

CHAD SMITH

By the age of 7, he was “drumming” on ice cream tubs with Lincoln Logs as sticks; his passion never waned, and 40-something years later, Chadwick Gaylord Smith was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as a 25-year-member of groundbreaking, hit making Red Hot Chili Peppers. An award-winning, multi-faceted drummer, Guinness World Record holder, six-time Grammy Winner, advocate for music in public schools, session musician, participant in numerous charities, and proud father of six, Chad Smith’s life is epic journey that’s always moving. As he puts it: “There’s so much to do and not enough hours in the day. I’m working on putting 25 hours into a day!” The dynamic drummer appears on a total of 26 Chili Pepper releases (seven studio albums and various live, EP and compilation albums) and finds success and satisfaction in his other projects--the all-star quartet Chickenfoot and his own Bombastic Meatbats. He’s also an articulate advocate for music and arts for children who, in 2014, received a presidential appointment as a Turnaround Artist for public schools.

Chad Smith’s journey began humbly enough on October 25, 1961, born in Saint Paul, Minnesota, the youngest of three children. “My dad, who worked for Ford, was from West Virginia and loved Johnny Cash, Elvis and Frank Sinatra. Growing up, those were the records in rotation,” he remembers. But Chad and Brad, his elder brother by two years, were true rock ‘n’ roll kids. “Brad was really into the English bands of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s; Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Humble Pie and Jimi Hendrix Experience. But the harder bands were the ones that I really got into,” Chad notes. “That’s what I liked to crank up when I got home from school to piss my parents off,” he laughs. “Nothing like putting Black Sabbath’s *Vol. 4* on really loud!”

The Smith family moved several times, but Chad spent the bulk of his later childhood and his entire teenage years in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, where he graduated from Lahser High School in 1980 after attending Andover High. His musical exposure in public schools are a huge reason Chad’s so passionate about his role in the government’s Turnaround: Art program, a public-private partnership designed to help narrow the achievement gap and increase student engagement through the arts. “My upbringing was all in public schools, and starting from fourth grade, that’s where I learned my instrument and learned about music. I was in all the band classes in the Michigan public school system in the 70s,” he says. “They had marching band, jazz band, and concert band; they even had music theory classes. If it wasn’t for that, I never would have graduated.” As a Turnaround Artist, he joins such boldfaced names as Yo Yo Ma, Sarah Jessica Parker and Forrest Whittaker in working with one-on-one with a specific school. “I’m not a scholar, but graduation rates and attendance are higher where there are music programs,” he says. At Flossmoor Junior High, where both sports and music kept Chad busy, Chad and his brother were also class VP and President, respectively, and formed their first band, The Rockin’ Conspiracy. “Very Watergate,” Chad laughs. “We were really bad.” But his formative years stuck with him, and he recalls learning in school from the Haskell W. Harr drum methods. “There are 26 rudiments, including paradiddle, flam, tap,” he recites. “I never took any

private lessons. I even learned to read music, and while that's super-important for many musicians, I rarely need it in the Chili Peppers. But it can only help to have that language and tool." Smith recalls his marching band days: "Back then we had the mounted tri-toms, that you wear over your shoulder. But we didn't have music for them, so I could just solo over 'Eleanor Rigby' all day long, being like [The Who's] Keith Moon, doing fills constantly!"

Post-high school he honed his style, influenced by drummers including Ian Paice, Mitch Mitchell, Bill Ward, John Bonham, Stewart Copeland and Neil Peart and immediately after graduation, joined Michigan band Tilt. Other local lineups included Pharroh and Toby Redd. Pharroh's percussionist, who also worked with Parliament-Funkadelic, introduced Smith to R&B and funk music and taught him how to play funk. Smith notes: "I think up until then, I was a drummer. Once I studied with Larry Fratangelo, I turned into a musician." Funk drummers like David Garibaldi, Jabo Starks, Clyde Stubblefield and Greg Errico added depth to Smith's rock-solid style.

Ambitious and adventurous, by his mid-20s Chad decided Los Angeles was the place to seek fame and fortune...or at least fun and drums. In 1988, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, working on their fourth studio album, were looking for a new drummer, and Chad went to the open audition. At a robust 6'3, the hard-charging Smith was one of the last to try out, and at first sight, singer Anthony Kiedis didn't think Chad's image suited the Peppers. But, as Kiedis remembers in his *Scar Tissue* autobiography, they told Chad abruptly: "Get ready to play. You've got 10 minutes. We're going to jam for five, then we're going to try a song or two for five. Smith was not the least bit intimidated by this attitude we were giving him." And he gave it back in his playing, blowing away the band, who invited him to join by December 1988, and within a few months, Smith recording his first album with the Peppers, 1989's *Mother's Milk*. Critical and commercial acclaim was strong for the singles that included "Knock Me Down" and the Stevie Wonder cover "Higher Ground," with Allmusic praising the record for turning "the tide and transforming the band from underground funk-rocking rappers to mainstream bad boys with seemingly very little effort."

It was an auspicious beginning for the Midwestern drummer, but bigger success followed with 1991's seminal *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, which ultimately sold 13 million copies worldwide and earned huge radio airplay with "Give It Away," "Suck My Kiss" and "Breaking the Girl." Widely regarded as one of the best albums of all time, it also marked the first time the band worked with fabled producer Rick Rubin, who became an instant Chad Smith fan. "I have to thank Rick Rubin for many wonderful musical situations that continue to this day," says Smith, who became the producer's go-to drummer on albums for such indelible artists as Johnny Cash, Sugarland's Jennifer Nettles, Kid Jake Bugg, Wu Tang Clan, ZZ Top, and others under the producer's hand. "I've known Rick for 22 years now. We have similar passion for music, and I think he likes the enthusiasm I have for music."

RHCP—and Chad’s—star continued to rise, and by 1999, the group’s smash *Californication* landed, eventually selling over 15 million copies worldwide, and featuring the Grammy Award-winning "Scar Tissue." The band was maturing musically and personally, and the album, called spiritual and epiphanic," marked that change. *By the Way* followed in 2002, which Chad termed "very dynamic, rich and lush," while 2006’s *Stadium Arcadium* (2006) the band’s ninth studio record (and Chad’s fifth) was their first to hit #1 on the Billboard charts, helped by the omnipresent single "Dani California." The album earned the band seven Grammy Award nominations and five wins, including Best Rock Album of year.

By this highpoint in the band’s career, Smith had also become an in-demand studio drummer, and by the mid-90s he was playing on albums by such icons as the MC5’s Wayne Kramer (1996); as a drummer on Howard Stern’s *Private Parts The Album* (1997); on John Fogerty’s 1997 *Blue Moon Swamp*; on sometime RCHP bandmate Dave Navarro’s 2001 album, and on Fishbone’s 2000 release, *The Psychotic Friends Nuttwerk*. In 2003, Smith began a collaboration with one of his teenage favorites, former Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Trapeze vocalist/bassist Glenn Hughes on his *Songs in the Key of Rock* album, and played on four subsequent Hughes albums, most recently 2008’s *First Underground Nuclear Kitchen*.

The synergy and work ethic that marks Smith’s musical life led to the Bombastic Meatbats. With Hughes alum Jeff Kollman (guitar), Ed Roth (keyboards) and the addition of bassist Kevin Chown, Smith formed his own all-instrumental band, inspired by 1970s funk and fusion. Chad Smith’s Bombastic Meatbats debuted at the 2008 NAMM show in Anaheim, California and put out 2009’s *Meet The Meatbats*, 2010’s *More Meat* and the double-live CD *Live Meat And Potatoes* in 2012. Smith’s fluid ability to move between styles and personalities is legend, but as the drummer explained to Artist Direct, "my approach to playing music is always the same. I'm always trying to be musical and play what's right for the song. Then I inject my personality, make it feel and make the other guys feel good. From a musical standpoint, that goes for any music I play." In the Meatbats, he says, "It's not like Avant Garde experimental music. It still has verses, choruses, bridges and solos with that pop music structure. Obviously, there's a lot of space for stretching out musically."

Following a lengthy world tour in support of *Stadium Arcadium*, the Chili Peppers decided to take a break in 2008. During this hiatus, Smith joined the hard rock supergroup Chickenfoot, featuring Sammy Hagar, Joe Satriani and Michael Anthony. Their 2009 self-titled debut made it to #4 on the U.S. Billboard 200, and scored #1 status on the Top Hard Rock Album and Independent album charts. Hagar told *Billboard* that it’s the group effort that makes Chickenfoot special: "We're all on the same page so much in this band it's scary. I really think it's Montrose, Van Halen, and the thing Chad brings is a deep pocket. He plays this groove that is kind of Zeppelin-esque." Chad tours with Chickenfoot when not otherwise obligated to the Chili Peppers, and since Chickenfoot’s inception, the busy band has put out two studio albums, one live record, a box set and two videos.

The Chili Peppers re-grouped in 2009 after a year-long hiatus to record new music, but Smith still found time for more creative side projects, notably 2010's *Rhythm Train*, a critically acclaimed children's album with Dick Van Dyke and Parents Choice Award winner Leslie Bixler. In April 2010, MTV named *Rhythm Train* one of the best children's records of all time, and Bixler raved about Smith's contribution, noting, "Along with his virtuoso drumming, he's a great singer, has a really funny comedic animated style and great production ideas! You really get to know him on this album, as a kid, a father, and a monster talent."

The "monster talent" played on 2011's *I'm With You*, his seventh Chili Peppers studio album (the band's tenth), the disc garnering a Grammy Award for Best Rock Album, with a *Rolling Stone* Reader's Poll naming it the 8th best album of 2011. (Among the more personal awards are Smith's 1994 Guinness World Record for playing the World's Largest Drumkit; *Spin* Magazine placing Smith at #10 on their list of the 100 Greatest Drummers of Alternative Music in May 2013; and Smith and RHCP bassist Flea being named the fourth-greatest rhythm section of all time by readers of UK-based *Rhythm* magazine.) Then came the biggest kudos to date: In April 2012, the Chili Peppers were inducted by Chris Rock into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, an honor that humbled Smith. "Music's not a competition," he told *Billboard*. "Yeah, you like to win Grammys and stuff, but (the Rock Hall) is different. It's not like the flavor of the month or the flavor of the year; it's for a long career we've been fortunate enough to have."

His career expanded into other areas with the March 2012 release of the Chad Smith Drum App, a free mobile application for iPhone, iPad and Android devices featuring a "Drummer GPS that spotlights drummers influential and important to Smith. Smith, who plays an 11 piece Pearl Acrylic drum kit, with Sabian cymbals and Vater Percussion sticks, gives master classes and appears at school functions whenever his schedule allows, letting him give back and give thanks for the support he's received in his own life. In 2010, Smith was part of a day long music education event with a master class and all-school concert at Peters Township High School in McMurray, PA sponsored by The Percussion Marketing Council. Other public activities and action for non-profit organizations, include his work with Surfer's Healing, MusiCares, Silverlake Conservatory of Music, and Bystander Revolution, a group that speaks out against bullying in schools. The well-spoken musician also took to the other side of the mic, in May 2013, launching *In Conversation with Chad Smith*, his own podcast through MusicRadar where he interviews other musical artists including RUSH's Alex Lifeson and Carlos Santana.

After Smith and the Chili Peppers wrapped up *I'm With You* World Tour in April 2013, yet another a new phase of his life kicked into high gear. Smith was asked by NAMM, the National Association of Music Merchants, to represent the music community by going to Washington, D.C. as a lobbyist in support of music education in US public schools. The experience, says Smith, "was surreal and overwhelming. To be walking through the halls of Congress and to see the 'big machine' so to speak..." Clearly, Smith's public school success, his generous time and articulate, impassioned story, cemented his being named a Turnaround Artist under the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. "I really want kids to pick up instruments so

they can see how fun it is to play,” he says. “Although it’s important to have technical proficiency—in anything, there’s practice and hard work, no shortcuts—but if you love it, or you’re gonna wanna do it. I want them to see that after all these 40-ish years, I still love it, that’s why I still do it. It’s fun. It’s taken me everywhere—and beyond.”

If possible, 2014 may be Chad Smith’s busiest year yet. February found the Chili Peppers appearing with Bruno Mars as a part of the halftime performance at Super Bowl XLVIII, watched by a record 115.3 million viewers. Additionally, Smith and his celebrity doppelganger, comedic actor Will Ferrell, faux feuded in the press in early 2014, after Ferrell said in an interview that he and Smith were in fact the same person. Agreeing to a drum-off to settle the score, the dynamic duo had raised \$300,000 online for the battle to occur, and the charity drum off took place May 22 on *The Tonight Show* with host Jimmy Fallon moderating. As winner, Smith received a giant golden cowbell, while the real winner were the two charities-- Ferrell raising money for Cancer and Smith for Little Kids Rock, respectively. For Ferrell’s final “solo”, he was accompanied by Smith’s Chili Peppers bandmates—in their first late night TV performance in eight years--for Blue Oyster Cult’s “Don’t Fear the Reaper”, a callback to Ferrell’s classic *SNL* sketch. Additionally, early 2014 saw the RCHP begin work on their eleventh studio album that will no doubt be another chart-topper leading to years-long touring.

Despite Smith’s powerful work ethic and massive success, family is a priority. Living between New York and California with his architect wife, Nancy Mack, and their three boys (Cole, Beckett and Dashiell) Smith also spends time with Manon, Ava and Justin, his older children from previous relationships. In reflecting on his life, Smith can hardly believe his good fortune. “I work with people who want to grow; the Chili Peppers are open to new stuff, and as an artist, it’s the best creative situation to be in. It’s simple: I love what I’m doing and I’m really lucky. I got pretty good at the music thing,” he says humbly. “I do gigs in little bars and big stadiums, and every one is rewarding. But I really just want to be a good dad,” he admits. “I’m a better musician than I am a dad... but I’m working hard at both.”

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