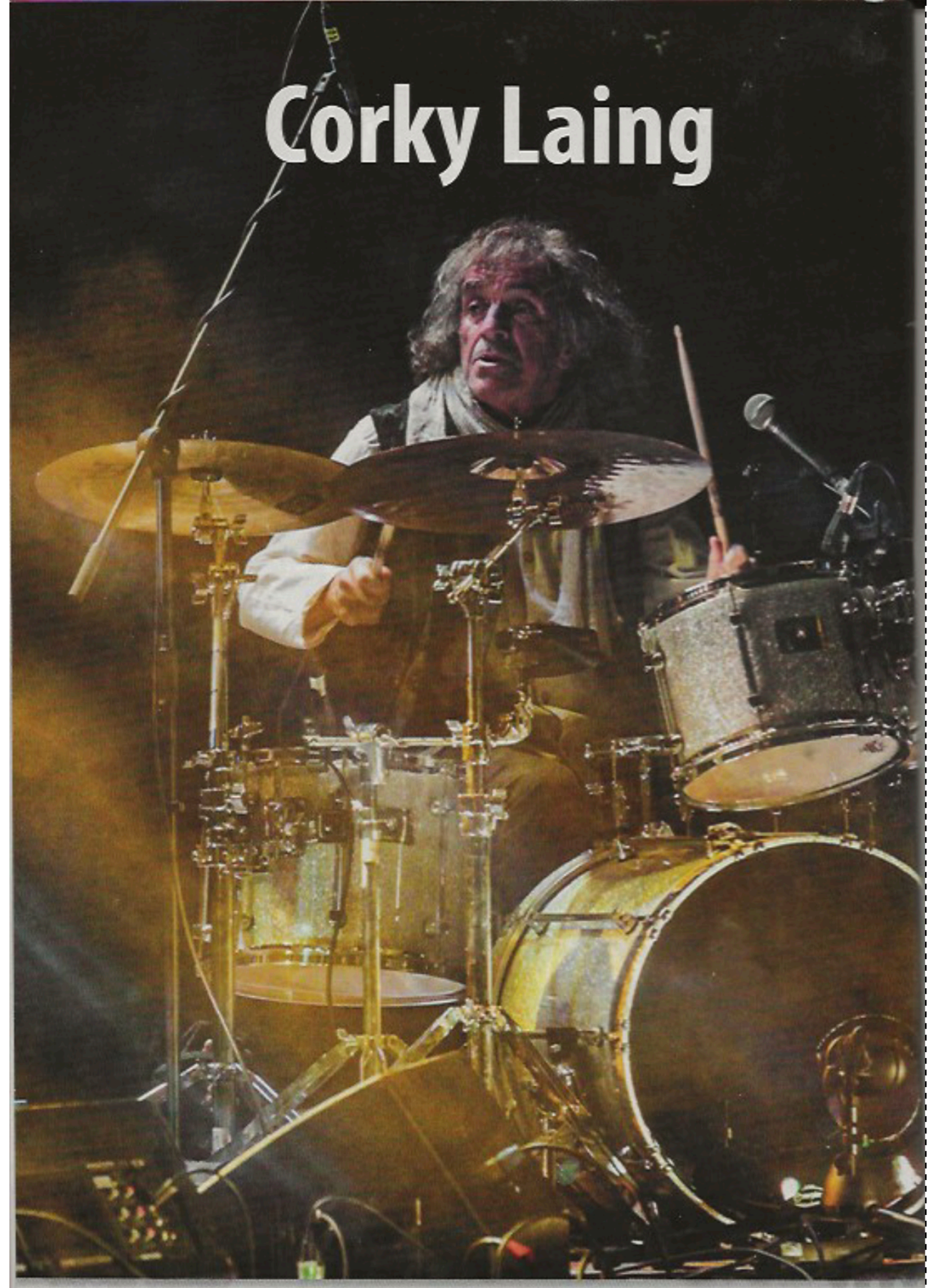
Corky Laing



His new album reminds us why we loved him with Mountain all those years ago, and why we love him still.

Throughout his legendary, five-decades-long career, Corky Laing's energy has defied logic. The man might be seventy-two, but his youthful passion toward drums and drumming is inspiring to players of any age. Following the release of his stellar 2019 memoir, *Letters to Sarah*, Laing again finds himself in the national spotlight.

The drummer's new album, *The Toledo Sessions*, is a potent blend of classic-meets-contemporary rock, beautifully engineered by Jason Hartless and Chuck Alkazian. The album carries with it a decidedly "Mountain-esque" vibe, but while its '70s sound is retro in concept, there's a kind of modernity to its—as Laing describes it—"uncivilized" rock approach. Corky's playing is massive, his fills perfectly setting up verses, bridges, solos, and choruses, all while retaining the musicality within each song. For an example, check out the thunderous rhythm of his double bass drums in the intro of the opener "Beautiful Flies."

When asked how he musters the energy to play drums like a person half his age, Laing says, "It may be corny, but every time I sit down at the kit I think it could be the last time. And I play accordingly. As long as I can tap into the zone, I love it."

In the late '60s and early '70s, bands like Cream, the Jimi Hendrix Experience, and Mountain defined the genre of "power rock." Today, Laing and his young contemporaries *burn* as if no time at all has passed. How did he find such a perfect fit, and capture it so well? "It was strictly old-school," says Laing. "We did it all live and let the tapes roll. Working with bassist/producer Mark Mikel was like working with [Mountain's] Felix Pappalardi again. Besides being a phenomenal bassist, he knew the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the studio process.

"I met Chris [Shutters] through Ginger Baker's son Kofi," Laing continues. "We toured together with Kofi Plays Cream, and Corky Plays Mountain. Chris is not only a formidable guitarist, but an amazing singer as well."

So were they purposely going for a retro sound? "Absolutely," Laing responds. "We finessed it enough to sound like a monaural record, but mixed it with all the digital bells and whistles of today." Highlight tracks include "Something's Gotta Give," "Information Overload," and "Earthquake," which sounds like it could have been an outtake from the Beatles' *White Album*.

As we went to press with this issue, musicians the world over were—and likely still are as you read this—adjusting to severely curtailed touring schedules, but Laing has specific plans for when things return to normal. "I'm going out as Corky Laing's Mountain," he says, "because I don't want to imply that this band is the same as the original Mountain of the 1970s. However, it is the fiftieth anniversary of the album *Mountain: Climbing!*, and there's quite a number of folks out there that recognize that. What I'm getting at is we're using what we *had* and reminding people of what we represent *now*, musically speaking…and that live performance is truly alive and well."

Bob Girouard