

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

The guy behind the guy who taught Gadd

Steve Gadd is the drummer Eric Clapton won't leave home without.

He's the one on whom Paul Simon has relied since long before Gadd wrote the now famous drum intro to "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover." He also tours with James Taylor, but is from Rochester.

John Beck — the guy who taught Steve Gadd — was the principal timpanist in the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra for 43 years, and generally is considered the greatest percussion professor in the world.

He's also the guy I met in a recent cooking class — where he was wearing an apron — and where I was merely a stand in, filling in for one of my wife's friends who couldn't make it that night.

He was standing by the stove when I introduced myself. When he introduced himself, I stood there for a moment and just stared.

"Are you *the* John Beck? I mean are you at the Eastman?" I asked.

He showed no signs of anything but utter humility when he responded "yes."

I was overwhelmed by the chance to meet him face to face. It was so weird that we met in a cooking class — while he was wearing an apron. I only stammered for most of the conversation.

Steve Gadd and I had a mutual friend, Mark Manetta. Years ago Mark gave me a drum made for Steve and, after months of my wife's staring at it in our foyer, she finally asked how long it was going to stay there.

Thanks to her, I recreated the drum set Steve Gadd put together years ago. I think it was the same configuration he used when he played drums on Steely Dan's "Aja."

I had decided not to play the set until Mark came over to jam but, tragically, he passed away a week before he was going to visit. I then began hoping I could somehow arrange to have Gadd be the first person ever to play the set, so it sat unused for years.

Fast forward to this year's Super Bowl: John Beck and his wife, Ellen, came over for our very small party. I was cleaning up the music area in the basement when my wife said, "Don't you think you let those drums wait long enough? I mean, John is the guy who taught Steve Gadd."

Thanks once again to my Judy's level headed thinking, I was honored to have John Beck sit at those drums for the first time. He even autographed them, allowing some room to be saved for Gadd.



By **ROBERT L. BRENN JR.**
Daily Record
Columnist

I actually got to sit beside him, drum set by drum set, and we played for hours. All the while I constantly tried to forget just how unschooled I am, and how amazing he is — I was sitting next to one of the world's greatest drum players.

John has always been so gracious. He makes me feel at ease despite the discrepancies, despite his enormous talent and success. Thanks, Mark.

While we spoke that night it occurred to me that if he had played with the RPO for so long, and since I knew he had been recording and playing with jazz greats since he was a teenager, I had to know what happened in between.

"Who taught you?" I asked.

He replied with the name William Street — Beck's predecessor as the RPO's principal timpanist.

Very few people knew the name William Street, and I'd never heard of him until John mentioned him that night. But I now had the name of the guy who taught the guy who taught Steve Gadd!

By the way, I also had the pleasure of accompanying John Beck when we attended Jeff Tyzik's Timpani Concerto. As we were leaving, some audience members were talking about how wonderful it was. A woman was talking to John, and asked naively, "Did you ever get to see John Beck perform?"

John merely smiled and replied "I am John Beck!"

A lot of people don't realize it but we've been able to see John perform for free at the jazz festival for many years. In fact, looking at the cumulative talent that infiltrates our city on a yearly basis, it's almost hard to believe that we have evolved from the days when William Street first arrived in Rochester to today's world famous International Jazz Festival. Thank God for John Nugent and Mark Iacocca. Thanks, John. Thanks, Mark.

Nowhere on the planet is there a place as densely infested with raw musical energy and talent as Rochester, with venue after venue within walking distance, and music seemingly flowing out of every other building, most accessible by merely purchasing a jazz pass. No I don't own any of it, but I'm sure as hell proud. We are truly fortunate in this community. We have opportunities that are exponentially greater than almost any other place to which you might wish to compare us. There are very few cities that have so many different talents, both artistic, intellectual, community minded, coupled with business savvy.

Just look at the fact that we have Mark Cuddy here with Geva

Continued ...

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Continued ...

Theatre, for which I'll now offer a cheap plug: On Friday, June 4, the Geva will host "Curtain Call," the annual fundraiser for theater education and outreach in our community. I'll be performing alongside the likes of Maggie Brooks, George Hamlin and Jennifer Johnston in "Five County Love," a comedic spoof of the current Geva production "Five Course Love." Call (585) 232-4382 for tickets. Mark assures us the part he's writing for me will

be more embarrassing than anything I've done on stage before. Knowing his talents, I'm sure that will be true. Thanks, Mark.

Robert L. Brenna Jr. is a partner in the Rochester law firm of Brenna, Brenna & Boyce PLLC, which his father founded. He is the immediate past president of the New York State Academy of Trial Lawyers and hosts a Sunday morning radio program, "The Brenna & Brenna Law Forum," on WHAM 1180 AM at 8 a.m., online at www.wham1180.com.