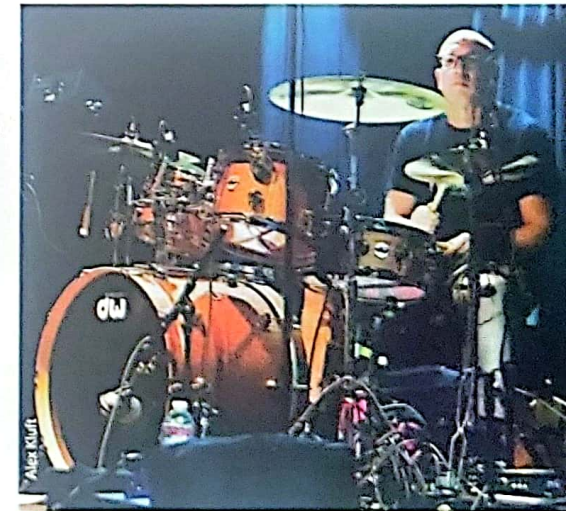




TY DENNIS

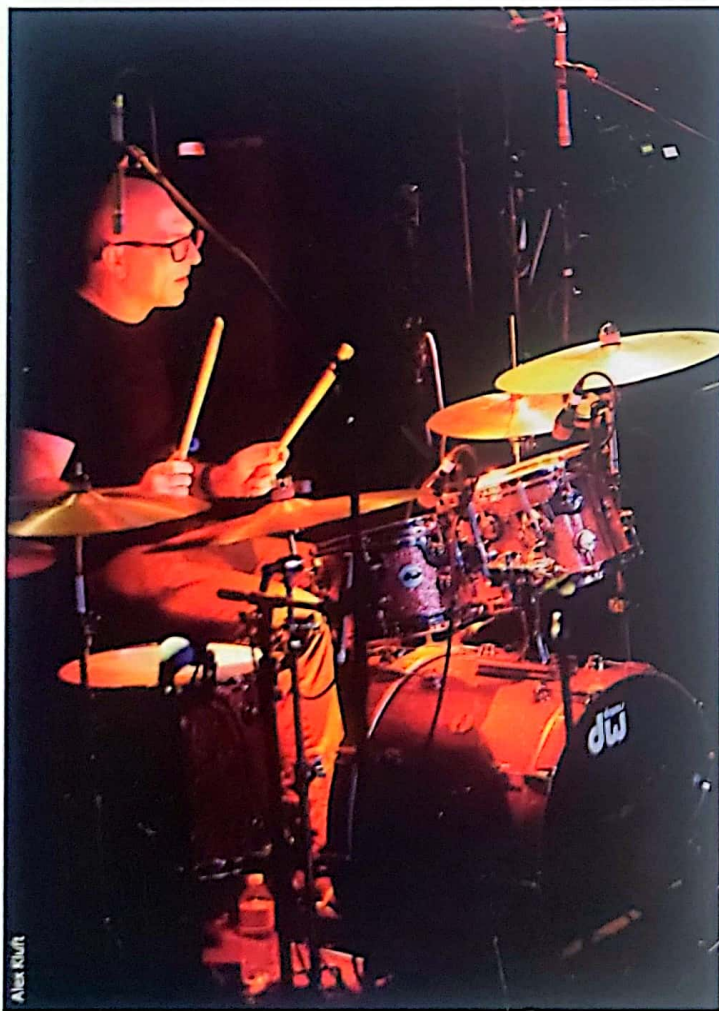
By Daniel "Ziggy" Laverde

The support of a parent in pursuing one's aspirations can make or break the majority of people. For Ty Dennis the fulfillment of his hopes was undeniable. Ty, the son of a jazz drummer, was destined to achieve success as a drummer. The ambition that most drummers have is to meet their heroes, but as you will read in this interview Ty got to sub for his. In addition to his enormous successes as Robby Krieger's long-time drummer, Ty has filled in with other iconic artists. Not many drummers and musicians are willing to put in the effort and make the necessary sacrifices to reach their goals. Before his career reached new heights and stages, Ty spent many years as a session musician working with many artists and bands. Ty was able to reach unforeseeable heights when Robby Krieger and Ray Manzarek dubbed themselves The Doors of the 21st Century and embarked on a revival tour. Ty was chosen to carry The Doors' drumming torch and legacy forward. Ty Dennis is neither a superstar nor a household name, yet his drumming has made many admirers around the world very happy.

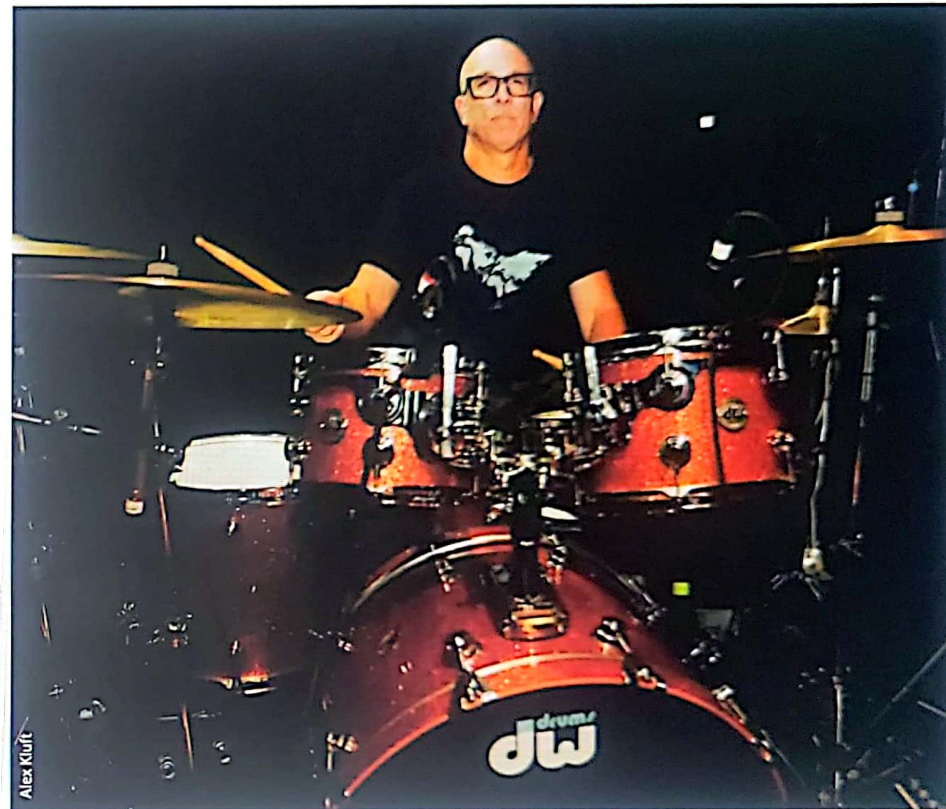


MD: How did you first become interested in music and drums?
TD: My dad Denny Dennis is a professional drummer. For as long as I can remember there were drums in the house. There're even pictures of me at 17 months old holding a pair of sticks. I was exposed to drumming because that's what my father did. He also played great music in the house which became my background noise. When I was a kid, he had all these great records. In my opinion, he had great taste in music. So, I was exposed to drums and great music from a young age. I had an affinity for it. He didn't force it on me or anything like that. Playing drums was just something that I wanted to do. It's in my blood, I guess.
MD: What kind of records were you listening to growing up?
TD: Some of the earliest records I remember listening to are the first *Headhunters* record with Harvey Mason and Herbie Hancock,

the first James Taylor record with Russ Kunkel, Billy Joel *52nd Street*, Steely Dan *Aja*, The Doobie Brothers *Minute by Minute*, and then, of course, a lot of jazz stuff too. I would play along on the floor, and when I got my first drum kit, I would try to mimic those records.
MD: Did you learn a lot from your dad Denny?
TD: Yes, I was fortunate because he was a disciple of Freddie Gruber who taught a lot of dudes including Neil Peart. My dad was one of the cats in the seventies that learned from him. In turn, I learned a lot of the Freddie Gruber principles from my dad.
MD: Growing up, would you go with your dad to his gigs?
TD: Yes, I got to go see him play many gigs. When I got to be 16 or so, the first gigs I did was when I subbed for him on some little jazz gigs that he sent me on. I can now fake my way through jazz. I thank my dad for a lot of exposure to good things.



MD: How did you get started in LA becoming a studio session player?
TD: I grew up about an hour from LA. I made the big move up to Hollywood in the mid-nineties. Back then everybody had an ADAT studio. Back when there were a lot of clubs in LA, I started playing and working for a zillion original bands. I got immersed in playing for original bands and meeting songwriters. I did a ton of records for people that way. They'd hire me to record for projects or I'd be working for a band and then they'd want to record. That's when I started getting the experience of working as a session player.
MD: What were the biggest challenges for you at that time?
TD: Honestly, there were a couple of different things. It's a big learning curve when you don't have a lot of experience in the studio. When you listen back to yourself, you hear things that you might have thought sounded good in the moment, that don't. This helped me learn what I needed to improve upon. I needed to learn how to produce myself when I played. That was a challenge for me, learning to listen back and learning what works and what doesn't. The thing I still work on, and the biggest for me, is listening. When you're recording something or someone sends you a project, it's important to really listen to everything. For example, what are all the parts? What's



the guitar doing? What's the bass doing? How do I compose a part that interacts with all of this? It's a big challenge to get in that head space and to have the chops to do so. It takes a while to develop those skills.

MD: How did you get involved with The Doors and Robby Krieger? How did you transition from studio work to this new venture?

TD: I was playing in a bunch of bands up in the Hollywood area, meeting people, and recording. I made a connection with a great friend of mine named Angelo Barbera who is an amazing bass player. We were a rhythm section team and we connected. We would also recommend each other for gigs. Then Angelo got the gig with the big 80's band, The Motels. At one point they started looking for another drummer, so Angelo recommended me. I auditioned for that gig and got it. I did that gig for a couple of years. Then Angelo got the gig with Robby Krieger playing in his solo band. When Robby started looking for a new drummer, Angelo recommended me once again. That's how I got the chance to meet Robby, and eventually became his drummer.

MD: Did you listen to The Doors records growing up?

TD: I didn't know a lot of The Doors songs. I'd only heard the big hits such as "Roadhouse Blues", "Light My Fire", "Break on Through" and "Riders on the Storm" and I honestly wasn't much of a fan. I had a big learning curve when I got that gig because I didn't really know what The Doors were about. Robby handed me a bag full of The



Doors live stuff and when I listened to it, I thought this is a different animal. I could see where they took it as a band live. I learned to be a big Doors fan, but initially, no I really wasn't.

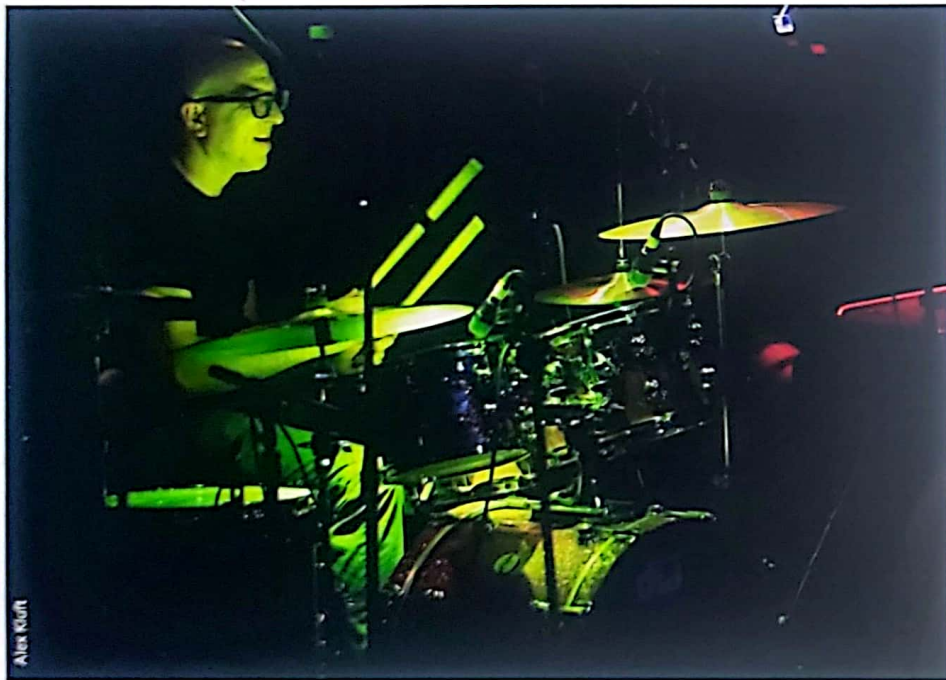
MD: When you heard John Densmore's playing on the live recordings that Robby gave you, did you try to replicate the tone of his drum kit?

TD: I didn't replicate the tone and that was never something that Robby wanted me to do. I can't recall him ever saying anything like, "Hey, can you tune your drums this way?" Or "Can you get more of a jazzy tone." Anytime I worked with Robby and later when I worked with Ray, they

would never mention that. I was free to play with a more modern sound.

MD: After getting the gig with Robby Krieger you also got the opportunity to play as a part of The Doors of the 21st Century. How did that opportunity arise?

TD: Around 2001 I was playing with Robby's solo band. It was mostly shows in the United States. I did that for about a year. Then Robby and Ray, along with Ian Astbury of The Cult, and Stewart Copeland who is one of my drumming heroes, had plans to create a new version of The Doors called The Doors of the 21st Century.



It was a supergroup and they had offers to do it. When the group formed Robby invited me to SIR in Hollywood to go watch him rehearse with Stewart Copeland. I went to watch the rehearsal and that's when I first met Ray, Ian, and Stewart Copeland. I had never met them before. I watched the rehearsal and hung out a little bit with Stewart. Which was a very surreal moment for me.

MD: It must have felt crazy to be in that room. Did it change your perspective to see how he approached the same songs that you were playing for the previous year?

TD: It was different. Stewart just imprinted what he does on that music. It was really interesting. I was playing a version of the original parts, and he was taking those songs and imprinting his style all over them.

MD: What happened after that day?

TD: I thought my gig with Robby was over. I started looking for a new gig. Not long after, I get a call. I was walking in a Rite Aid pharmacy in Glendale, and they called me and said, "Hey, man,

something came up and Stewart Copeland can't rehearse. Do you want to sub and do a rehearsal at SIR?" I said absolutely! I knew the manager because he had managed Robby when I played with him. He told me to come by about a week later and to bring my drums. I showed up at SIR carting my drums and set up. Then, I got to chat with Ray and Ian a little bit more. I remember Ray was about eight feet to the right of me on the keyboard riser and we started to play "Riders on the Storm" with Ray playing the keyboard solo part that everybody knows. I still have the memory of looking over to my right to see Ray playing while I was playing the groove.

It was a good moment in my life. I also had a big advantage. After all, I had played with Robby for a year, and I knew a lot of the tunes and their arrangements. That rehearsal went well, and I told the manager, "If you need me to come sub again, I loved it. Call me!" Sure enough, he calls up about a week later or so and says "Something came up with Stewart, he can't rehearse again. Can you come down?" Again, I said absolutely. He told me that I had to play Stewart Copeland's drums and I couldn't move anything because the group was going to rehearse the next day. I got there and I saw Stewart's green Tama Starclassic drum kit.

MD: That must have been a dream come true for you considering he is one of your drum heroes.

TD: It was surreal because when I was 12 years old, I would play along to *Synchronicity* in my parents' garage imagining that I was playing behind Stewart Copeland's drums. Here I am at 30 something years old and I'm actually playing Stewart Copeland's drums. It was a very cool moment. I remember that he had 12"

hi hats, with a regular ride and a flat ride next to each other. I just remember thinking, *that's different...* 12" hi hats and a flat ride next to the other ride. It was great because I got to play drums and hang out with Ray more. I remember going to the bathroom that day which was down the hall and I hear Ray coming out of the bathroom talking to the manager saying "I really like the way Ty played these tunes" or something to that effect. Ray came out of the bathroom saw me and said, "I'm glad you heard that."

MD: How did you feel hearing that from Ray Manzarek?

TD: I thought, "This is going well, this is cool." When I was doing those rehearsals, I remember thinking how am I going to go in there? Should I kind of copy John Densmore, or should I try to copy my hero, Stewart Copeland? I knew I was able to copy Stewart pretty well because I was so into his playing. But I just remember telling myself, "I'm just going to do what I do and not get caught up in trying to be those guys." Ray really liked that I brought something different to the table.

MD: It all seemed to be falling in place for you. How did you seal the deal on getting the gig?

TD: I did the second rehearsal and then long story short, I got calls to sub on other things. I played on the *Craig Kilborn Show* and I also played a gig at the House of Blues in Hollywood. Then I got the call. They asked me if I would want to do the gig, the tour was starting, and they were leaving.

MD: During The Doors of the 21st Century tour, you got to play a lot of big places, especially in South America, right?

TD: Yes, we did. I did that gig from 2003 until Ray got sick in about 2012. We played all over Europe and even the Wembley arena. Then, we went to South America and played really big gigs all over the place. We went to a lot of places that the original Doors had never gone. There were fans of that music that never got to see Robby and Ray play live. It was quite an experience to go to South America, Mexico, Europe, Australia, and Japan.

MD: What was your favorite gig?

TD: The one that sticks out in my mind the most is a soccer stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was around 27,000 people. The fans were so excited that they couldn't contain themselves. When we were playing, they started throwing pieces of fence and chairs around, and people starting fires out in the audience. It wasn't because they were angry, it was because they were so excited.

MD: What's your favorite Doors song to play live?

TD: I still love to play "Riders on the Storm," and just getting into it behind the keyboard solo. There are different keyboard players that will play live with us now. They each do their own thing and it's fun because each player will go into a totally different direction. I also like to play "When the Music's Over" because that's another one that's never the same way twice. There's a lot of improvisation under

Robby's guitar and he starts to really get blazing on it. I try to follow him on it and see where he's going to go.

MD: You must have certain skills to be able to keep a jam going?

TD: With my dad's influence, those records he showed me, and coming from the background I had, I was able to get in the head-space of where those guys were coming from. They love jazz! If I had just been a guy who wasn't experienced with jazz, didn't know how to play bossa nova beats or brushes, and didn't know how to swing... I could have never gotten a gig like that.

MD: How was the energy and chemistry different from playing with Ray and Robby to just playing with Robby?

TD: With Ray there were more surprises on stage. He tended to be more adventurous and spontaneous. Robby is very spontaneous in his playing, but Ray would occasionally just take a full-on left turn, which was really cool. Musically, sometimes it didn't work out, but that was okay. Together, their chemistry was really good. I felt very fortunate to be a fly on the wall, observe them playing together, and to be a part of it.

MD: Did you develop a personal relationship with Ray?

TD: Absolutely. Ray was a mentor to me in a lot of different ways. We would hang out a lot, I learned so much from him. You can hear how unique Ray's playing was, he didn't care what anybody

thought. I learned so much playing with guys like him. He showed me the experimental side of playing. Sometimes you're going to go for different things, and sometimes you're not going to play them the same way. It may work, or it might not, and that's okay.

MD: Have you played with any other bands recently?

TD: Yes, I just recently started playing with Booker T. Jones. That's been a really great gig because Booker's original drummer was Al Jackson Jr. and I'm enjoying getting in that head-space and honoring that music.

MD: Does Booker T. know that you play with Robby?

TD: Yeah! Booker told me, "We should work up a version of "Light My Fire" or something... Maybe Robby could come out and play sometime."

MD: Did you tell Robby?

TD: I did! Robby was a fan when "Green Onions" came out, he was really into that tune.

MD: You can make it happen!

TD: Yeah, that'd be fun. I'm enjoying it. The Booker gig is super funky, and I get to play all these great Al Jackson parts. Booker is a gracious guy, just like Robby and Ray.

MD: Are you endorsed by any drum companies?

TD: Yes, I use DW Drums, Bosphorus Cymbals, Aquarian Drumheads, and Innovative Percussion Sticks.

Check out Ty's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com