

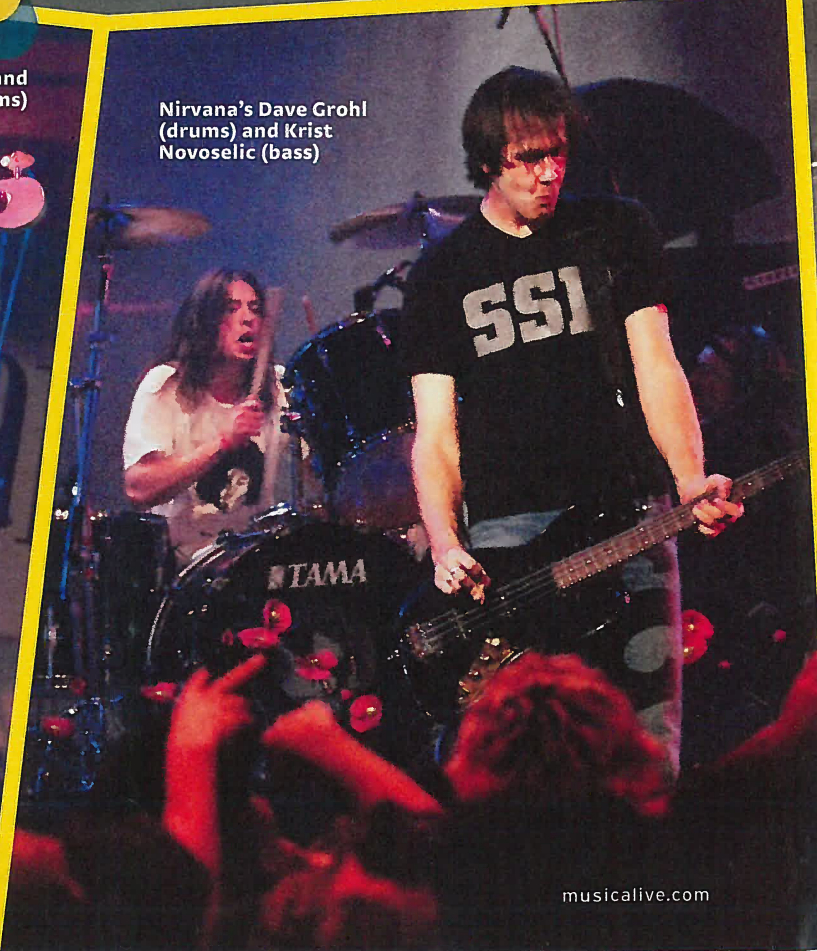
Two important players form the backbone of just about every great band: the **bassist** and the **drummer**.

MASTERS of RHYTHM

Robbie Shakespeare (bass) and Sly Dunbar (drums)



Nirvana's Dave Grohl (drums) and Krist Novoselic (bass)



PHOTOGRAPHY (LEFT TO RIGHT):
JAMES EMMETT/REDFERNS,
JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC, INC.,
MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES,
ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

WHEN YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC, chances are you focus heavily on the singer, and maybe those cool licks played by the lead guitarist, keyboardist, or other band members. And that's natural, since those elements are the most dominant ones, calling (sometimes screaming) for attention!

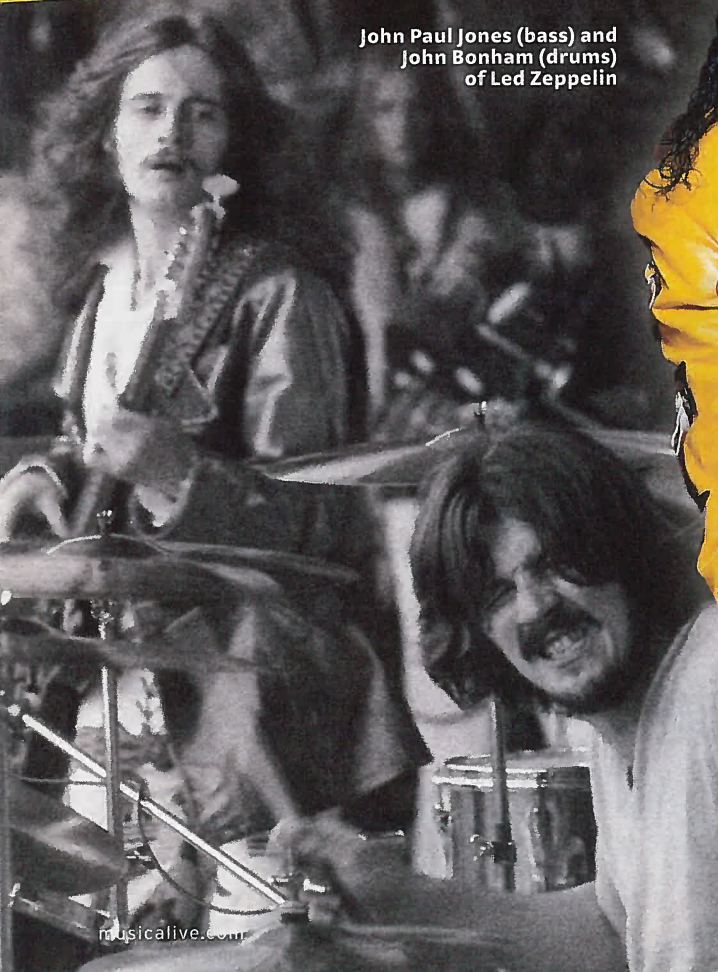
But beneath the attention-grabbing vocals and solos lies the heart of the band—the rhythm section. The makeup of a rhythm section varies, but its basic function remains the same: to keep the beat. If you've ever clapped or tapped along with music, played an instrument, or heard a metronome, you've experienced the beat! While drummers and percussionists are the most obvious beatkeepers in any band, most of the time they're working in unison with bassists, who provide the necessary low notes that ground the harmony (in other words, the chords) of a song. These two players form the core of a rhythm section. Rhythm guitarists can be important too, and so can keyboardists, but drummers and bassists are **ESSENTIAL**.

Just as a concrete frame serves as a building's foundation, a strong rhythm is the foundation of every band. And even though lots of contemporary popular music doesn't have a rhythm section



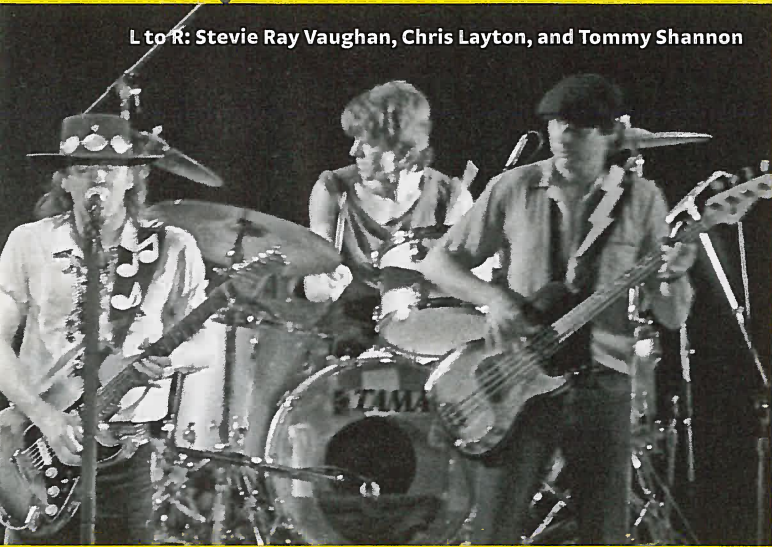
Bootsy Collins

John Paul Jones (bass) and
John Bonham (drums)
of Led Zeppelin



RHYTHM

L to R: Stevie Ray Vaughan, Chris Layton, and Tommy Shannon



The Funk Brothers
(Benny Benjamin bottom left,
James Jamerson just above him)

as such—bass and drum parts are often handled by computer software rather than live musicians—the technology used by producers to create a beat still tends to EMULATE the “real” playing of instruments. With that in mind, let’s see what makes a good rhythm section tick, and pay tribute to some of the greatest in pop music history.

FIRST, THE BIG QUESTION...

What exactly makes a rhythm section great? One of the main ingredients is obvious: good musicianship. But it’s not just about playing an instrument well. It’s also about teamwork.

“Locking in” is what bassist Tommy Shannon calls it. With drummer Chris Layton, Shannon served in Texas blues/rock guitar legend Stevie Ray Vaughan’s world-renowned rhythm section, Double Trouble, through the 1980s, until Vaughan’s tragic death in a helicopter crash in 1990.

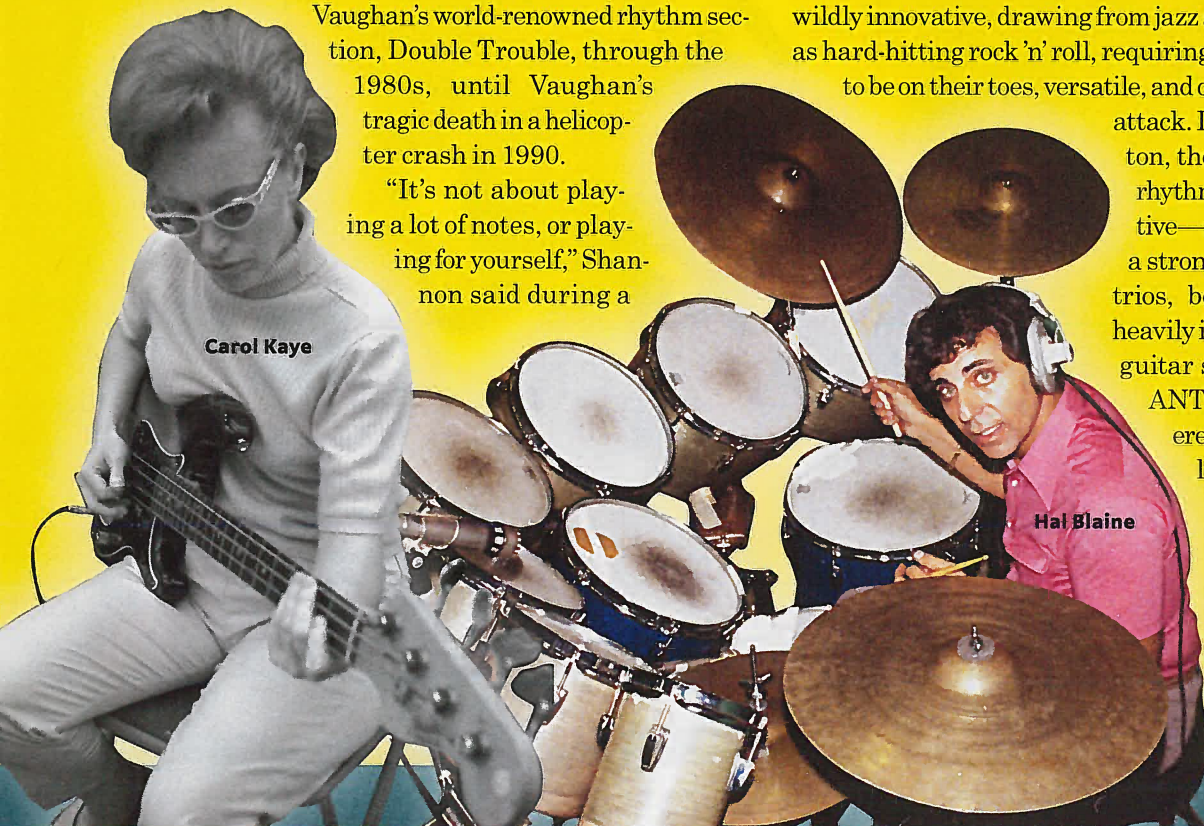
“It’s not about playing a lot of notes, or playing for yourself,” Shannon said during a

recent interview with *Music Alive!* “It’s about locking in with each other. When you get into that groove, it’s an incredible feeling, like water flowing.” While LONGEVITY (they were together for 10 years) helped Double Trouble get tighter, they had such a natural “click” from the start that playing together was often pure instinct: “With Stevie and Chris, we all knew instinctively what the other was doing, like one unit.” Last year, the group (including keyboardist Reese Wynans, who joined later) was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, which gives you an idea of their importance!

A famous predecessor to Double Trouble was the Jimi Hendrix Experience, in which bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell backed up a rock guitar revolutionary. Hendrix, who died at age 27 in 1970, made music that was wildly innovative, drawing from jazz and psychedelia as well as hard-hitting rock ‘n’ roll, requiring Redding and Mitchell to be on their toes, versatile, and often aggressive in their

attack. Like Shannon and Layton, they managed to be both rhythmically solid and distinctive—not an easy feat! There’s a strong link between the two trios, because Vaughan was heavily influenced by Hendrix’s guitar style and FLAMBOYANT showmanship, and covered some of his tunes both

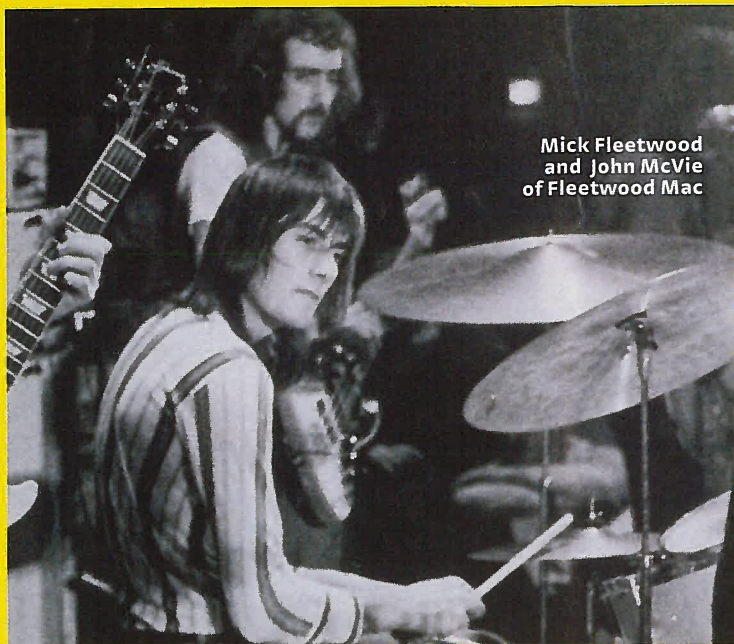
live and on recordings. And the connection continues: Drummer Layton currently tours as part of “Experience Hendrix,” paying homage to the late legend.



Carol Kaye

Hal Blaine

PHOTOGRAPHY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (1,3); GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS (2,4)



Mick Fleetwood
and John McVie
of Fleetwood Mac

ROCK AND POP

One of the most highly regarded rock/pop rhythm sections included drummer Hal Blaine and bassist Carol Kaye. In the '60s and '70s, they were part of an ensemble of 20 or so West Coast musicians known as "the Wrecking Crew." This was not a normal band situation; the Wrecking Crew were actually *session musicians*, whose job is to play in studios on the recording sessions for records by other artists. Both together and separately, Blaine and Kaye played on an unbelievably long list of chart-topping hits, including "Good Vibrations" (the Beach Boys), "Be My Baby" (the Ronettes), and "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" (the Righteous Brothers). Only masterful musicians could perform such a wide range of material so impeccably and add their own creative touch, as both of them did.

Mick Fleetwood (drums) and John McVie (bass) are another powerful rhythmic pairing—one that originally came together nearly 50 years ago when both Brits performed with John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers. Subsequently, they formed the nucleus of Fleetwood Mac, which became one of rock's most successful groups of the '70s and '80s. Whether it's a poppy tune like "You Make Loving Fun" or something with a heavier groove such as the hypnotic "Tusk," Fleetwood's muscular, theatrical drumming and McVie's fluid basslines lift up the music even as they hold it steady.

Other rock bands whose rhythm sections often make "best of" lists include the legendary Led Zeppelin, whose bassist John Paul Jones and drummer John Bonham specialized in complex beats with a menacing edge. And we would be REMISS not to mention the

Rolling Stones. That group's original bassist Bill Wyman and drummer Charlie Watts created some of the most memorable grooves in rock history on songs like "Jumpin' Jack Flash" (1968) and "Miss You" (1978).

MOTOWN, FUNK, DISCO, AND REGGAE

Just as Los Angeles had the Wrecking Crew, so Detroit's Motown label had its own studio musicians, known as the "Funk Brothers," who played on hits by Marvin Gaye, the Temptations, the Four Tops, and many others. Although several different musicians performed in the Funk Brothers' rhythm section, bassist James Jamerson stands out as one of the most inventive and influential who ever lived, and you can hear his magic touch on tons of Motown hits from the '60s and '70s—everything from the Temptations' "My Girl" to Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On." His bass lines were far from simple, involving CHROMATIC runs, syncopation, and other sophisticated techniques. But he still kept a tight connection to the groove laid down by the drummer, usually Benny Benjamin, another marvel who brought jazz and Latin influences to the mix, along with fiery drum fills.

It's hard to imagine hotter rhythm players than the ones who passed through the late "Godfather of Soul" James Brown's band from the '50s through the '80s, including drummers Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks and bassists Bernard Odum and Bootsy Collins. Brown's funky style, which emphasized the downbeat and often a "vamp" on a single chord, was exacting and required incredible precision from his players. Then there's disco; the bouncy, infectious grooves played by Chic's bassist Bernard Edwards and drummer Tony Thompson in the '70s and '80s have propelled millions onto dance floors worldwide.

Like funk and disco, reggae is all about rhythm, distinguished by strong syncopation and a laid-back feel. Possibly the most revered reggae rhythm section is that of drummer Sly Dunbar and bassist Robbie Shakespeare, known simply as "Sly & Robbie." Natives of Jamaica, the two joined forces in the mid-'70s and are known not just for their prolific career as players but also as a production team, with credits ranging from Madonna to Bunny Wailer.

WRAPPING IT UP

As usual, there's not enough room to include all the great rhythm sections we'd like to acknowledge—how about Metallica's Cliff Burton and Lars Ulrich, or Nirvana's Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic?—but the take-away is this: A strong rhythm section is the engine that makes any band run. Perhaps Tommy Shannon, who keeps the music going with his new blues band in Austin, said it best: "The groove is everything." 🎧

HEAR THE MUSIC

at musicalive.com/
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may-2016

"I Got You (I Feel Good)"
by James Brown

"Tusk"
by Fleetwood Mac

"Pride and Joy"
by Stevie Ray Vaughan

EXTENDED PLAY

Go to musicalive.com/
extended-play-may-2016 to
hear more great rhythm
sections.