



# ZORO

That Persistently  
Funky Drummer

**T**o say that well known drummer Zoro is a man with a vision is an understatement. To relegate his sizeable talents to just R&B drumming is a mistake. Zoro is more than just a musician who has been voted six times as the “#1 R&B Drummer” in Modern Drummer and Drum! magazines reader’s polls. He was also voted “Best Educator” for his drumming books and also “Best Clinician” for the hundreds of workshops he has taught. He is a motivational speaker as well as a guy who has been called to exhort the brethren now in church pulpits. Quite a lot going on for a guy whose unique name came from the guys in the band New Edition teasing him about the funky looking hat he always wore.

Currently Zoro drums with Lenny Kravitz and Frankie Valli (quite a wide berth of styles just between those two artists alone) and he has played with Phillip Bailey, Jody Watley and Bobby Brown (among others) in his busy career.

I’ve known Zoro for years now and what I like about him is his commitment level... first to the Lord and then to persistently following who he believes he is supposed to be. He is a one man dynamo... and yes he really is one funky drummer.



**Christian Musician:** You certainly have a lot to offer musically. You get to express yourself in a lot of different situations/styles. How did you get started in music and what were your early musical influences?

**Zoro:** (answering this question from Reykjavik, Iceland).

Though none of my 6 siblings were musicians, I grew up in a home where everyone loved music, especially my mother Maria. She raised me on timeless artists like Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Elvis Presley and some classic jazz artists too. The neighborhood where I grew up in Los Angeles was predominantly black so I heard a variety of incredible gospel, soul, blues, New Orleans rhythm and blues and a plethora of great R&B of the 60s & 70s. The Motown sound, Stax records, James Brown, etc. My older sister Maria loved all the classic rock of the 60s, so I heard and enjoyed a wide variety of great music and didn't worry about what it was called.

One of the first songs I learned on the drums was a tune called "Hip Hug Her," by Booker T. & the MGs. I bought the 45 and was in love with the fat drum groove played by Al Jackson Jr. Some of my favorites were all of the Motown acts, Earth, Wind & Fire, and Elvis Presley. Once I started playing I was quickly drawn towards early soul, funk fusion artists like Grover Washington Jr., Chuck Mangione, Tom Scott and the Jeff Lorber Fusion. Music that was a bit more progressive but still maintained an R&B groove.

My mother fed the rhythmic desire in me by giving me a Mickey Mouse drum set one Christmas when I was around 10 years old, Mickey Mouse was literally on the bass drum. It was made of paper heads and even though it didn't last through the day, the desire to play never left and finally in 1978 at the age of 16 I bought my first 4 piece drum set and began taking private lessons. I knew that it was part of the destiny that God had for me and just moved forward by faith. It was all by the Lord's prompting. I simply obeyed his voice and pursued the dream he placed in my heart with a relentless passion, diligence and perseverance.

**CM:** So what were the next steps from aspiring drummer to professional musician?

**Zoro:** (answering from Stockholm, Sweden)

The next steps were to follow the vision that God placed within me and to see it by faith long before it came to pass. Remember the word

says, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I simply believed that with God it was all-possible. So I let hope and expectation explode in my heart! As I looked at it, God already did his part. He gave me the gift of rhythm. Since he gave me the gift, planted the vision and desire in me, then obviously he can and will enable me to fulfill that very call, as long as I do what is required of me. My part was moving forward by faith and with hard work, persistence, perseverance and most of all patience.

A farmer is freely given a seed to plant. That seed has the potential to yield a great harvest, but he must first plant it if he expects to get a return. He must prepare the soil, fertilize it, water it, weed it, tend to the garden and labor after the seed with reverence and expectation. Then he will reap a harvest many times bigger than what he planted.

It's God's universal law in scripture, "for

Undoubtedly, God's favor was on my life and through his grace my name and reputation started to spread around Los Angeles.

Building key relationships with other serious players eventually led to major audition opportunities. Through that God opened great doors for me to walk into my destiny. I didn't get every gig that I auditioned for, only the ones I was destined for. I did however learn a tremendous amount about my playing at each audition, for when your playing is tested by the fire of real life demanding situations, you'll surely know what stands when it's over and that can help mold you into a real musician. The refiners fire for musicians so to speak.

I always asked for feedback about my playing after each audition. I would ask for honest opinions and made people feel comfortable with giving me the truth as they saw it, even if it hurt. That critique was not only valid, but it was invaluable and revealed weaknesses in my playing, blind spots I could not see. It gave me revelation and a clear road map of what was necessary to get my musicianship to the next level.

It was all part of the learning process to becoming professional. The key was that I was not arrogant. I was humble, therefore teachable and open to criticism that would help me bear more fruit from the seed God gave me. I find humility to be the vital link to my spiritual, personal and musical growth. This truth has transformed me as a husband, father, friend, mentor, speaker, preacher, writer, drummer and man of



*pictured above: Zoro in concert with Lenny Kravitz*

as long as the earth remains there will be seedtime and harvest." I just applied his truth and principles to my seed. I was extremely disciplined and practiced consistently as much as my schedule allowed. I was passionate and studied intensely. I took chances, private lessons, read magazine articles, books, went to concerts, watched videos, and attended classes; seminars, conventions, clinics and I asked lots of questions.

Eventually I studied at Berklee College of Music in Boston. Then after that I took every gig under the sun, from Bar mitzvahs to weddings, club gigs, happy hour gigs, recording sessions, jam sessions, demo sessions, you name it, I did it, nothing was beneath me. That is where I gained invaluable experience that eventually seasoned me as a player and gave me confidence.

I played and enjoyed every style of music and that gave me versatility on my instrument.

God.

In short, I immersed myself completely and made an investment in my future. That investment came in the form of stewardship. I stewarded my time, energy, money and opportunities very well. I listened to wise counselors, instruction, and wisdom. I received God's promises the same way all of his people had throughout the Bible. Through faith and overcoming!

He guided and directed me through many challenges, trials and tribulations and as I passed each test he elevated me. With the help of the Holy Spirit I overcame fear as he instructs us to do. My dominant life principle is to be motivated by faith and not fear. It's not to say that fear never crept in, it's just that I pushed through the fear with courage in spite of it, just as Joshua did in the time of Moses.

I also learned to bounce back from disappointment, be resilient and trust God for



my future. Failure to me was only a temporary state, not a permanent destination. I eventually understood that some things are just on God's timetable and not mine and learned to wait on him.

These are all the real keys to seeing the vision come to fruition, to go from the aspiring to the professional. And I can't overstate how hard I worked and how I dedicated myself to excellence in order to honor God. Through being a servant and allowing him to use me in whatever capacity he wanted, he has given me increase.

By desperately seeking him, desiring to know him in deeper ways and by spending time in his presence, he has increased the anointing on my playing because there is purpose in it, his purpose. It's about his kingdom and partnering with him, because we are called to co-labor with Christ, what an honor! I mean really, the God of the universe asks us to be partners with him, what an offer, who in their right mind can turn that down?

I was always motivated by Proverbs 22:29, "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men," and I have lived to see that made manifest in my life over and over again. I have played for kings, queens, princes and princesses, dignitaries and billionaires, but

through it all and most importantly I play for he who sits on the throne. God is amazing and faithful!!

As I look back now on the long journey, the purpose was always that through my instrument I would worship him and by doing so I would war against the forces of hell. The last Psalm in the Bible says, "praise him with clashing cymbals." We cannot see, except by faith and the assurance of God's word, but genuine heartfelt praise and worship destroys the power of darkness in the spiritual realm and releases the power of God into our lives and the lives of others for his purposes.

When I play, I am truly worshipping my king with all my heart, mind, soul, body and strength and nothing but gratitude flows from my heart for the gift he graciously gave to me. It's a privilege to be part of his ever-expanding kingdom and to have an important role to play in its advancement. As a drummer, I am nothing more than a servant of the most high God, a worshipper, and as we know the Israelites always sent out the worshippers in advance of each battle to assure victory.

Drumming is spiritual warfare and the great thing is that as a Christian I am assured victory as long as I just pull out my sword and fight. I must end each day with blood on my sword or I have not fought. That fighting for me comes in the form of faith, obedience, prayer, practice, repentance, faithfulness, meditating on God's word, standing on his promises and eventually drumming.

I am on the winning side and if God is for me then who can be against me? My confidence is in him so with that assurance I feel I can do anything he calls me to do. That is the practical, philosophical and spiritual answer on how one goes from the aspiring to professional. For me it's always deeper than just a surface level one-dimensional strategy for success, because it's God inspired and God is deep!!!!

**CM: What I like about you Zoro is that not only do you have the drumming skills but also, you like to teach other drummers what you've learned. In books, DVD's and your drum clinics you pass along a working knowledge of drumming history and principles. Why is this such an important part of who you are as a musician?**

**Zoro:** (Answering from Copenhagen, Denmark)

Thanks for the kind words! I guess it's very simple. It's because that's who God called me to be. Not only do I like to teach

drummers what I've learned but I love to teach all people what God has taught me about living a purposeful, fulfilled, and victorious life. In essence, I am a communicator and my goal is to communicate Godly success. When I play the drums, write books, teach, preach, or speak, I am really just communicating. It's all just various facets of one major gift, the gift of communication, which spiritually speaking is the teacher/ exhorter anointing.

Romans 12: 5-8 tells us to use of our spiritual gifts in proportion to our faith and to do it cheerfully! Whatever your call is, the point is to flow in it to build up the body of Christ, glorify God and cause the lost to see the living Christ in you and through that gift. I am just being faithful to the call and contributing my portion to the body of Christ and attempting to awaken unbelievers to the power and purpose of the living God.

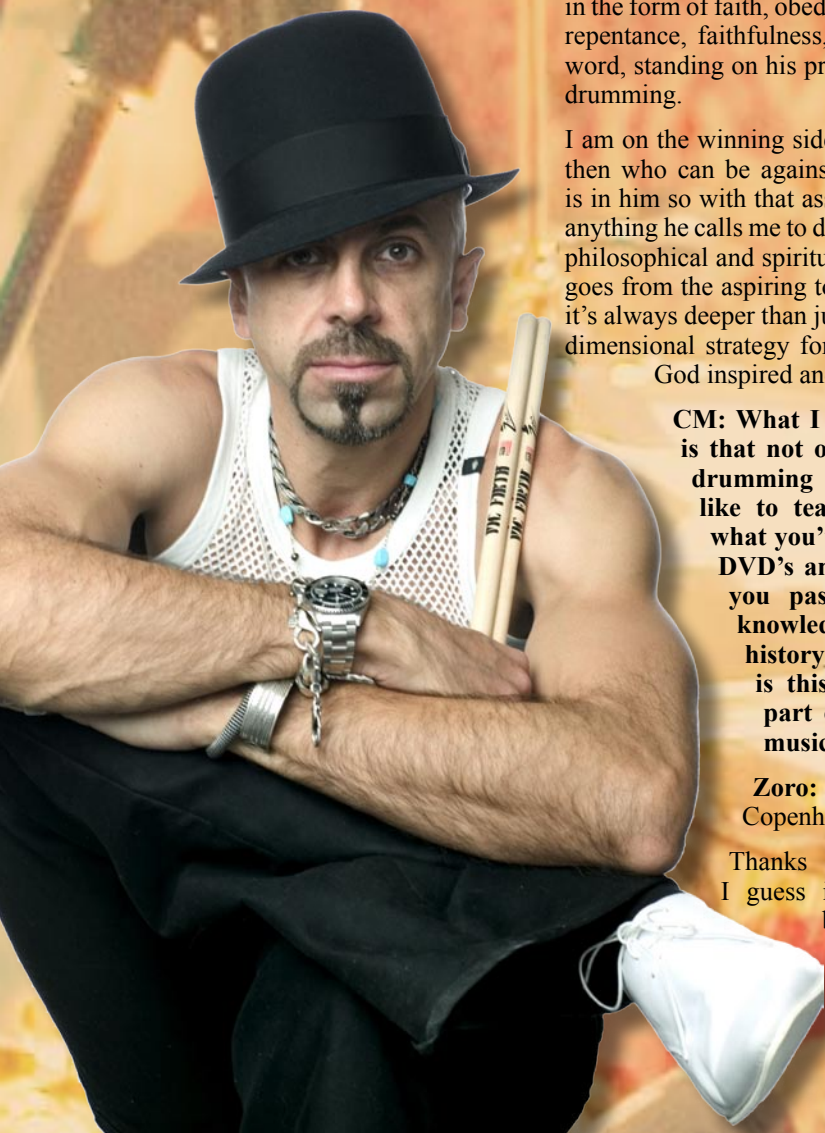
Aside from my mother who was awesome, I grew up fatherless and with very few mentors and encouragers along the way. So I have a heart to see people believe in themselves and more importantly in the God who made them. When I teach, I am doing more than just instructing on a particular musical idea or concept, although that's definitely part of it. What I am really doing is passionately imparting encouragement and life to others and that gives my teaching purpose and I enjoy that most.

And even though I never had many encouragers, the Lord spoke to me and said, "My son, I will make you for others the very thing you were looking for yourself and because of your hardships growing up, you now have my heart for people and I will make you a great encourager like Barnabas and the apostle Paul! And like Barnabas and Paul I too am driven to motivate people in the things of God. So in my life God has fulfilled his promise to me in allowing all that I do for others to flourish.

And Because of the difficult circumstances that I went through as a young boy I now possess a deeper understanding of what people need. As the word declares, "God works out all things for good for those who love him, even the bad things.

At the end of our lives, the one thing we can count on is that God will surely judge us. And it won't be on whether or not we were successful by world standards, but rather he will judge us on whether or not we did what he called us to do and whether or not we were faithful stewards to the things he gave us. And by faith, I am trying to honor him with my stewardship by doing the very thing he called me to do with to the best of my ability with a level of excellence that would please him. What good will it do to come to him, "hey Lord you know I was a hugely successful stock broker when what he really called you to be was a doctor.

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Whoa!! Watch out. When we miss our call a great many things that should have happened won't. It's kind of like the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. If George Bailey weren't born, so many things wouldn't have happened. Each of our lives is called to affect so many others and when we answer the call it profoundly does.

If we fulfill the call of God on our life, then many lives will be affected for the kingdom and we will bear fruit for God and cause his body to grow. For the believer there is always kingdom business within all of our earthly business endeavors. We need to take God out of the little box we put him in. He is in everything and can be in so much more if we let him. We will only know what that call of our life is by spending time with the father, surrendering to him with the humility and being obedient to his promptings by the Holy Spirit.

We need to discern his voice from our own and that of his enemy. It can be done and it is his will that we do so. It thoroughly pleases my soul to know that I am affecting people as a teacher, speaker, mentor, encourager and preacher because that desire is wired into my DNA. Nowhere do I enjoy doing this more than in my own home as a husband and father!!! My first ministry is my wife and children. From that all else flows. That gives my ministry real life substance, integrity and great joy!

I don't believe that we will ever feel content unless we are flowing in the exact gifts that God intended for us to use. If you don't know what your gift is, just ask him. It is his good pleasure to reveal it to you. Proverbs 19:20 says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." Get with his program and his purpose and it will succeed.

All of my products, books, DVDs, clinics, etc., are just visions that God gave me and I was faithful to pursue each one. When God gave me a vision for my book, *The Commandments of R&B Drumming*, there were many obstacles that I had to overcome in order to see it come to fruition. At the time he gave me the vision I could not type, I didn't own a computer, nor had any idea how to work on one, nor did I have any guarantee that if I wrote a book that it would ever get published.

At first, I was discouraged that I had to learn so many new things in order to bring this dream to life. I knew I had all the ideas and the ability to communicate and convey them, but there were other skills I needed to develop in order for it to become a reality. So I learned them all and in the process that changed my life in numerous ways.

Not only did it allow the vision to come to life, but it also opened up other doors of

tremendous blessing. The key is not to let what you don't know prevent you from doing what you do know! The amazing thing was that every endeavor that I saw to completion turned to gold. God is good all the time and following his commands will always lead to blessings, because he is faithful to his righteous servants. The book, and DVDs were voted best in the world by a plethora of international publications and I have been voted #1 educator and #1 R&B drummer many times and received numerous awards from around the world as a player, teacher, author and speaker.

I don't share this to boast, unless it is to boast of what God can do with a willing vessel. I share it to inspire and confirm that God is not a man that he should lie. He is just, faithful and true. I share it to encourage everyone reading to do what your called to do and to reaffirm to you that our God is the God of desires, visions, dreams and the impossible! God's grace has enabled me to accomplish nothing short of the miraculous in every area of my life.

If you are faithful to pursue God's call on your life I can assure you that you will find mountains standing in your way and a multitude of other obstacles that will try and prevent you from fulfilling that call. It's O.K. really it is, that is to be expected. But the great news is that with God you can overcome them all. Jesus told us in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

That is very encouraging to me and gives me incredible confidence and assurance that if I just stay true the course I will succeed!! I have a motto by which I live by. "To live each day as if it were your last and one day it will be true." Heavy right? So each and every day I give my family my absolute best, and I give

the world my best so that when I check out of this place I will hear those words in Matthew 25: 23 that I long to hear. "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of our lord."

Answering the call that God has on our life is just about one thing.... faithfulness, our faithfulness. He has been faithful already by freely giving us life, gifts and the promise of eternal life through Christ Jesus. Our life is just an opportunity to show him our faithfulness! In closing, I wish to share with you three words that I apply to my all aspects of life. They are discipline, diligence and denial and define who I am presently and to a large extent will also determine my future.

You need discipline to accomplish any worthwhile endeavor in life and to walk with integrity as a man of God. Diligence is the ability to apply the necessary discipline over the long haul, to stay the course. Anyone can embrace discipline for a short duration, but for a lifetime that is quite another story. Our life should be that of one who overcomes and endures to the end and you would need diligence to see you through. And finally, denial comes to play, a kingdom principle that is so foreign to most of us today. Deny yourself and serve others, treat others as more important than yourself and in doing so you will reveal God's true nature to the world. Our goal should be to show the world just who lives in us, Jesus!

*Zoro is a spokesperson for Compassion International.*

*Zoro is also featured in the Amy Hammond Hagberg book "How Do You Know He's Real? God Unplugged."*

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*Find out more about Zoro at [www.zorothedrummer.com](http://www.zorothedrummer.com)*



*pictured above: Zoro in Ghana, West Africa demonstrating God's love.*