



By Marya Errin Jones for the New Mexico Compass

— When the drummers were women, they discovered that tapping out the grain sieve made a sound, and that sound made a rhythm and a song. When the drummers were women, they played for good crops and safe passage for the mother during childbirth. When the drummers were women, the temple grounds shook with sound, the goddess came, and the Earth flourished. And then, somewhere in there, between the flow of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and the Tree of Creation, things went south. Gilgamesh started a war and opened the first Guitar Center with his smug band of nonchalant warriors. The timekeepers became rock gods, and the women stitched together their leather pants made of mammoth pelts. The rest is buried in the annals of Grammy history.

Today, the story of the female drummer is slowly being excavated, rediscovered and restored in the pages of a certain quarterly. Launched in 2009 by founder and Editor-In-Chief (and drummer) Mindy Seegal Abovitz, *Tom Tom Magazine* is the world's first publication devoted to female drummers.

Tom Tom is a semi-glossy full of features and interviews, album and product reviews, tips, techniques and drum lines from well-known songs and indie tunes.

Sounds just like every drum rag you've ever flipped through, right? Well, it should, and any drummer can learn from *Tom Tom Magazine*. The only difference is women and feminists are included in every article.

Abovitz has played for 12 years with various bands, including More Teeth, Chica Vas, Hot Box and Taigaa! She says after years of drumming, teaching at Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls, sound engineering shows and working in music stores, women drummers were still mostly invisible. Abovitz says her publication was born out of necessity. "I started *Tom Tom Magazine* to show up-and-coming drummers that there is a place to be seen and heard."

Pick up copy of *Modern Drummer*, *Drummer Magazine*—any magazine for and about drummers—and you'd think women had gone extinct except for the rare, stiletto-footed, airbrushed aliens draped over hoods of cars or on the arms of rockers. They offer page after page of men dominating the hell out of their kits without a female drummer in sight unless she's sittin', gaped-legged on top of a drum—and not playing it.

Abovitz speaks of conducting a few experiments by taking a pair of scissors to a well-known drum magazine and removing all of the irrelevant content in search of information about women who drum. She basically ended up with paper pulp. "Sometimes there'd be NO magazine left at all. Maybe an ad with a woman in it."

It was clear to Abovitz that if she wanted female-focused drum material, she'd have to make it herself.

Tom Tom Magazine has featured well-known musicians, such as Sheila E. but also folks from indie bands, like Carla Azar from Autolux. Did you know that female drummer Bobbye Hall toured with Bob Dylan, recorded with Tom Waits and with Pink Floyd on *The Wall*? She also wrote the drum parts for Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine" and Janis Joplin's "Me And Bobby McGee." How did we not know this? Hall's contribution to rock music should be basic modern drum geek history. It's amazing that as often as we've heard these songs, can sing and air drum along, we have no idea who rocked those beats. That's not good enough, Abovitz says—we need to know. "*Tom Tom Magazine* is an effort to, through the megaphone, scream, This woman rules!"

It's important to Abovitz that after three years in print and a dozen issues, *Tom Tom Magazine* has made a noise in the drum world on paper. But that's just the beginning: She aims to change the way we explore content on the web. Two years ago, when you Googled "female drummers," you got a list of male drummers. Or the question: "Can girls play the drums?!"

Consistent, relevant information that did not diminish the hunger for the search in the first place was

almost nonexistent. Abovitz poses a question: "If 90 percent of the Wikipedia entries are submitted by men, who do you think they are writing about?" And so, she discovered another necessity in the realm of women's music—Internet archiving.

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, affects how we find anything on the web. Using "white hat" techniques of crafting useful content and cross-linking that information between platforms drives traffic to diverse and relevant data. "Through SEO work, tagging and constantly posting content to our websites, we've been able to make a small dent," Abovitz says. "Wikipedia is getting better, but it's still not good. I've just decided that this is the angle I want to work on. I'm always trying to push into the industry at every angle possible."

Abovitz realizes she is not alone in her efforts to bring female drummers to prominence. She mentions that well-established artists are part of the movement, too. Musicians like Prince, Alicia Keys, Jack White and (however begrudgingly noted by this writer) Beyonce have selected the best musicians for the job. And often those artists just happened to have been women. "We have allies helping out," Abovitz says.

Allies can also be found in the support and sponsorship for *Tom Tom's* worldwide Hit Like a Girl contest. Winners will be announced today. Female drummers ages 18 and up have submitted videos of their handiwork for the perusal of judges, with the grand prize being a brand new, full drum kit provided by Pearl. Yamaha has also provided the second place prize for the lucky winner. Scanning the sponsorship / partnership list, it's easy to see the companies that have thrown their support to *Tom Tom Magazine*—and those that have not. Abovitz explained that the heads of the absent companies don't think the demographic of female drummers is large enough to chase. According to outmoded information available, of course, on the web, only 5 percent of the drum population is female. "The stats are wrong," Abovitz says. "Female drummers are an untapped market. I'm trying to convince these guys that it's true, we aren't going anywhere, but some advertisers are still uncertain." And so the work continues.

Abovitz begins to conclude our phone conversation in the car, in route to meet with more drum companies. She also attends trade shows and conferences where her presence—not as a drummer

but as a woman—is still a stark contrast to the phalanx of dudes that seem to hold the sticks when it comes to keeping the beat. “Guys don’t know what we have to do to get on the drums,” she says. “I had to overcome 100 hurdles to call myself a drummer. All I need to do is call on those 100 experiences to know that there is a need for this.”
