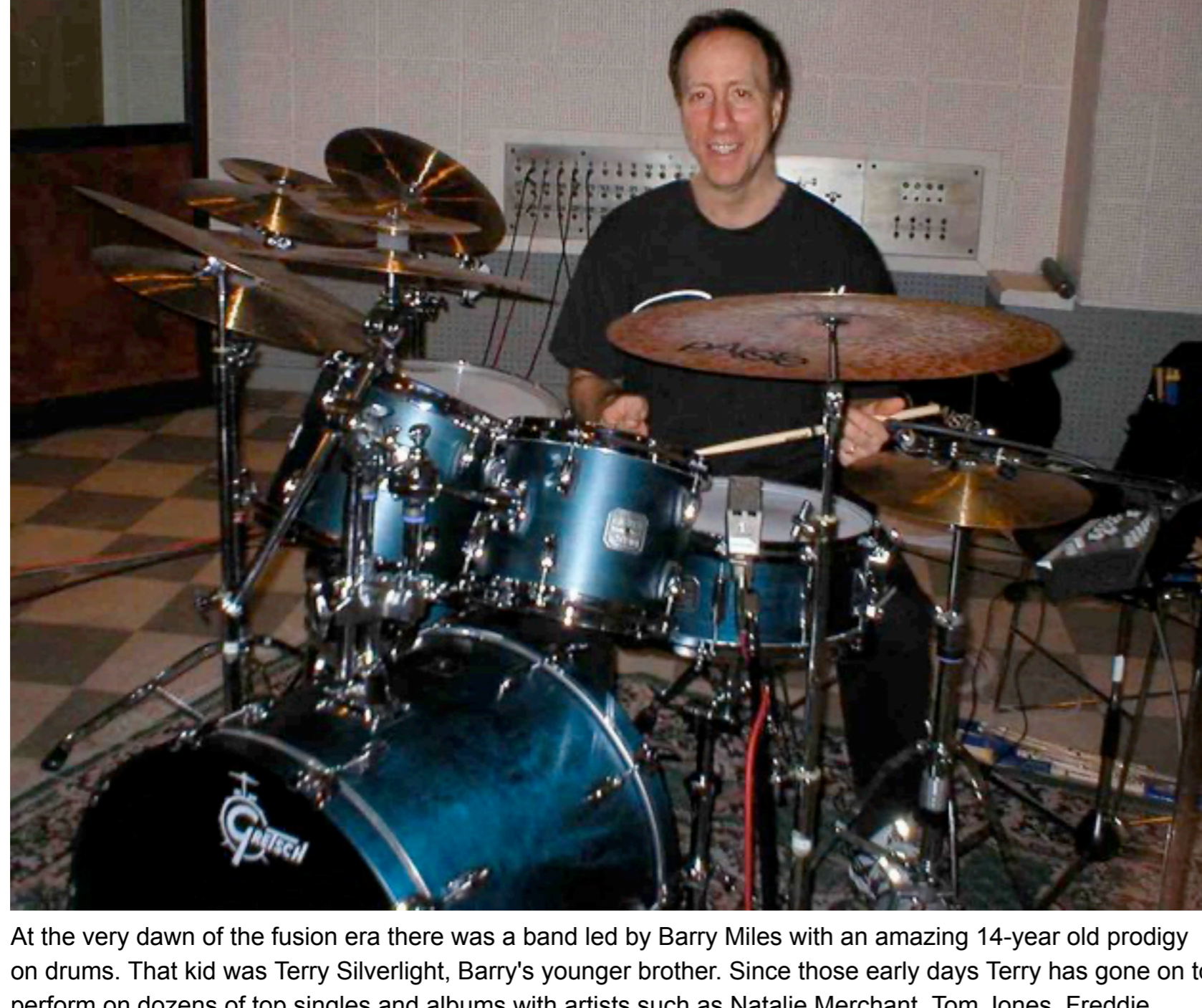


# Terry Silverlight: Lighting The Way

By Phil Hood Published March 12, 2010



At the very dawn of the fusion era there was a band led by Barry Miles with an amazing 14-year old prodigy on drums. That kid was Terry Silverlight, Barry's younger brother. Since those early days Terry has gone on to perform on dozens of top singles and albums with artists such as Natalie Merchant, Tom Jones, Freddie Jackson, Slaves of New York, and others. In addition, he's made his mark as a composer, writing pieces for *The Sopranos*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *NCIS*, *The Shield* and many more TV shows and movies. When not working his magic behind the red light Terry finds time to release his own solo albums with the Terry Silverlight band, whose ranks have included bassist *Will Lee*, saxophonist *Bill Evans*, *Edgar Winter*, guitarist *Hiram Bullock*, and others.

Terry is busy. In the last ten months he's released four new albums, *Diamond In The Riff*, the album *Live* which is a compilation of live recordings in New York over a six-year period; *Songwriter/Producer Volumes I & II* which are pop songs Terry has written; and *Collaborations Volumes I & II*, which are pop songs he's co-written with a number of established hit songwriters, and *Music To Picture* which is a combination of pieces he has placed in TV shows and films. He's also played on recent new recordings with the Manhattan Jazz orchestra and with vibist Dave Shank (recorded by Steely Dan engineer Roger Nichols, "who got a great drum sound in 5 minutes!"), and others. He says at some point in the near future he'll start thinking about his next solo album. We interviewed Terry by email this week.

[Ed. Note: He's got a high-profile gig happening this April 20 at the Bitter End in NY with Will Lee, David Mann and Aaron Heick on sax, vocalist Tabitha Fair and his brother Barry on keys.]

**DRUM!** You're out doing clinics now. What do you try to teach when you're in that environment?  
**Silverlight** I try to incorporate a variety of topics. Diversity has always been a major focus for me in my own world, so it's natural that I find it interesting to cover a lot of ground in my clinics. I like to talk about the concept of my book, *The Featured Drummer*, which is taking patterns grouped in 3's, 4's, 5's and 7's and playing them over various grooves (samba, shuffle, funk) in 4/4 and 6/8 times. The book addresses hands-only exercises and hands and feet-together exercises. The book is accompanied by two audio CDs of me playing the exercises taking fours with John Patitucci on 6-string electric bass and Barry Miles on keyboards. I demonstrate this in my clinics where I play along to these tracks. It makes sense to me to incorporate the book's odd rhythmic groupings into a real life musical situation, since that is how the book was developed in the first place. The fact that I'm playing the concepts from the book live with real musicians (even though pre-recorded) and communicating with them in the form of swapping fours, makes for an interactive experience.

Other areas I cover in the clinics are basic exercises I use to warm up around the kit, practice techniques such as beginning each exercise slowly and gradually increasing speed and really breaking things down, ideas about how to get a good sound and feel out of various grooves with sticks, brushes and Hot Rods (funk, jazz, fusion, Latin, Brazilian, rock, pop), drum tuning, verbally sharing my on the job experiences and how each situation is completely different (some are sight reading only, others are well-rehearsed, large and small ensembles, studio tricks), and a Q & A that can take the direction anywhere.

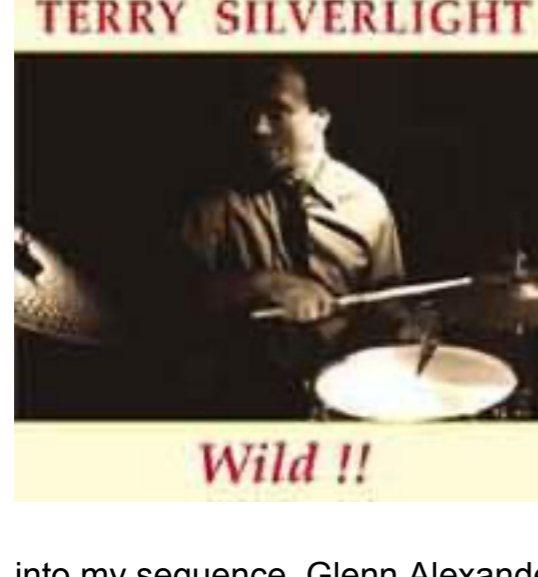
**DRUM!** Not enough people know about your skills as a composer. When you get a gig for TV, or when you're writing for your own band, where do you start? Do you go to the keyboard?  
**Silverlight** I do it differently depending if it's a song for my own band or something for TV and film that may be in a more straight forward pop songwriting style, which most of my work for TV and film has been. That's not to say that I don't do instrumental scoring work for jingles and films, but for now I'll focus here on just my band writing and pop songwriting.

For material I write for my band, I usually get behind the live kit, set up my studio for drum record, and start a groove I know I'd enjoy playing with live musicians... something that I know would lend itself to group interplay and improvisation. I keep in mind that I'll have Will Lee on bass and Barry Miles on piano, so it inspires me to come up with a rhythmic vibe that will showcase their virtuosic abilities and the other outstanding soloists I use. Plus, show off my stuff, too!



That's where it begins. I'll start playing something I have in mind as far as a groove and rhythmic concept, and press the record button. I'll let it go for 15-20 minutes. From there, I'll go to my computer and keyboard and start building a song from there with my library of bass, keyboard, orchestral, and other sounds. On one of my latest albums, *Diamond In The Riff*, I ended up keeping several of the original drum tracks which I developed the song from and added live musicians to. The drum tracks were so integral in the development of the song, that it made musical sense to keep them as finals. To me, those songs came out sounding like they were recorded completely live with everyone at once. It's a way of recording that perhaps certain jazz buffs would claim would hinder the spontaneity of a performance, but I think I've shown that's not necessarily the case in all instances.

Regarding how I build a pop song for TV and film work, I use a similar method as above, except that I'll begin with drum samples or individual elements of a drum kit and/or percussion. I find there are so many great drum and percussion libraries available, that it's a quicker process for me than taking the time to get live drum sounds. I'm still creating the actual parts the drums are playing (I don't use the sample loops right out of the box ever. I edit until it's something completely original and right for the song), but I can take advantage of the high quality recordings of the drums that are pre-fab.



**DRUM!** Do you always lay down all the parts at home before bringing them to the musicians?  
**Silverlight** For my band material, I've done it both ways. On my *Wild!* album, most of the tracks were recorded live at Avatar Studios in NY with me and the other musicians in the same room. On my *Diamond In The Riff* album, the songs "PT" and "Eye Of The Beholder" were recorded as part of a live TV show, and I used those tracks for the album. Many of the other songs, as explained above, I recorded the drums first in my studio along with synth pads and other ornamental parts. After that, Will Lee overdubbed his bass parts at a studio in NY, and Barry Miles, David Mann, and Aaron Heick overdubbed their parts in their home studios, then sent me the audio files, which I flew back

into my sequence. Glenn Alexander overdubbed his guitar parts in my studio, as did vocalist Tabitha Fair. On "Nothing Like Today", Lew Soloff, Bob Malach, and Larry Farrell overdubbed their horn parts in my hotel room when we were on tour together in Japan! As for my pop material, I record all the parts myself in my studio on my keyboard and computer. Occasionally, I'll call in a guitarist or horn player for overdubs, and I record vocals at my studio.

**DRUM!** What do you bring to composing as a drummer, that you wouldn't have otherwise?  
**Silverlight** I suppose simply having the knowledge of how a drummer thinks and the importance and focus I place on the groove in music. Having played in rhythm sections for so many years and being an admirer of the rhythm section on recordings, I have a good knowledge of what drums, bass, guitar and keyboards should be and would be playing. That's why I'm able to convincingly emulate those parts when I'm composing and arranging on my keyboard and computer. People have often commented that because I'm a drummer, they can feel a special pulse, heartbeat and rhythmic spirit in my writing that sometimes is missing in other's tracks.

**DRUM!** Your last studio record, *Wild*, was very well received. Was there anything else different about the approach to that?  
**Silverlight** In addition, I mixed the album myself in my studio.

**DRUM!** How do you approach a tune like "Phantom of Bebopera" on that recording? That's wild.  
**Silverlight** I love this question, because that's the only song that wasn't recorded with the entire band simultaneously. In the studio, I decided to run a click and have Will Lee and Charles Blevins just blow over the changes and riff I had written. I asked Charles to be free and play whatever he felt (over my changes and form that I had written, of course). The first pass was on acoustic piano. He asked what I wanted him to play, and I said "Anything you feel". I then asked Charles to do the same thing on Rhodes (of course over the part Will had already recorded and muting Charles's acoustic piano pass). Then, I gave Charles and Will a lunch break and I proceeded to record drums over both those takes. At my home studio when mixing, I swapped back and forth between Charles's acoustic and Rhodes takes for a change of color, added some synth horn stabs, and that's the song.



**DRUM!** You started drumming at a very young age and by your teenage years were playing major concerts. Looking back now, what did that experience do for you?  
**Silverlight** I consider myself very lucky that I had some key experiences. I can see that the educational field today is of the highest level. That combined with the availability to hear and see almost everything on YouTube, DVDs and digital downloads, the education young musicians are getting today is unsurpassed. Although Lawrence Berk offered me a full scholarship to attend Berklee School of Music when I was 18 years old, I decided instead to attend Princeton University. I stayed there for only one year, then moved back home for 2 years to resume my self-teaching, a few hand technique drum lessons with Arnie Lang and piano-teaching methods for writing and drumming. I never got the classroom music education that many students are utilizing today. Mine was a combination of self-taught, private lessons, the amazing amount of time and support that my brother Barry Miles

gave to me, and the fortune of getting to play with some of the greatest musicians in some of the highest level situations at an early age.

**DRUM!** What were the key experiences?  
**Silverlight** Playing drums on Barry Miles's "White Heat" album at the age of 14 in 1971 with Pat Martino, John Abercrombie, Lew Tabackin and Warren Smith. Then I was 19 years old when I played on my first platinum album, *Native New Yorker* which was conducted by Charlie Calello with musicians Will Lee, Pat Rebillo, John Tropea, and David Spinozza. I also played drums at the age of 20 on a two-week recording session in London on albums for Phil Woods, Mel Torme, Michel Legrand, and Kenny Wheeler. Also playing drums on my first platinum pop album, "Native New Yorker," conducted by Charlie Calello Conducted by Charlie Calello with musicians Will Lee, Pat Rebillo, John Tropea, David Spinozza. And, there were many gigs with Barry Miles, [saxophonist] Phil Woods, [guitarist] Vic Juris, [saxophonist] Eric Kloss along with band members [bassist] Richard Darvey, [guitarist] Sam Jones, [bassist] Tony Levin, [bassist] Anthony Jackson, Brecker Brothers, [bassist] Tom Barney, [guitarist] Al DiMeola, etc.

**DRUM!** How do you keep your chops up today. Do you still practice regularly?  
**Silverlight** Yes I do, especially when a major drumming event is in the forecast.

**DRUM!** Do you have set of exercises or routine you follow?  
**Silverlight** I like warming up with paradiddles, double strokes and single strokes around the kit, then orchestrating the same patterns between the hands and feet around the kit. From there, I like to stretch out with other ideas I've been thinking about that I need to practice. Patterns or grooves that I might not be as familiar with, that I'd like to get under my belt. And of course, when there's a special upcoming event with new material I need to prepare for, that takes center stage.

**DRUM!** Tell us about the gig that's coming up on April 15. Is this pretty much the current band when you're playing out?  
**Silverlight** It will be on Tuesday April 20, one show at 9:30 pm at The Bitter End in Manhattan. I will be using the same band I did on my last band performance which was almost two years ago. Will Lee on bass, Barry Miles on keyboards, David Mann and Aaron Heick on saxes and Tabitha Fair as guest vocalist on one song. The material will be a combination of songs from "Wild!" and "Diamond And The Riff". Maybe one or two new songs. I still think I have one more performance in me with the same material and personnel, but saying it in a different way! Because I'm busy performing and recording on drums for others, my writing schedule, along with the very busy schedule of the great musicians I select, I don't do these original band gigs very often. So, it's a special occasion for me.

For more info: <http://www.terrysilverlight.com>.

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