Pop Talk: When it Came to Ilan Rubin's new gig, he 'nailed' it

by George_Varga

Circumstances beyond llan Rubin's control kept him from watching the star-studded Grammy Awards telecast, but he doesn't mind one bit.

"I've been a bit busy," he explained as the newest member of Nine Inch Nails (or NIN, as it is fondly known by fans).

Nine Inch Nails welcomes 20-year-old Ilan Rubin as the band's new drummer. Photo courtesy of K.C. Alfred. Touring with the world's most innovative and successful industrial-rock band would be a major thrill for any 20-year-old musician.

Yet, while this young virtuoso is understandably pleased about his high-profile new gig, he's also taking it in stride.

This, after all, is the same Ilan Rubin who â€” at 11 â€” became the youngest musician to perform at the 1999 Woodstock festival, where he ably manned the drums for F.o.N. The San Diego pop-punk band, which also featured his two older brothers, Aaron and Danny, on guitar and bass, respectively, went on to perform on three separate Vans Warped tours.

The same year as his Woodstock performance saw Modern Drummer magazine declare Rubin the winner of its national "Best Undiscovered Drummer Under the Age of 18" competition. A year later, he began taking lessons in Riverside, Calif., from blink-182 drum star Travis Barker.

"Being able to learn firsthand from him was awesome," Rubin said. "The lessons were split between snare drum stuff on a practice pad and then a drum set, which went between rock and more jazz-oriented drumming."

Now, the day may soon come where Rubin tops Barker in Modern Drummer's annual readers poll.

Blessed with a formidable instrumental command, he is able to play even the most challenging time signatures and polyrhythmic accents with deceptive ease and accuracy. He also maintains a solid groove, no matter how intricate the song at hand, and always plays to enhance the music, not to show off.

It is these skills that earned him the admiration of Trent Reznor, NIN's leader. By coincidence, Rubin is replacing NIN drummer Josh Freese, whom he also replaced in 2005 in the Welsh rock band Lostprophets.

"We recently invited (Ilan) out to rehearse with us and he blew us away," Reznor said in a post late last year on NIN's website. "(He's) the perfect guy to pick up the sticks after Josh leaves us at the end of the year."

Rubin is 23 years younger than Reznor, who first heard him in 2007 when NIN and Lostprophets both played at the annual Reading and Leeds rock festivals in England.

But Rubin is much more than just a highly skilled drummer whose resume already includes having played on 13 albums. He is also an accomplished guitarist, bassist, keyboardist, singer and songwriter.

Witness his recent debut solo album, "Coup," which Rubin recorded under the musical nom de plume The New Regime and finds him handling every instrumental and vocal role himself.

"I wrote all the songs on either guitar or piano," said the self-taught Rubin, who has already been asked by Reznor to cover some of the piano parts on NIN's tour.

Rubin, who won't turn 21 until July, was only 7 when he attended a 1995 concert by ex-Led Zeppelin mainstays Jimmy Page and Robert Plant. Instantly mesmerized, he was soon playing on his dad's 1968 Ludwig silver sparkle drum kit, even though his right foot could barely reach the bass drum pedal. At age 9, he performed his first gigs with F.o.N.

Rubin cites Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Cream, The Police and Radiohead as his favorite bands, while Buddy Rich and former Dave Brubeck Quartet star Joe Morello are his two favorite jazz drummers. However, while he has long been aware of NIN, it's only since he joined the band that he's immersed himself in its music.

"A year ago, I didn't really listen to NIN; I hadn't progressed to that kind of music yet," Rubin said.

And now that he's a member?

"At this point, I know about 55 NIN songs, which covers a good chunk of the back catalog," he said. "I don't think there are many bands that are bigger or better than NIN, so I want to do this as long as I can."

Copyright 2009 Creators Syndicate Inc.

Pop Talk: When it Came to Ilan Rubin's new gig, he 'nailed' it by George_Varga