REMO BELL: Marching to the BEAT of a Different DRUM

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REMO BELL:  
Marching to the Beat of a Different DRUM

BY MARGIE ANNE CLARK

As a major player in the music industry, Remo Belli — founder and CEO of Remo, Inc. — has marched to the beat of a different drum in growing his Valencia-based company into one of the largest drum and drumhead manufacturers in the world.

“I have always been fascinated with rhythm,” says Belli who began playing the drums with his neighborhood friends at the age of twelve during the dawn of the Big Band era. While he was learning his craft, new technologies were being developed in response to World War II, which would play a major role in Belli’s future and in turn, change the world of drumming forever.

During the post-war era, Belli, then a renowned jazz drummer in his own right, established Remo, Inc. in North Hollywood in 1957. His firm developed and perfected the first practical drumheads made of DuPont Mylar polyester film — an exceptionally strong, durable plastic film developed in 1952 by DuPont.

Belli immediately recognized the advantage of the new Mylar drumheads, which simplified countless drummers’ lives by offering alternatives to traditional animal skins. The drumheads are now exported to more than 100 countries, with factories located in Taiwan and China.

“It’s a rather significant business,” says Belli, pointing out the wide variety of drums and drumheads being assembled in his vast factory. The company moved from North Hollywood to the Valencia Commerce Center in 1996 in response to the company’s tremendous growth.

“I have a wonderful group of people that I work with,” says Belli who commutes from his home in Sherman Oaks to Valencia nearly every day when he isn’t traveling abroad.

Remo noted that each drumhead, drum and related accessory also incorporates a variety of modern technologies that allow them to be accessible and affordable to the rapidly growing number of part-time players on a global level.

“We are exploring the application and value of weekly Drum Circles for social well-being and personal health,” explains Belli, noting that classes are held at the Remo Recreational Music Center in North Hollywood.
Belli validated the health-promoting effects of drumming in a first ever study of its kind, which was published in the prestigious International Journal of Alternative Therapies in January of 2001. The landmark study showed that group drumming helps stimulate the body’s natural defenses against cancer and other diseases. The research team included neurologist Barry B. Bittman M.D. and a team of renowned specialists.

“As a health-conscious society, we’re searching for meaningful and enjoyable ways to live full, vital and productive lives,” says Belli. “Music is no longer confined to entertainment and culture. We’ve now reached the point where science is involved in learning more about the effect music has on wellness.”

In furthering the development of wellness programs, Belli recently launched HealthRHYTHMS, a new division within Remo, Inc. that develops and provides materials, programs, training and the latest research supporting the use of drumming as an effective means for promoting and maintaining health and well being.

Trim, fit and youthful, Belli is clearly a man who practices what he preaches. “I enjoy my job,” says Belli. “My work is no longer related to money — it’s related to what we can do and what we can accomplish in helping people to live up to their potential.”

Belli’s renaissance in drum making and its related health-promoting benefits grew out of the opening of his first store in Hollywood in 1952. Known as Drum City at the time, the retail outlet was once the hub of activity for anyone with an interest in drumming.

Among his “A” list of customers were such luminaries as Gary Cooper, William Holden, Ralph Edwards, Mel Tormé, Peggy Lee, Betty Hutton, Marlon Brando, Johnny Carson, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz.

“They would come in and tap away and buy something and take it home with them,” recalls Remo, noting that Johnny Carson’s first drum set was purchased at Drum City as a gift for the late-night talk show icon.

“I had some wonderful experiences,” says Belli who went on to create the world’s largest bass drum for Disney, measuring 10 and half feet in diameter. The drum was featured in a Main Street parade at Disneyland in 1959. Today, Remo, Inc. is the provider of special drumheads for the Rose Bowl Parade, the Hollywood Christmas Parade and the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Belli enjoyed a heyday of his own as a professional drummer for 20 years, during which time he rubbed shoulders with legendary jazz giants Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Carson’s musical side-kick, Doc Severinsen.

“It was our time,” Belli says of his years as a top Swing-era drummer. “Every generation has its music and I’m still very much a swing drummer — it’s what I enjoy the most.”

Cover photo by Gary Choppé
Inside photos courtesy of Remo, Inc.
Remo Signature Artist, Leon Mobley, pictured here playing his Remo Djembe.
The most famous heads in drumming salute the most famous heads in drumming.
Rhythm is in all of us. It doesn't matter who you are or where you're from, all you need is the right inspiration to find it. That's why I set out to make it my life long vision to craft and manufacture the best drum products on earth.

Now more than ever before I find myself more enthusiastic about drums and drumming. I was thrilled when research told the world the human condition is very much connected to drumming. And what a great pleasure it is to know that all of our drumheads, drums and world percussion instruments have the unique power to break down borders, creating a language so universal, anyone can speak it, play it and understand it. Ultimately contributing to the betterment of mankind.

Yes, rhythm lives in each and every one of us. And I challenge every one of you to find it.

Remo D. Belli
Chairman and Founder
With all due respect to the late Mr. Wundt, here are our impressions.

Kenny Aronoff
Session Great
"I love how drumming makes me feel physically, mentally and spiritually. It makes me feel great. I always want to improve, and I love the total experience everyday whether it's in the studio, or live or practicing, whatever. It's all good."

Ror Bourdon
Linkin Park
"I can't get away from drumming. It's like a good friend or a relationship, the kind that always gives something back to you."

Travis Barker
Blink 182
"There is no alternative."

Anton Fig
Late Night with David Letterman
"I feel weightless, really good and free when I play the drums."

Louie Bellson
Jazz Great
"I feel great inside when I pick up the sticks and play the drums. At my age, it still gives me a wonderful feeling inside. The good Lord made it all possible for me. He put the sticks in my hand. Ever since I was 3 years old, I get that happy feeling when I play the drums."

Vic Firth
Drumming Legend
"The art of creating sound and rhythm has always been a challenge. Being an integral part of great music has always been inspirational."

Tom Float
Marching Great
"My father and brother were drummers. It must be a genetic thing. I don't have much choice. It's the best way for my creative, emotional, and physical expression to be displayed. The best moment is when you don't realize you are drumming but feel like you are in conversation with your audience."

Josh Freese
A Perfect Circle
"I feel it from head to toe and it's kept my whole body buzzing and my head stimulated and constantly ticking ever since I can remember. I can't begin to imagine what I'd do without it and I don't wish to know."

Steve Gadd
Eric Clapton
"Drumming is the conduit which allows me to communicate with an entire audience."

David Garibaldi
Tower of Power
"Drumming has become my voice in this world and has allowed me a unique, personalized way of connecting with people. Drumming 'strikes' at the core of my life, since I was 10 years old."

Trilok Gurtu
Artist
"Drumming makes me forget the worldly affair. It comes from God and goes to God."

Sue Hadjopoulos
Joe Jackson
"Drumming is a form of active meditation, a means of achieving a higher level of consciousness and a way of connecting with the universal energy. If you don't go within, you go without."
JEFF HAMILTON
Jeff Hamilton Trio
"Taking away drums would be like taking away food. They are necessities. We need 'musical nourishment' every day. Don't forget, we didn't select drums...they selected us!"

ARNO LUCAS
Al Jarreau / George Duke
"Drumming comes from everything you have inside. The coming together of all that you are. After 2 or 3 months on tour your chops are way up, even though your hands are screaming."

JOHN 'JR' ROBINSON
Studio Session Great
"The inspiration of drumming came directly to me from God when I was a little boy. Drumming makes me feel complete. Knowing that I'm satisfied and I have contributed to the world through this great art form makes being a part of music even more special."

ARTHUR HULL
Drum Circle Facilitator
"Drumming is a life enhancement experience for the heart, mind, and body. Rhythm is the mother tongue, it is the foundation of our language, music and relationships. Vibrations from a drum circle are a message that reaches into and relaxes these places in us that are separate, alone or afraid. Drumming together makes us more human."

PAOLO MATTIOLI
Drum Circle Facilitator
"I am driven to drum by a burning passion to express what is in my heart, to share the joy and spirit inside of me and share that with others. Drumming comes from the heart, it is the voice of our spirit. An invisible, palpable energy wave, it transcends all boundaries of race, gender, language and background to touch the very essence of all beings within its reach."

PONCHO SANCHEZ
Latin Jazz Great
"Drumming fills my spirit and enriches my body. It sets me straight in every way and reaches out to other people with positive energy. I feel that I was put on this earth to drum and it brings me closer to my spiritual being."

GLEN VELEZ
Artist
"Drumming opens doors to my inner emotions and to the life force I share with all living things. It is a pure form of life spirit energy, it connects all the parts to the whole. Drumming allows me to fulfill my purpose on earth, while swimming in and transcending time."

RICKY LAWSON
Babface
"It's a great escape. It takes me to a spiritual zone out of this world into the next world. And you take the people who are listening with you."

LEON MOBLEY
Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals
"When I'm playing, I'm not on this plane. I try and play from within my heart to be true to whoever is listening or feeling me. It is like I'm out of body, really soul searching."

DAVE WECKL
Dave Weckl band
"From body, mind and spirit, through my hands and onto the instrument, it is spiritual, sensual, powerful, delicate, raw, finely crafted communication with others. It is the gratification, the joyous feeling I get, through this primal, artistic journey and display of ability we call 'playing drums' and making music, to be able to affect someone else's life positively. It is the essence of who I am, always has been, always will be."

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