals as often



"Next time we're shopping at Wal-Mart."

as possible, and off the beat, rather as jazz and big-band drummers do. The effect, of all these cymbals being struck, is of someone shouting out at unexpected moments while waiting in line—a yammer of exclamation marks. (Whereas his habit of entering a song by first crashing a cymbal and then ripping around the kit is like someone bursting into a quiet room and shouting, "I'm here!")

So alive and free is this drumming that one tends to emphasize its exuberance at the expense of its complexity. But the playing on songs like "Won't Get Fooled Again" and "Bargain" and "Love Reign O'er Me" and "The Song Is Over" is extremely complex. In addition to demonstrating intricate cymbal work, Moon is constantly flicking off little triplets (sometimes on the toms, but sometimes with his feet, by playing the two bass drums together), and doing double-stroke rolls (a method by which, essentially, you bounce the sticks on the drum to get them to strike faster notes) and irregular flams on the snare drum (a flam involves hitting the drum with the two sticks not simultaneously but slightly staggered, and results in a sound more like "blat" than "that").

New technology allows listeners to isolate a song's individual players, and the isolated drum tracks from "Won't Get Fooled Again" and "Behind Blue Eyes" can be found on YouTube. On "Won't Get Fooled Again," the drumming is staggeringly vital, with Moon at once rhythmically tight and massively spontaneous. On both that song and "Behind

Blue Eyes," you can hear him do something that was instinctive, probably, but which is hardly ever done in ordinary rock drumming: breaking for a fill, Moon fails to stop at the obvious end of the musical phrase and continues with his rolling break, over the line and into the start of the next phrase. In poetry, this failure to stop at the end of the line, this challenge to metrical closure, this desire to get more in, is called enjambment. Moon is the drummer of enjambment.

For me, this playing is like an ideal sentence, a sentence I have always wanted to write and never quite had the confidence to do: a long, passionate onrush, formally controlled and joyously messy, propulsive but digressively self-interrupted, attired but dishevelled, careful and lawless, right and wrong. Such a sentence would be a breaking out, an escape. And drumming has always represented for me that dream of escape, when the body surrenders its awful self-consciousness. I taught myself the drums, but for years I was so busy being a good boy that I lacked the courage to own any drums. At school, I played in a rock band, but I kept the fact very quiet. The kids I played rock music with did not overlap with the world of classical music. Drumming was a notional add-on, a supplement to the playing of "proper" instruments. The classical-music path was the scholastic path. Choir school was like being at conservatory—daily rehearsal and performance. And then, later, as a

teen-ager, to work hard at the piano, to sing in the choir, to play the trumpet in a youth orchestra, to pass exams in music theory, to study sonata form in Beethoven, to sit for a music scholarship, to talk to one's parents about Bach (or, daringly, the Beatles!), to see the London Symphony Orchestra at the Albert Hall, even just to fall asleep during "Aida"—all this was approved, was part of being a good student. Nowadays, I see schoolkids bustling along the sidewalk, their large instrument cases strapped to them like coffins, and I know their weight of obedience. Happy obedience, too: that cello or French horn brings lasting joy, and a repertoire more demanding and subtle than rock music's. But fuck the laudable ideologies, as Roth's Mickey Sabbath puts it: subtlety is not rebellion, and subtlety is not freedom, and it is rebellious freedom that one wants, and, most of the time, only rock music can deliver it. And sometimes one despises oneself, in near-middle age, for being so good.

Georges Bataille has some haunting words about how the workplace is the scene of our domestication and repression: it is where we are forced to put away our Dionysianism. The crazy sex from the night before is as if forgotten; the drunken marital argument of the weekend is erased; the antic children have disappeared; all the passionate music of life is turned off, and a false bourgeois order clothes you, with the sack and quick penny waiting if you don't obey. But Bataille might also have emphasized school, for school is work, too—work before the adult workplace—and school tutors the adolescent in repression and the rectitude of the bourgeois order, at the very moment in life when, temperamentally

and biologically, one is most Dionysiac and most enraged by the hypocritical ordinances of the parental league.

So adolescents quickly get split in two, with an inner and an outer self, a lawless sprite inside and a lawful ambassador outside: rock music, or your first sexual relationship, or reading, or writing poetry, or probably all four at once—why not?—represent the possibilities for inward escape. And playing rock is different again from playing classical music, or from writing poetry, or from painting. In all these other arts, though there may be trancelike moments and even stages of wildness and excess, the pressure of creating lasting forms demands discipline and silence; mindful of Pascal's severe aphorism about the importance of staying quietly in one's own room, one does just that, and stares at the sheet of paper, even if the words are not coming. Writing and reading still carry with them the faintest odor of the exam room. (It is exam-silent in the room where I write these words, and how terrible, in a way, is this disjunction between literary expression and the violence of its content.) Rock music, though, is noise, improvisation, collaboration, theatre, showing off, truancy, pantomime, aggression, bliss, tranced collectivity. It is not concentration so much as fission.

Imagine, then, the allure of The Who, whose battering velocity was such an incitement to the adolescent's demon sprite. "I'm wet and I'm cold, / But thank God I ain't old," young Roger Daltrey sang on "Quadrophenia," in a track about a mod teen-ager (named Jimmy, no less) who gets thrown out of home:

Here by the sea and sand  
Nothing ever goes as planned

I just couldn't face going home.  
It was just a drag on my own.  
They finally threw me out.  
My mum got drunk on stout.  
My dad couldn't stand on two feet  
As he lectured about morality.

It is no accident that punk rock got a fair amount of its inspiration from The Who (the Sex Pistols often performed "Substitute"), or that, a generation later, a band like Pearl Jam devotedly covered "Love Reign O'er Me." Here was a band that, in one obvious way, embodied success, but that, in a less obvious way, dared failure—the large amount of improvisation in their songs, the risky, sometimes loose excess of their concert performances, the failing earnestness of so many of the lyrics. And the epicenter of this successful failure, this man who wanted to pack as much of the fun stuff into his playing as humanly possible, was Keith Moon.

The Who was a kind of performance-art band: there was plenty of calculation amid the carelessness. Pete Townshend attended Ealing Art College (whose other musical students from the nineteen-sixties included Freddie Mercury and Ronnie Wood), and has sometimes claimed that the idea of smashing his guitar onstage was partly inspired by Gustav Metzger's auto-destructive-art movement. That high tone is quite Townshendian. But it is hard not to think of Keith Moon's life as a perpetual "happening"; a gaudy, precarious, self-destructing art installation, whose gallery placard reads "The Rock and Roll Life, Late Twentieth Century." In a manner that is also true of his drumming, he seemed to live at once naïvely and self-consciously: spontaneous in his scandalous misbehavior and yet also aware that this is how one should live if one is a famous and rich rock musician. His parody is very hard to separate from his originality; his parody is his originality. This is one of the most charming elements of his posture behind the drum kit: he is always clowning around—standing up sometimes, at other times puffing out his cheeks like Dizzy Gillespie, grimacing and grinning like a fool in some opera buffa, twirling his sticks, doing silly phantom rolls just above the skins of the drums. A child might think that Moon was a circus performer. His drumming, like his life, was a serious joke.



"Them's dancin' words."

FARLEY KATZ

Nowadays, Moon would probably be classed as both A.D.H.D. and bipolar; fortunately for the rest of us, he grew up in non-therapeutic Britain, and medicated himself with booze, illegal drugs, and illegal drumming. Tony Fletcher's entertaining biography "Moon: The Life and Death of a Rock Legend" (1999) is one of the most reliable sources for all the famous "Moon the Loon" stories. Born into a modest, working-class household, in north London, in 1946, Moon had a paltry education. He was restless and hyperactive, and often played to the gallery. An art teacher described him as "retarded artistically, idiotic in other respects," and the authorities were doubtless relieved when he left school at the age of fourteen. "You never felt, 'One day he is going to be famous,'" a friend tells Fletcher. "You felt more likely that he was going to end up in prison."

He had little formal training on the drums. As Gogol's brilliant prose or Richard Burton's swaggering acting embodies the temperamental exhibitionism of their creators, so Moon's playing is an extension of his theatrical hyperactivity. His mother noticed that he got bored easily, and quickly lost interest in his train set or Meccano. Throughout his short life, he was seemingly addicted to practical jokes: he set off cherry bombs in hotels, dressed up as Adolf Hitler or Noël Coward, rode a wheelchair down an airport staircase, smashed up hotel rooms, drove a car into a pond, got arrested for breaching the peace. On planes, Moon might do his "chicken soup" routine, which involved carrying a can of Campbell's chicken soup on board, emptying it, unscen, into a sick bag, and then pretending to retch violently. At which point he "would raise it, and pour the sicklike soup back into his mouth, offering up a hearty sigh of relief while innocently inquiring of fellow passengers what they found so disgusting." Fletcher captures the patient relentlessness of this theatricalism, which often needed preparation and forethought, and certainly demanded a kind of addicted commitment: "Keith wore the Nazi uniform like something of a second skin, donning it intermittently for the next six or seven years." His boozing and coke-snorting were certainly addictions, but perhaps they were merely the solvents needed to maintain the larger, primal addiction to joking and playacting.

Performance is a way of sublimely losing oneself, and there is a sense in which Moon as drummer was another role, alongside Moon as Hitler, Moon as Noël Coward, Moon as arsonist, Moon as sick-bag buffoon, and Moon as crazy rock star. ("I don't give a damn about a Holiday Inn room," he grandly said, after some act of vandalism. "There's ten million of them exactly the same.") But "role" suggests choice, freedom, calculation, whereas these roles don't seem to have been chosen so much as depended on. Or put it another way: despite all the gaiety and partying, the only performance that seems to have truly liberated Moon was the one he enacted behind the drum kit.

I often think of Moon and Glenn Gould together, notwithstanding their great differences. Both started performing very young (Moon was seventeen when he began playing with The Who, Gould twenty-two when he made his first great recording of the Goldberg Variations); both were idiosyncratic, revolutionary performers, for whom spontaneity was an important element (for instance, both enjoyed singing and shouting while playing); both had exuberant, pantomimic fantasy lives (Gould wrote about Petula Clark's "Downtown," and appeared on Canadian television in the guise of invented comic personae like Karlheinz Klopweisser and Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite, "the dean of British conductors"); both were gregarious yet essentially solitary; neither man practiced much (at least, Gould claimed not to practice, and it is impossible to imagine Moon having the patience or the sobriety to do so); and all their performance tics (Gould's hand-washing and coat-wearing and pill-popping hypochondria) have the slightly desperate quality of mania. The performance behind the instrument, however, has the joyous freedom of true escape and self-dissolution: Gould becomes the piano, Moon becomes the drums.

For both Moon and Gould, the performer's life was short: Gould abandoned concert performance at the age of thirty-one; Moon was dead by the age of thirty-two, and had not played well for a long time. He had perhaps five or six really great drumming years, between 1970 and 1976. Throughout this period, Moon was ingesting ludicrous volumes of drink and drugs. There are stories of him swal-

lowing twenty or thirty pills at once. In San Francisco, in 1973, he took so many (perhaps to come down from a high, or to deal with pre-concert nerves) that, after slopping his way through several songs, he collapsed and had to be taken to hospital. When his stomach was pumped, it was found to contain quantities of PCP, described by Fletcher as "a drug used to put agitated monkeys and gorillas to sleep." What magically happened onstage, while Moon was being carted away, was incised on my teen-age cerebellum. Pete Townshend asked the crowd if anyone could come up and play the drums. Scot Halpin, a nineteen-year-old, and presumably soon to be the most envied teen-ager in America, got onto the stage, and performed in Moon's place. "Everything was locked into place," Halpin later said of the gargantuan drum kit; "anyplace you could hit there would be something there. All the cymbals overlapped."

Both Moon and Gould were rather delicate, even handsome young men who coarsened with age, and developed a thickness of feature, an almost simian rind. At twenty, Moon was slight and sweet, with a bowl of black hair upended on his head, and dark, dopey eyes, and the arched eyebrows of a clown. By the end of his life, he was puffy, heavy, his features no longer sweetly clownish but slightly villainous—Bill Sikes, played by Moon's old drinking friend Oliver Reed—the arched eyebrows now thicker and darker, seemingly painted on, as if he had become a caricature of himself. Friends were shocked by his appearance. He was slower and less inventive, less vital, on the drums; the album "Who Are You," his last record, attests to the decline. Perhaps no one was very surprised when he died, from a massive overdose of the drug Heminevrin, a sedative prescribed for alcohol-withdrawal symptoms. "He's gone and done it," Townshend told Roger Daltrey. Thirty-two pills were in his stomach, and the equivalent of a pint of beer in his blood. His girlfriend, who found him, told a coroner's court that she had often seen him pushing pills down his throat, without liquid. Two years later, John Bonham died from asphyxiation, after hours of drinking vodka. And then English drumming went quiet. ♦

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James Wood takes a Keith Moon solo.