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# Ivan Firchie Ensnared

Words Aerik Von Barbal

To call **Ivan Firchie** a musical survivor would be a criminal understatement. In a world in which tragedy and triumph collide with an alarming regularity, Ivan has proven to be a driven, multi-talented renaissance man.

As a musician, Firchie has played on countless sessions with as many artists. He was also a pivotal force behind Yugoslavian musical legends Luna and the era-defining EKV (who have found a substantial underground following in the United States, long after the group ceased to be).

Firchie also proved himself to be an innovator of instruments, as he created a user friendly "Roto-Snare" that allows one to tune both the top and bottom drum head simultaneously. This snare, built on his deep interest in improving the basic snare, has cured many of the ills associated with tuning and allows any drummer better control of their sound. The Roto-Snare has been adopted

by many major drummers such as Dennis Chambers, Peter Erskine, Will Calhoun, Martin Chambers and Lenny White, to name a few. These accomplishments though, while born from Firchie's immense natural talents, have faced many trials. Struggles with the United States government over financial details, the loss of his homeland to civil war, and even the loss of many original tape libraries have tested his creative and personal strength, as well as proving his perseverance.

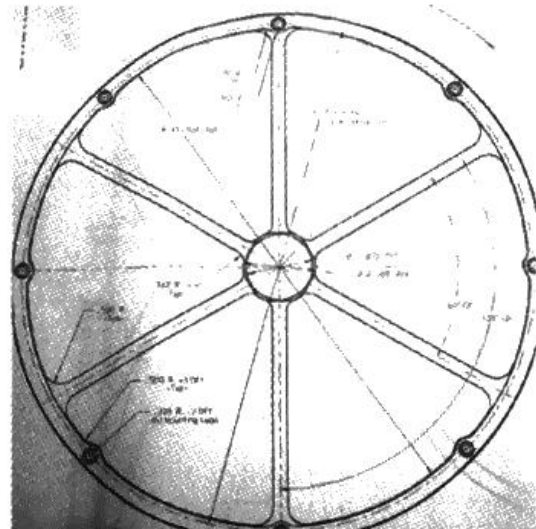
Not only is Firchie an inspiration for his recordings and drum innovations, but he also represents the irrepressible strength of music. With new drum designs in the wings, and his re-working of the legendary EKV catalog (EKV Revisited), the time to tell the tale of Ivan Firchie is now...

## Drumhead: Where does the story of Ivan Firchie begin?

Ivan Firchie: I actually came from a musical family. My grandfather was a great violinist. When I was young, he stated, "this child will be a musician." When I was 5 years old, I was enrolled into music school and began learning to play the violin. It wasn't exactly what I wanted to be doing at the time, but looking back, I really appreciate it for what it taught me. Later, in my teens, I was introduced to rock 'n' roll bands like the Beatles and everything changed! You see, Yugoslavia wasn't what people think, there was no "iron curtain" and we weren't part of the "eastern bloc," either. Yugoslavia was actually like a Disneyland! There were no restrictions and many of the major rock acts like The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones were available to us. When I found Hendrix around the age of 12, the violin became a soccer goal post in comparison!







The Firchie plan

**DH: When did you begin to play drums, following your studies in classic music?**

IF: I formed a band at 12 years old, and I actually wanted to play the guitar. Everyone else, though, had been playing guitar already and were a bit better than I. Moving to drums seemed to be the right move, (Firchie's father played drums as well). I actually began playing a different way than other drummers. From being self-taught, I didn't play with my hands crossed over, because it didn't make sense to me and actually seemed kind of stupid. Playing with my hands open enabled me to use my toms, in and around the back beat snare, and I ended up using it a lot at the time with my band Luna. It worked great and I was actually making more than my father's salary by drumming, and with that, I was able to purchase my first Premier drum kit.

**DH: Was the next step getting into the studio with EKV?**

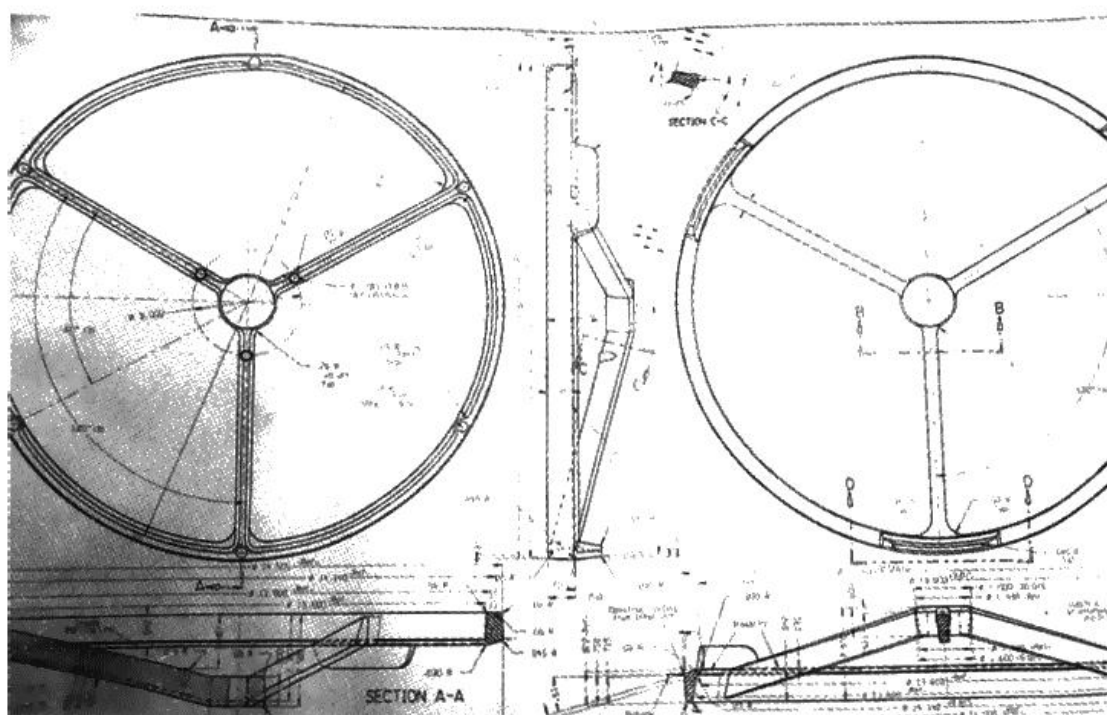
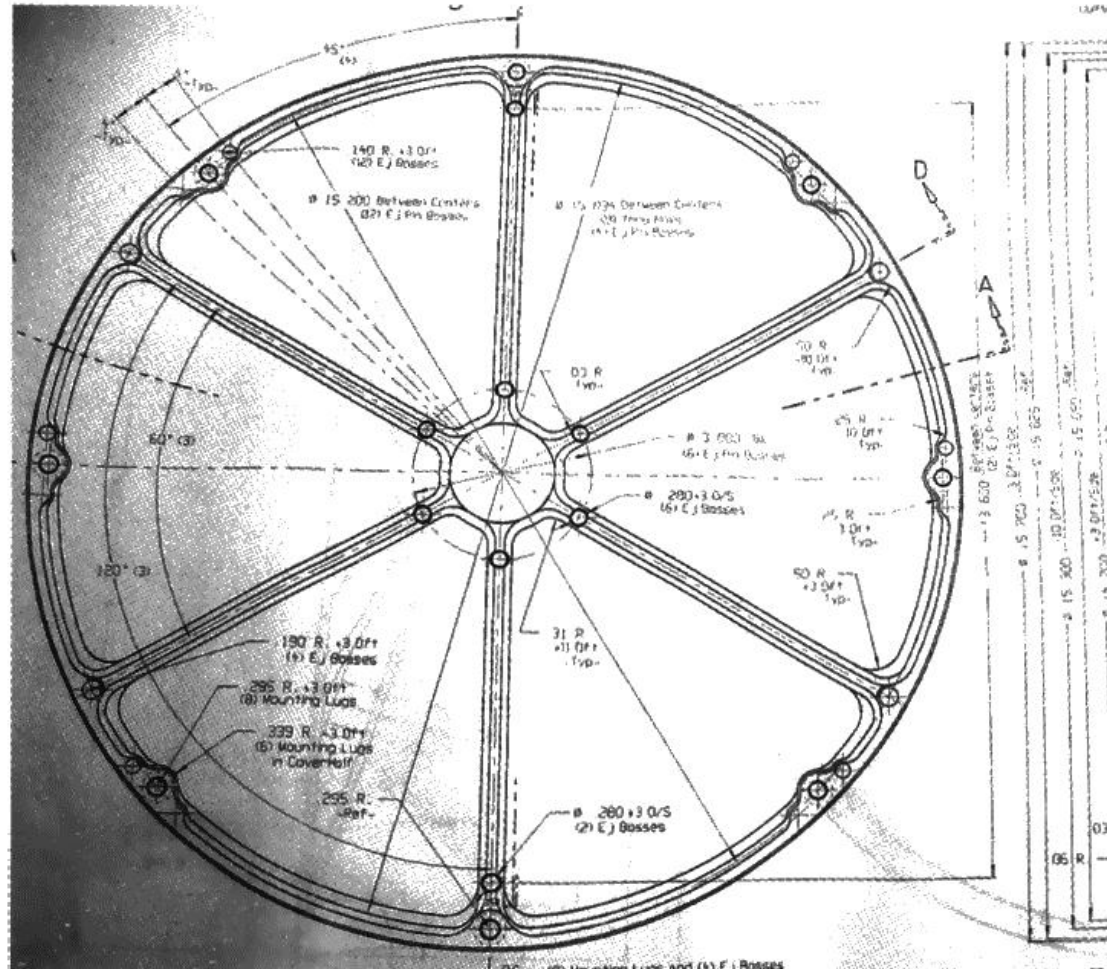
IF: Actually, the first full album I recorded was with a band called Zetva during 1977. My next record was one of my favorites, with the band Luna, which became very, very influential in Yugoslavia.

**DH: So how did you come to form your defining musical project, EKV?**

IF: EKV was based in Belgrade. After being a session musician for long enough, I got to know many musicians, and joined the band. Belgrade had a very good music scene going on during this time.

**DH: EKV became a rather popular band in Yugoslavia. What were the turnouts like for your concerts? It seems that the Yugoslavian audience was very open to this form of music.**

IF: When we played in urban cities, we started with 50-60 [spectators]. Eventually it became 1,000 and then even to 10,000. Near



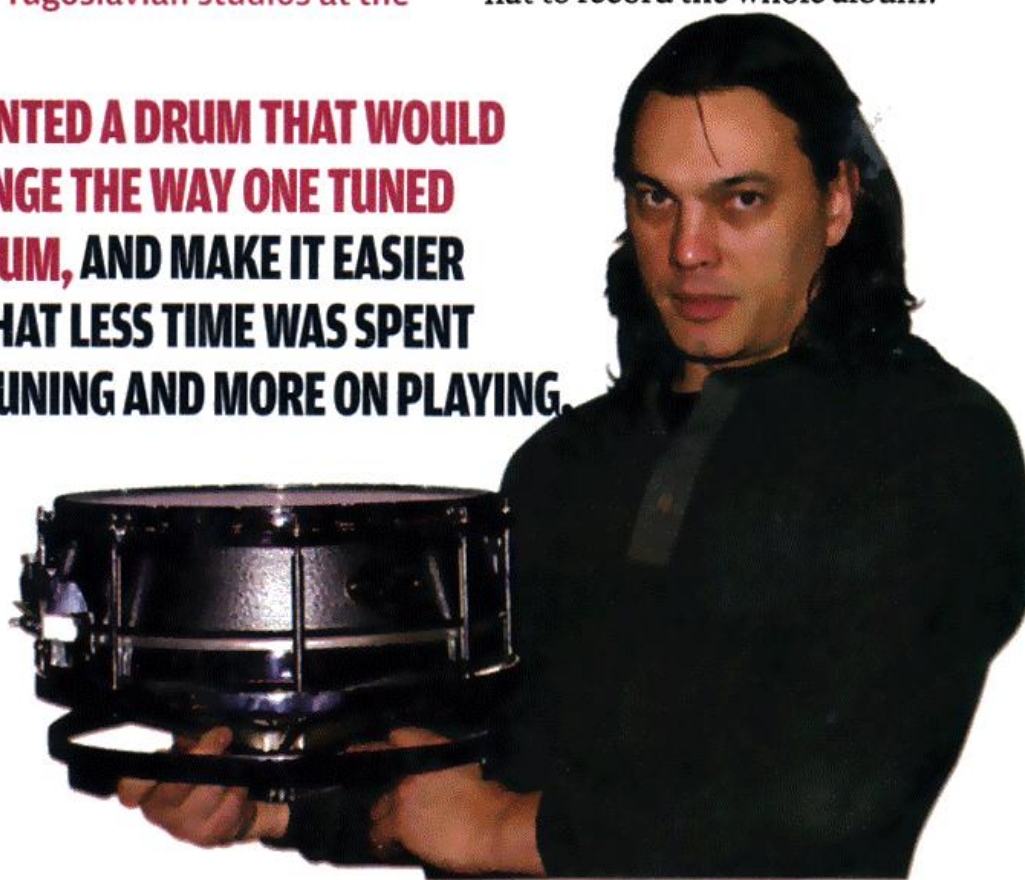
the end of EKV, we were drawing 40,000 to 50,000 people. The band later played at the MIDEM festival. Our musical talents and lyrics allowed us to build a very strong following in Yugoslavia.

**DH: You've recorded in many studios. What was it like recording in Yugoslavian studios at the**

**time? How did the technology match with studios elsewhere?**

IF: Studios in Yugoslavia were actually every bit as advanced as any other place in Europe. We had the MCI boards and all updated technologies were available to us. The only problem in the beginning was that we were given 100 hours flat to record the whole album!

**I WANTED A DRUM THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WAY ONE TUNED A DRUM, AND MAKE IT EASIER SO THAT LESS TIME WAS SPENT ON TUNING AND MORE ON PLAYING.**



That was one of the biggest differences between studios in Yugoslavia and the rest of Eastern Europe. Even so, the longer we played and the more successful we became, we learned to find ways around this so that we'd somehow get all the time we needed.

**DH: You've played on countless sessions. Which one of these outside of Luna or EKV was most successful for you?**

IF: The most records I've sold were 1.2 million. It wasn't a situation I was happy in, but the Blue Orchestra sold the most. All of the deals were on a handshake. Of course, it sold the most copies of any record I've done and we're all still looking for our money!

**DH: What inspired the creation of the Roto-Snare?**

IF: The Roto-Snare was actually something I envisioned in a single moment. It was like an apple falling on my head. I was playing in a band in 1984 called Jakarta. It was very well established and well produced. The producer, though, was very involved with trying to find "that sound," so we tried half a dozen snares, all with different mic techniques. We were tuning and pushing buttons and the producer was like "try this and that," and nothing seemed to work. I wanted a drum that would change the way one tuned a drum, and make it easier so that less time was spent on tuning and more on playing. Unlike a guitar player or a piano player, who can just sit down with an instrument with basic tuning and play, a drummer has to be very concerned with his sound. I think that many beginner drummers give up due to frustration, as the simple act of tuning a drum is very difficult to learn and a poorly tuned drum has a truly terrible sound. This drum design allowed for someone to tune both heads at once, moving the focus away from long tuning and back into playing. After I thought of it, the actual drum took two months to build. I actually built one of the first drums using pieces from a washing machine! The prototype worked. The second version refined everything and we ended up debuting it at NAMM in 1992.

**DH: Can you tell us the basic mechanics and concept of the drum, and how one can benefit from its use?**

IF: The drum has many tones. You



can simply mark the drumhead to find the sound you had been using or want to lock onto. For a deep rock sound or a higher jazz sound, you just need to turn the drum to that marked setting each time you play. By turning it to that exact setting, the drum will tune the same each time. It's also a loud snare, possibly the loudest ever. The snare has a lot of "ring," and if you play loud you will have the loudest sound you can possibly create. If you don't want that much volume, the answer is easy: just don't play as hard. If you want that room-filling sound, though, this snare is very responsive and will match how you play. The Roto-Snare also helps to preserve your heads. On a normal drum, the head can suffer—even when you're not playing—from material fatigue. By de-tuning, you allow the head some relief. If you turn the drum counter-clockwise, you can save the life of the head and turn it back when you need to play.

**DH: Did you actually intend to build drums for the commercial market?**

IF: No. I actually built this drum for my own use. A good friend of mine pushed me into the business of making these drums. I wasn't interested at all in making these drums, but he kept pushing and pushing. It was actually truly annoying at times! He simply kept harassing me until I did it. He even told me that if I didn't do it, he'd never speak to me again! On his life! My patent was approved in 1987 and again granted on my birthday, which is September 10th. After the patent, we actually established offices at the World Trade Center. We ended up making about 1,000 pieces, and they were sold to many drummers whom I admire a great deal. Unfortunately, running a business was very difficult and we ran into many problems. We ended up having to close down the business and I ended up only making the drums to individual order.

**DH: What led to the collapse of this business? It seems things were actually going rather well.**

IF: One of the biggest pains I have about the situation is that because we only had green cards, during the [Yugoslavian] civil war, all of our assets were frozen "until further notice." Imagine going from having a full business to literally having no money and having to take calls from all of



The Firchie factory

your suppliers. It was a difficult time. This killed the business.

**DH: You've been working on a new drum, different than the Roto-Snare. What can you tell us about this new creation?**

IF: This drum has no shell, but is two heads suspended. How important is the shell? It's not as important as you think. An early version was called the "Shotgun Shell" due to the holes that were punched into the shell. This idea was re-created and copied by many. The new drums I am building will come out in four to five months. While we have the basic concept, the new drum is not yet finished.

**DH: When do you think this drum will be released?**

IF: There is no final date for the appearance of this drum, and I still have to refine it. I want to work on the drum until it is ready.

**DH: Aside from your creation of new drums, what new recording projects have you been exploring as a musician?**

IF: I've been for a year or more playing around with many of the old EKV recordings. I am now heavily involved with reworking and remixing much of my old material under the name EKV Revisited. This material is being heavily edited, with many new instruments being layered to the old recordings. Many parts have been re-recorded and it has all been re-mixed. I am hoping that



if everything goes right these records will come out during January of 2007. This depends on a lot of things, though.

**DH: Will the original versions of the EKV records be preserved in any form?**

IF: One of the deepest and crushing wounds is that during the civil war, entire libraries of music were literally recorded over, or destroyed. Some literally burned. Many of the multi-tracks by many various artists were lost forever. It's impossible to imagine, but entire libraries of what was seen as "common" culture were taken and destroyed. It's a very, very painful thing to consider.

**DH: Other than these re-releases and the new drum produc-**

**tions, are you considering the recording of any new musical projects? What is the next step for Ivan Firchie the musician?**

IF: This is a painful thing for me, as the building of drums became the one thing I focused on. While the drum thing was happening, I was focused on selling my drums, living my life, and having children. I am just now going back into playing and over-dubbing for the upcoming re-releases. What is a blessing can also be a curse. I dedicated so much time to the building of drums, it's impossible for me to think of my next ambitions because I'm trying to figure out where I've been. I will always continue to be involved in music and I will never leave the hobby of creating a better drum.

**Web Foot**  
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