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# Citizen Drummer: How Michael Vosbein Makes Podcasting Work

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**BY PHIL HOOD**

Michael Vosbein has been there and done that a few times. He’s been a drummer, college jazz professor, bandleader in several genres, and twice was a cymbal company owner. Today he’s active in the podcast scene. He runs the biweekly [Drummer Nation](http://www.drummernation.com) (<http://www.drummernation.com>) podcast, including a livecast video version which airs each week on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/drummernationclub/) (<https://www.facebook.com/drummernationclub/>).

([HTTPS://I0.WP.COM/DRUMMAGAZINE.COM/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2018/02/PHIL\\_BEHIND-THE-SCENES\\_FEATURED\\_IMAGE-REV-3-WEB.JPG](https://i0.wp.com/drummagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/phil_behind-the-scenes_featured_image_rev-3-web.jpg))**NEW ORLEANS IS A GOOD PLACE TO START**



Vosbein was born in New Orleans, city of great drummers, to a father who was a singer. His dad was in the Coast Guard in the 1950s but on Sundays he scooted over to WDSU studios for a weekly radio show. His band was called The Surfmen (of course!) and he played guitar and sang in a Nat King Cole style. “Dad sang all the standards and jazz hits and I absorbed that growing up,” he says. The family later moved to Miami and then Atlanta, and Vosbein followed with college stints at North Texas State and Miami. Pursuing the muse he moved to Los Angeles in the 1980s where he did some teaching and studied with jazz icon Jeff Hamilton and Tower of Power legend David Garibaldi. From there he moved to Canada in 1989 to join the faculty in the music program at [St. Francis Xavier University](https://www.stfx.ca/academics/arts/music) (<https://www.stfx.ca/academics/arts/music>). Then, as now, the school was a jazz hotbed. But home was calling, and after a year Vosbein and his wife returned to Atlanta.

*“Podcasting is still a medium  
in search of a business model.”  
— Michael Vosbein*

Once there he found a full-time music gig. “I hooked up with the Ritz-Carlton hotel and stayed there ten years,” Vosbein says. “My son was young and the job kept me home.” At the hotel he played in a jazz trio in the club as well as an R&B group with a singer, a big band, and an orchestra for special events. Such gigs are scarcer nowadays. “They’re there but it seems like there are less and less of them,” he says. “It was almost like having a patron [in the Renaissance] to have steady work like that.”

**THERE WILL BE BRONZE**

In 2004 the entrepreneurial bug bit. Vosbein created Cymbal Masters, a company that imported Bosphorus cymbals with the goal of building up the brand in the US. After eight years he and Bosphorus parted ways and he started his own brand, Crescent, to design cymbals to be built in Turkey. “I realized I needed partners and mentors to do that,” Vosbein says, “and that’s when I partnered with Jeff Hamilton and my friend Bill Norman from Atlanta.” Stanton Moore later joined the company as well.

During five years with Crescent he learned again that being a small cymbal company is a tough climb. Wearing the hats for design, sourcing, marketing, selling, and social media took its toll. “Essentially, my son Kevin and I were running the business,” says Vosbein. They had built a great product reputation, and when the opportunity presented itself he sold the company to Sabian in 2015. Today, Sabian has introduced the [Crescent](https://sabian.com/en/crescent) Vanguard line, signature models from Stanton Moore and Jeff Hamilton, and the Element series. “I’m delighted with what they’ve done,” says Vosbein.

After years of working 24/7 Vosbein took a little time off. But only a little. “I had the idea of doing Drummer Nation so I started figuring out the tech involved and decided to get into it,” he says. Even though he’s in his 60s, he says, “I feel native to social media because I did so much of it with Bosphorus. When we were starting out we had no money and so that became my marketing.” He took a similar DIY approach to Drummer Nation.



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## CONTENT IS EVERYTHING

The first video he posted was one of Stanton Moore having a cup of coffee in Johnny Vidacovich’s (<https://www.facebook.com/neworleansdrummer/>) kitchen, talking about New Orleans and drumming. It had been shot in 2005 but went up (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bzYdGQoALc>) on the DN Youtube site on March 20, 2016. “I started out being purposely guerilla-ish” Vosbein recalls. “Nothing sophisticated.”

To this day he’s kept the same approach but has improved quality, both of the production and his own skills as an interviewer and host. “Like *60 Minutes*, I try to be as professional as I can without resorting to production tricks. I think anyone who is in this business will tell you content is everything,” he says. “At the end of the day I want the show to be two drummers hanging out talking about drums.”

Michael says production quality can vary, depending on where he’s shooting. If he can be in a studio then he shoots with DSLR cameras, LED light setups, and professional microphones. For most productions he uses his basement studio with web cams and software for switching and Skype recording. His “primitive” setup is a mobile rig with an iPhone that he uses when he wants to be less obtrusive.

## ADDING IT UP

Over time he’s added more advertising to the podcasts, with video ads for the YouTube version. But in the podcast world at large that is an anomaly. Some, like [Drummers Resource](http://www.drummersresource.com) (<http://www.drummersresource.com>), a prolific podcast with nearly 300 episodes broadcast so far, do well with sponsors and ads; others are nonprofit (at least in practice, if not in status). Some ask for donations; others are projects to promote a company or vanity projects to promote the host. “There’s not a great deal of money in our field,” says Vosbein, “but my idea from the get-go was to monetize it. I don’t think the ads detract in any way.”



He creates many video ads for clients in his studio. “Some of the companies in the industry aren’t fully ready for video or social media advertising,” he says, “though I think they may be soon.” But he’s been saying that for a while. “In the 1980s I was involved in a program in L.A. called *Drum View* magazine. But back then the same problem existed.

Small companies did not have the advertising figured out. But we’re getting closer.”

Drummer Nation’s style runs toward jazz and classic pop. Many subjects have tended to be older drummers, partly because Vosbein knows the music well and it makes for a great interview. You can catch the Drummer Nation podcast every week at [drummernation.com](http://drummernation.com) (<http://drummernation.com>) or on video on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2looBh8mpoe_rRYEoMP4RQ) ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2looBh8mpoe\\_rRYEoMP4RQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2looBh8mpoe_rRYEoMP4RQ)). Each Wednesday it is live on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/pg/drummernationclub/community/) (<https://www.facebook.com/pg/drummernationclub/community/>) at 1 PM EST.

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