

## JOHN ARMATO

### The Drummer Who Loves Ballads

#### THE DRUMS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THERE

From Christmas toy drums to first lessons, from his first pro gig with the Ink Spots to a tour of Russia, drums have been John Armato's constant companion. He has played clubs and concerts from New York City to Napa Valley and was a member of the trio behind Lisa Henry, a winner of the prestigious Thelonious Monk Institute Vocal Jazz Competition.

While the beat and burst of high-energy drums captured his attention early on, it was the swish and sizzle of ballads that captured his heart. It was always about the beauty, not just the bang. (As a kid, after seeing Buddy Rich repeatedly on the "Tonight Show with Johnny Carson," Armato asked his parents for an album by the drum legend for his birthday, but "one with a whole band playing, not just a bunch of drum solos.")

Forty years ago, Armato played one of his first jam sessions. That's where the story of *The Drummer Loves Ballads* – and the album itself – begins.

A Kansas City native, New York City ex-pat, and now a Sacramento resident, Armato appears on the CDs "Claudette," by Sacramento vocalist Claudette Stone and "Comfort" by Texas praise singer Lisa Bloecher. *The Drummer Loves Ballads* is his first release as leader.

#### DRAWN TO DRUMS AND IMPATIENT TO PLAY

Armato had to wait until his eighth birthday before a teacher would agree to take him on. A week after the magic day, he took his first lesson. Years of private study followed as well as stints in nationally recognized school and university programs: He spent a season with the Kansas City Youth Symphony and was a member of the Winnetonka High School music program in the early 80s, led by the renowned music educator, Dr. Charles T. Menghini.

College saw Armato performing with the rhythm sections of well-known vocal jazz educator Kirby Shaw at the University of Missouri-Kansas City as well as the jazz band under Dr. Michael Parkinson, and other ensembles. In 1986 Armato earned a coveted spot with the All-American College Band at Disneyland, a summer-long, 35-show-a-week, professional experience for 20 musicians selected from coast-to-coast audition tours of the country's top music schools.

Those various settings put Armato behind the drums for such luminaries as Bobby McFerrin, Pete Christlieb, Rob McConnell, Les Hooper, Bobby Shew, Gary Foster, and many others – including even a "battle of the drums" feature with Louie Bellson.

#### COMING UP IN KANSAS CITY

Professionally, Armato has worked with 50s acts such as The Ink Spots, The Drifters and The Platters as well as swing and dance legends such as The Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra and the Guy Lombardo Orchestra. He has played shows such as "A Chorus Line," "Godspell," and "Nonsense" and performed the world premiere of "Dragons," working directly with composer/director Sheldon Harnick of "Fiddler on the Roof" fame. For one football season, Sundays found Armato in the end zone at Arrowhead Stadium as a member of the Kansas City Chief's "Pack Band."

Armato was an early member of Kerry Strayer's groups and the Kansas City Boulevard Big Band, as well as an occasional sideman for jazz and tap dance duo, the McFadden Brothers. In 1994 he performed with a 40-member cast of musicians, singers, and dancers representing the state of Kansas in a tour of St. Petersburg, Russia.

#### EAST TO NEW YORK ...

After moving to New York City in 2004, Armato played with noted tenor saxophonist Bob Kindred, vocalist Anne Phillips, and cornet legend Warren Vaché, among others. He was one of the many volunteer jazz musicians who performed in the annual city-wide "September Concert" to promote post-9/11 healing through music. He had begun studying with Joe Morello shortly before the legendary drummer's death.

#### ... THEN WEST TO CALIFORNIA

Armato relocated to Sacramento, California, in 2008 where he has worked with Dick Johnson's Mardi Gras Jazz Band, Claudette Stone, Virginia Ayers-Dawson, Vivian Lee, Greg Willett, Cecil Ramirez, Jim Martinez, Mickey Bennett, Dennis Johnson, Peter Petty, and the popular horn band Funkengruven. He has backed touring smooth jazz headliners such as Paul Brown, Darren Rahn, Steve Oliver, and Dean James, and singer-songwriter Spencer Day. In recent years he has traveled the Northern California region with the Dean-O-Holics Rat Pack tribute show.

#### COMBINED LOVES

Armato served on the Board of Trustees at VanderCook College of Music in Chicago for 12 years. Since graduating from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1987 with a degree in communications and nearly as many hours in music, Armato has had parallel careers as a communications executive and creative strategist as well as a musician. *The Drummer Loves Ballads* combines his talents as a jazz drummer with his skills as a writer, designer, and speaker to create a uniquely personal project.

