

—Slug:.....COMM-0853.arts.VJC\_Nate\_Smith  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

—Line 13: The musician’s Facebook profile does not use all caps.  
—Line 30: The transcript of the World Cafe podcast episode where Nate Smith was the guest had none of these quotes or anything even close, which is why I removed it as the source. I don’t want to remove that explanation, so I made the attribution vague. I did some due diligence to search Apple Podcasts and Google but couldn’t find a source for the key phrases in the quote.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Always responsive to the moment

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Get funky with Grammy-winning drummer Nate Smith at  
3 the Vermont Jazz Center Feb. 21

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 WE AT THE Vermont Jazz Center are thrilled to welcome  
6 drummer Nate Smith to our Brattleboro venue on Saturday, Feb.

7 21. Smith is known for his work with the Fearless Flyers, Dave  
8 Holland, Brittany Howard, Jon Batiste, and many others.

9         Smith is the recent recipient of two Grammy awards for  
10 his latest release as a leader, *Live-Action* . This concert kicks off a  
11 tour that he is leading with his current trio, including  
12 pianist/keyboardist Jacob Pollack (“J3PO”) and electric bassist  
13 “Carrtoons” (Ben Carr).

14         Smith is considered a “deep pocket” drummer, one who  
15 thrives on creating a unified groove with his bandmates. When an  
16 ensemble is “in the pocket,” each instrument locks into its own  
17 part and considers the overall group sound paramount.

18         In the drummer-focused podcast *Go with Elmo Lovano*,  
19 Smith described what “pocket” means to him.

20         “Pocket to me is about the space in which all of the  
21 musicians on stage agree on time. [...] When a band plays ‘in the  
22 pocket,’ they are all playing in the same space — they all agree  
23 on the distance between the notes, they all agree on the distance  
24 between notes. They all agree on the length of notes, the  
25 emphasis. [...] Pocket always involves playing with other  
26 musicians.”

27         The characteristics of Smith’s sound are solid time, a  
28 commitment to the natural build of an arrangement: funky when  
29 needed, not overly busy, and always responsive to the moment.

30         “I think that space is very valuable in music — I’m not a  
31 chops drummer, I love watching drummers who play with lots of  
32 chops (there are a lot of killin’ drummers out there),” he has said.  
33 “But my approach is to determine how to best utilize space, how  
34 to make the best use of dynamics, and how to develop rhythmic  
35 ideas in ways that are interesting.”

36         Over the years, Nate Smith has collaborated and toured  
37 with renowned artists, which, in addition to Howard, Batiste, and  
38 the Fearless Flyers, include Pat Metheny, Ravi Coltrane, Childish  
39 Gambino, Norah Jones, Vulfpeck, Chris Potter, Kiefer, Carrtoons,  
40 Charlie Hunter, and Kurt Elling. He has graced the cover of

41 *Modern Drummer* magazine and provided the backbeat for *Late*  
42 *Night with Seth Meyers'* house band.

43 Smith's first experience with jazz royalty occurred when  
44 he was in his late teens in the mid-1990s. The legendary Betty  
45 Carter heard Smith's college ensemble at the now-defunct  
46 International Association of Jazz Educators convention in New  
47 York City.

48 After a while, Carter invited Smith to be the drummer in  
49 her renowned Jazz Ahead youth discovery program. That tenure  
50 led to Smith playing under her direction in the program for two  
51 years. Later he became an instructor after Carter had passed  
52 away.

53 During his college and graduate school years, Smith  
54 pursued many other projects, including creating beats and  
55 serving as a producer for other artists' musical projects.

56 Smith is a co-writer and co-producer of a song recorded  
57 by Michael Jackson, "Heaven Can Wait." In the early 2000s,  
58 Smith began an eight-year tenure with the world-renowned jazz  
59 bassist Dave Holland (who played and recorded with Miles  
60 Davis).

61 \* \* \*

62 SMITH'S DOORWAY to the drums began when, as a kid, he  
63 fell in love with the music on his father's vinyl record collection.  
64 Smith has stated "In my youth I pulled from the drummers I heard  
65 on my dad's vinyls — like Steve Gadd with Bob James, Omar  
66 Hakim with Weather Report, Stewart Copeland with the Police,  
67 and Harvey Mason with Herbie Hancock. I would mimic their  
68 sounds and learn their beats."

69 In an interview with the StickPeople's *On the Corner*  
70 podcast, Smith also highlighted the influence that James Brown's  
71 drummer, Clyde Stubblefield, had on him, especially the tune  
72 "Funky Drummer" which contains a legendary drumbreak that  
73 informs Smith's basic style and concept.

74           During his interview with World Cafe, Smith said that  
75 “while listening to him [Stubblefield] I discovered a whole new  
76 solar system that hanged the way that I play, that’s for sure.”

77           Even today, Smith keeps reaching back to those moments  
78 in his youth and identifies them as reoccurring sources of  
79 inspiration. He claims: “I try to re-create the excitement of the  
80 discovery of that moment — it’s that sense of discovery that I try  
81 to convey on stage — it’s an ongoing process.”

82           Smith’s signature “bounce” can be heard even on tunes  
83 with complicated time feels. He explained: “I’m also interested in  
84 playing odd meter grooves in ways that feel natural and don’t feel  
85 odd; I go for grooves that are danceable.”

86           He told Jazz Café, “My relationship with straight ahead  
87 jazz began later with Art Blakey — that was the first drummer I  
88 discovered who was definitely a jazz drummer, but he was so  
89 funky, his backbeat was so big, and his sound was so big, that I  
90 fell in love with it.”

91           One of the reasons why Smith is currently so visible in  
92 the public eye is that he embraced social media early on to stay  
93 connected with his fans. His undergraduate degree is in media  
94 arts and design with an emphasis in recording and production.

95           In a conversation with Norah Jones, on her *Norah Jones*  
96 *Is Playing Along* podcast, the two musicians discussed how a  
97 current challenge for up-and-coming artists in the digital age is  
98 that the marketing of their own music is often their own  
99 responsibility, rather than that of a record label.

100           Nate Smith is a smart strategist who intentionally applies  
101 the tools he has learned toward the goals of developing his own  
102 future and carefully cultivating his image.

103           For example, after noticing that his drum videos were, as  
104 he says, “catching a lot of eyeballs,” he then produced two  
105 albums, *Pocket Change* (volumes 1 and 2), of unaccompanied  
106 drum solos. Smith then started to beef up his own YouTube  
107 channel and hired a stylist.

108 He now has more than 83,000 followers on [YouTube](#),  
109 and a legion of other drummers who post their own videos  
110 attempting to dissect Smith's trickiest beats. Some of the most  
111 popular beats have onomatopoeic hits names like "Rambo" and  
112 "Skip Step."

113 His latest album, the twice-Grammy-nominated  
114 *LiveAction*, is a snapshot of the more mature (age 50) Nate Smith.  
115 The music has a retro cover illustrating the bevy of keyboards and  
116 drums that he plays. Many of the sounds and grooves he conjures  
117 embrace the analog music of the 1970s and were inspired by his  
118 father's record collection.

119 The disc even includes a revised version of the Pointer  
120 Sisters' "Automatic" interpreted by vocalist Lalah Hathaway. The  
121 driving force of the album is Smith's funky drumming, but the  
122 writing and arranging is also brilliant in the way it transcends  
123 genres and yet makes a unified statement.

124 \* \* \*

125 IT IS A RARE and powerful experience to get to hear Nate  
126 Smith perform as a leader in the New England region. Come find  
127 out why Giovanni Russonello of *The New York Times* claims that  
128 Nate Smith's drumming "is a marvel unto itself [...]. Broad of  
129 palette, it has the rare ability to dial up the complexity and the  
130 sensitivity at the same time."

131 VJC operates using a subsidized ticket system that lowers  
132 the base cost per ticket to \$25 even though the value per seat is  
133 more than double that amount. Additional donations are  
134 welcome.

135 Tickets can be reserved online at [vtjazz.org](#), or by phone  
136 802-254-9088, ext. 1. Arrangements for mobility access are  
137 available by emailing or calling to schedule a time for one of our  
138 staff to meet your party.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

139           **EUGENE UMAN** is director of the Vermont Jazz Center.  
140    *The Commons'* Deeper Dive column gives artists, arts  
141    organizations, and other nonprofits elbow room to write in first  
142    person and be unabashedly opinionated, passionate, and  
143    analytical about their own creative work and events.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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####END LOGLINE####