

No Foundation, No House

Words: Ian Croft Images: Eckie

Perry Melius and Wayne Nunes understand what makes a rhythm section truly tick as they work with a broad range of artists and on their own project, Warrior Charge. And then there's panto! But not panto as you know it...

Warrior Charge is bassist Wayne Nunes and drummer Perry Melius who, after working on and producing many different kinds of projects, decided to put together their own band. Their debut album, *No Foundation No House*, was released in 2007 and featured Tricky, Brinsley Forde, Hawkman, Bea Brown from Beastallabeast and Noel Mckoy. "The music is a painting and it represents two people throwing colours at a canvas and only showing the pieces we like," states Wayne. "It's a melting pot; there was no plan, we just put everything in and something good came out," adds Melius.

Melius and Nunes have been working together as a rhythm section and as producers (Lickle Kings) for over ten years. They have played live and recorded with artists such as Billy Ocean, Tricky, African Head Charge, Aswad, Jeb Loy Nichols, Donnie Fritts, Fiona Renshaw, Wayne Hernandez and Ghetto Priest of Asian Dub Foundation. The pair moved their careers centre stage when they featured as the rhythm section for Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come* at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. As producers and writers, their first production deal was with Juni Morrison (Funkadelic/Ohio Players), and they also produced *The Diary* featuring Blu Miller. They have since written, produced, co-produced and remixed tracks for Mobo Award finalists, Kola, and produced a track for the movie *Bad Company*, with Chris Rock and Anthony Hopkins. They have also produced tracks for Tricky, Jeb Loy Nichols, Nick Rhodes, Eek A Mouse, Rico, Radana, Amy Coco, Ghetto Priest and Shaila Prospere, among others.

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JOINING THE DOTS

Bassist Wayne Nunes grew up in Guyana and his first music experience was singing in an Anglican church choir. "I loved singing bass, and there was lots of music played in our house and it was always the bass that attracted me, especially James Jamerson on the Motown records, and then Ashton 'Family Man' Barrett, who played with The Upsetters and Bob Marley. In Guyana there was a real radio culture, as you couldn't see anything and there was no TV, and because it was somewhat out of the loop, there was little information about players, so it was either you liked something or you didn't; there was no judgement made before."

Nunes then got into all the CTI records and The Crusaders. "I bought Stanley Clarke's *Schooldays* and Weather Report's *Heavy Weather*, and as soon as I got home from school I would listen to both of those records over and over. I wanted to be a combination of Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius! Otherwise, it was anything with Ashton on it and I loved reggae."

Nunes continued to play in bands all over Guyana and went as far as he felt he could, but in order to step up to the next level he decided to return to the UK, where he was born.

"Coming to England I had to start all over



again, and as I didn't know anybody I checked *Melody Maker* for auditions. I'd call up the ads and it all sounded great until I got to the audition, only to discover it was something very different! I had a wife and young child, so I needed work."

Nunes found stable employment via Eddie Grant's brother, who had a studio in Stoke Newington, where he started to work.

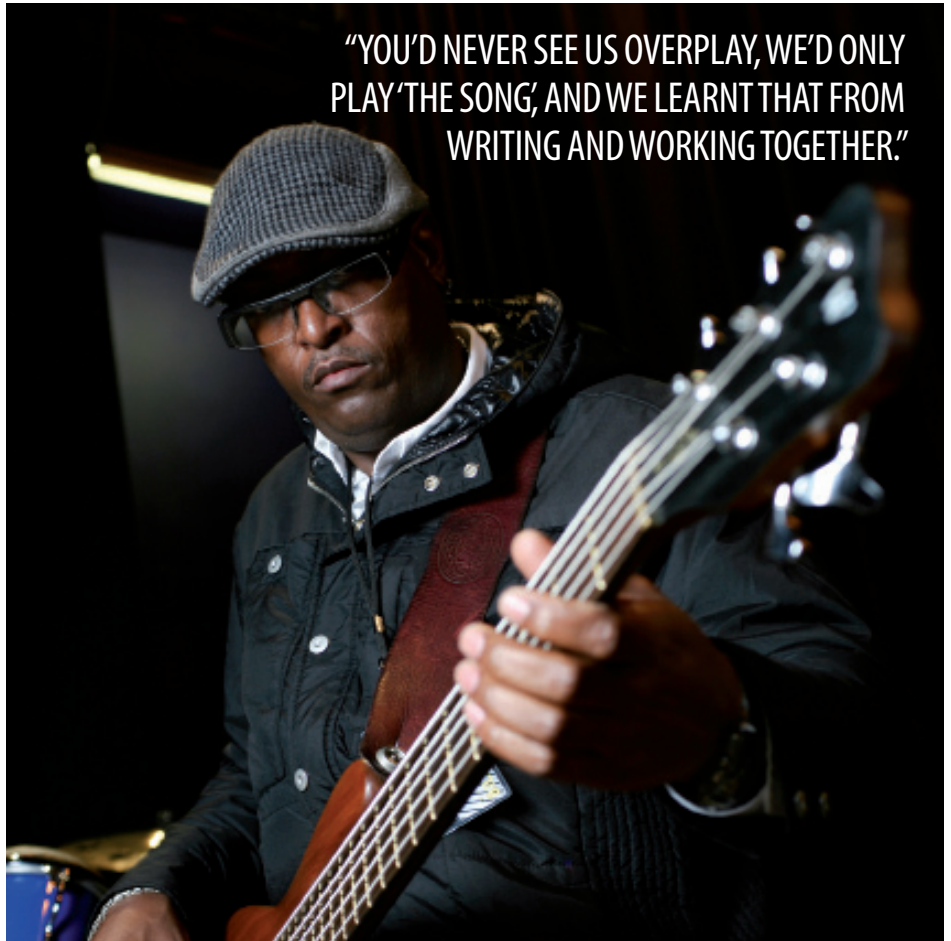
"We were making records and I would get involved with engineering, recording, learning about production, dealing with everything that came through there, and it was a great environment to learn in. I then got the gig with Eddie Grant, which was my first proper tour in the UK."

It was around that same time that Wayne met Perry when both were hired to play a gig for the GLC (Greater London Council), and as Nunes didn't drive, the two went together.

"I learnt that Perry was into writing and composing, as I was, and as Perry was a good programmer we hooked up and began writing together. I've always been into the whole rhythm section thing, and back in Guyana I played with the same drummer all the time, so I understood how that felt and how it worked. When Perry and I began writing, it automatically came together, as we both heard things the same way."

Perry Melius's journey was a little different, as it turns out that it was his mum that got him into music. "It was always the drums that I picked out and heard in my head, and I thought, 'I could do that!' I could tap out a beat easily, though I got into it all really late, as I was 17 when my mum bought me my first kit. I used to play along to The Specials, The Beat, Selector, as I loved the energy of that music, especially as it was very similar to reggae. My cousin had a covers band and we played social clubs, and I'd earn money doing that. The other players were all much older than me, so I was working with older heads and they showed me a lot of things about reggae and soca. I listened to Carlton Barrett, Sly Dunbar, early ska drummers and also Drummie Zeb with Aswad, who I was hugely influenced by. I would religiously play *Live And Direct* and wonder how Drummie played things. I listened generally to a lot of British music, and it was Wayne that later introduced me to American music, and in turn I introduced him to Lovers Rock, which he'd never heard, so we were able to join a lot of dots for each other musically. When Wayne first played me a Steve Gadd track, I was

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like, 'Who is that?' I had to research who it was and Gadd went straight to my heart!"

We will let them take it from here as Wayne and Perry discuss how their relationship has evolved and how each other's influences have helped them grow into the formidable rhythm section that they have become.

Wayne: "All I heard was roots reggae back in Guyana, so when Perry introduced me to Lovers Rock, I learnt everything that I could. I never heard any of that stuff before, only Dennis Brown, Steel Pulse, Bob Marley, Gregory Isaacs, Third World, and it was just as I was leaving Guyana to come to the UK that I heard the first Aswad record and I was like, 'Wow!' One of the first gigs that I ever saw was Toots and the Maytals, who I watched through a tiny window at a venue in Guyana. I'll never forget that."

Perry: "Back in those days when I first started playing, a lot of British music carried a lot of racial tension, especially as the skinheads were into it. I later toured with Selector and then Bad Manners, and I'd be sitting in a bar with some of those guys and I'd say, 'Why?' They'd say that they were brainwashed by a lot of what was going on around them and now they regretted how it appeared. But typically, music brought all those people and ideologies together. It was the energy of the music that did it."

Wayne: "In the Caribbean that kind of thing just

didn't exist, and I remember seeing Perry play with Bad Manners and it was the sheer energy of the music that brought people together. You couldn't just stand there, you just had to move, as the energy was so amazing. I went to see Perry with Selector, and again it opened all that up to me. Later on when we played with Tricky it was the same thing: the energy was so intense."

Perry: "The thing with Tricky is that he is not your normal type of artist. When I first started working with him, he had a group of musicians that were almost afraid to take chances. Tricky used to stand right by the drum kit, as he liked



GEAR BOX

PERRY MELIUS

Drums: Sonor – Delite Series

22 x 17" Bass drum

8" Rack tom

10" Rack tom

12" Rack tom

14" Floor tom

16" Floortom

14 x 6.5" snare

Cymbals: Zildjian

14" Z Custom Mastersound Hi-hats

11" K Custom Hybrid splash (x2)

20" K Custom Hybrid ride,

14" A Custom Projection crash

15" 1A Custom Projection crash

16" A Custom Projection crash

14" Oriental China Trash

Sticks: Vic Firth - 1A wood tip**Heads:** Evans/Remo**Electronics:** Roland 8" Pads (x6)

Alesis DM5 + MPC 100 Time Keeper

Cases: Protection Racket

the energy, and in my own way I'd take chances, equally understanding of my own abilities, and I think he liked that. Over the course of a couple of tours, those other players got phased out and in came players that were prepared to take risks musically. When Wayne came into the fold Tricky loved it, as we could all go on the same musical journey together, and you don't get many artists that are prepared to take risks like that."

Wayne: "We did African Head Charge (On U-Sound) together and we knew what they wanted to do, and we understood that it had a bit more going on and that we could take things in other directions. It was also how we discovered ourselves as a rhythm section, as we had the ability to take things where we wanted them to go, and as a rhythm section we held the key to it all."

"We've been lucky, as we've always had a project to do, as people realise that we do know what we are doing, and every project has been for a purpose. Tricky realised that we had that ability and he brought us in over the past ten years in various forms on all his albums. It all comes back to the writing thing again. If you came to one of our gigs, you'd never see us overlap, we'd only play 'the song', and we learnt that from writing and working together. Somebody said to us recently that they could hear how we had developed a sound, our sound, and that's why we get hired. It was a very unconscious thing, but working together over the years and the trust and friendship that

we have has brought that out. If you can find a rhythm section partner and grow and develop together, it creates something very solid. The best rhythm sections understand how songs work and how production works. It's not how fast or technically proficient you might be, it's simply about playing the songs. We could do a pub gig tonight and then a big production tour tomorrow, as we understand and have knowledge and experience of many different styles. Because of that, people get us for different things and we can handle it and deliver what is required with the minimum of fuss."

Perry: "We can jump onto things and be confident and even add a little bit of our own flavour to things and still keep it within the parameters of what the artist is looking for, or needs."

Wayne: "I worked with Jeb Loy Nichols, which was a learning process for me, as Jeb has a kind of low-fi country-dub vibe. We toured quite a lot in America, and I learnt a lot about that style of music and was able to bring that back and add it to our thing. It was very guitar based and introduced me to different instrumentation, such as banjo, dobro and pedal steel, which was on the record."

Perry: "I worked with Gabriel and that gig introduced me to yet another different style of pop music, and I also went out with Aswad with



Drummie out front singing.

Whenever we play separate gigs, the other one will always come and check out the shows, and sometimes we'd think, 'How would we have done it?' But everything is about learning and working, and then bringing it all back to our own writing and production.

"I got a last-minute call to tour with Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) and that was a little outside of my normal thing, but the musicians that I worked with on that tour really opened up my mind to new things. Playing some of those great songs that he'd written was just amazing. I loved that gig and we filmed a live DVD [*Yusuf's Café*

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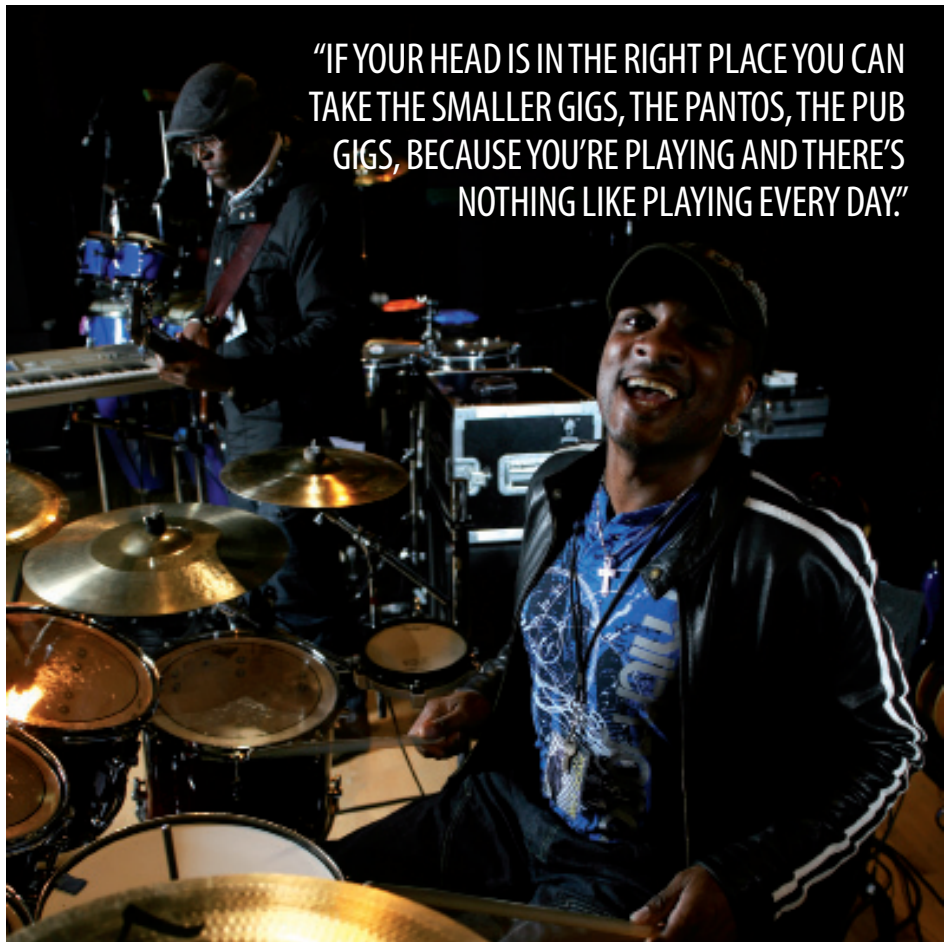
Session]. It was a totally different experience but one that I enjoyed and one that I learnt so much from. It could not have been further away from what I was doing or things that I'd done before."

Wayne: "It's always good to go and play with other people, and you should be prepared to step out of your comfort zone at times."

Perry: "Exactly! Right after the Yusuf tour we went into the studio to work with Rozalla. We got sent ten basic vocal and keyboard tracks, and they wanted us to be the rhythm section and help them produce and finish up the record. There was one particular track they had, and I remembered a beat that I'd played on Yusuf's tour and I ripped that and I played them that and they went, 'Amazing! That's it!' So it shows that when you do step out of your regular zone and learn something different, you can always take that and use it in a different way."

Wayne: "One thing that we have consistently done is maintain a good relationship with everyone that we've ever worked with. We're not really session players as such, but we've been lucky to work with people who like us for what we do, and those people are still good friends. For me, the Tricky gig is always there. We last did it two years ago, but then when we took on the show *The Harder They Come* at Theatre Royal, Stratford East, we couldn't go out with him because we were already committed. I recorded some things on his latest record, so there's always a continuing connection."

"One other really important aspect is that you have to offer something to an artist that makes them want you around. Personality



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and people skills are as vital as musical skills. I remember very early on hearing Eddie Grant say to someone that had suggested a guitar player for a tour, 'Oh yeah, he's great, but can I live with him?' I always remembered that. Once someone gets tagged with having an attitude or being difficult, it is a hard thing to change."

Perry: "It's a lot to do with people skills. Of course, you have to be able to play too, as you've got to be able to deliver, but you only spend around 90 minutes on a stage together and then you have to live happily for the remaining 22 and a half hours and get on. The artist wants to know that they can trust you not only onstage but offstage too, and that you will conduct yourself in a certain manner, as you are a representative for them and their music. Everyone that we've worked with we could call them on the phone right now and know that we have credibility with them. There's a personal connection."

Wayne: "We've never had a 'them and us' situation with any artist; it's always been cool and

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we try and maintain that with whoever we work with. Plus, we've always managed to produce the results by just being us."

IT'S BEHIND YOU

Perry: "We have been very lucky, as we were not known to be great readers, though we could do it and it has improved since, but a friend managed to get us into the theatre, which usually requires really good reading skills. Our first pantomime was at the Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds and we agreed to do it for a one-month run. After it finished they called us and asked if we'd put another band together and do it again. We still do pantomime at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, and their pantomime is considerably different to the traditional pantomime that everyone knows, as they produce shows that reflect the diverse cultures that exist within the East London area. Generally, five writers write the music and the shows will include Indian music, particularly bhangra, alongside reggae, funk, hip hop and other forms of street and urban music. So when *The Harder They Come* show came along we'd already had show experience, and when they were putting the band together, Derek Taylor, who I'd worked with on the Gabriel tour, suggested Wayne and I."

Wayne: "It very much has its own sensibilities. I mean, there are a million guys that can do it, but unless they've played shows before, they don't really know how to handle it. With their



GEAR BOX

WAYNE NUNES

Guitars:

Warwick Streamer Bolt-on 5-String
 Warwick Infinity Custom 5-String
 Warwick Infinity
 Fender Jazz 4-String
 Original Squire Jazz 4-String – tuned
 to a low B with no G string
 Harmony 1960s Semi-acoustic
 John Peacock Custom Acoustic
 5-String
 1950s German 3/4 Double Bass

Rig:

M-Pulse 600 Mesa head
 2 x Mesa 4x10 Cabs
 Demeter Tube DI Box

Effects:

Ernie Ball Volume pedal
 DOD Extreme Envelope Filter
 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff
 DigiTech BP200 Pedal
 Boss TU-3 Tuner
 EBS Octave Pedal

Strings:

Elites: Roundwound/half-wound/
 flatwound



skills, if they had done it before, then they could have handled it, but it is something a little different and it does open many doors as we came to learn. We were going to do the *Big Life* theatre show, but a pop gig that was signed to BMG came along for six months and we'd always wanted to do that, so we did decline that particular show."

Perry: "If your head is in the right place you can take the smaller gigs, the pantos, the pub gigs, because you're playing and there's nothing like playing every day. We've depped the shows out occasionally, and it is surprising that a player who you think could handle it is suddenly sweating on it! If you apply yourself in the right way, then it is all experience. I knew that when we first started doing those kinds of gigs it would lead to other things and it would allow us to work on shows where everything has to be much more dynamic."

Wayne: "The other thing with panto is that it also occurs during the quiet time of the year, from December through to the end of January, which ensures we stay busy, plus we are playing twice a day."

Perry: "It's also how we got the Billy Ocean gig. Billy wanted to get back on the road after a long time away and he wanted a band that he could trust. Billy came down to see us playing in a really small bar in the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, where there was barely room to set up a kit.

He sat in the corner of this tiny bar for the whole of our set and afterwards came up to us and said, 'I want you to be my rhythm section.' He then asked us to get a band together and we pulled in people that we could trust and that had worked with us before. We never dismiss anything that can lead to other things. As MD for Billy's show we do want to get the music right, but if there is anything that needs resolving, then we simply deal with it between us, as the other players have experience of shows and producing music. It never comes to arguments. On Billy's gig I get to use all those old 80s sounds, as it is important that we respect the original sounds that people are familiar with, and though it means a slightly bigger rig for me, reproducing those sounds and making it feel authentic is important."

Wayne: "We know how things should sound. When we first worked with Juni Morrison we didn't even know who he was, but when we started working with him we had a little MC-500 and an R8, and he got us to get rid of it all and he took us back to the source of where those things came from, and that was invaluable knowledge."

Perry: "Great musicians and artists will always share things with you and we've been lucky with that. Tricky would do that in abundance. He would come onto the tour bus with a big bag of CDs and say, 'Check this out.' And everybody would be sitting there armed, secretly, with paper and pen and write things down. He'd

come in with punk rock to hip hop to something that would make you cry to Serge Gainsbourg, and he could make the links between it all!"

Wayne: "We also toured with Tool and that was another great experience - a mind-opening experience. Danny [Carey] and Justin [Chancellor] gave us so much stuff and opened us up to so many things. Great musicians will always share that kind of knowledge."

Perry: "When we do our own projects we are able to call these people and have them contribute. The new Warrior Charge record has Tricky, Talvin Singh; also Brinsley Ford is on it and it is just a collaboration of all those people. It is our own thing, and to have access to those kinds of artists that are happy to contribute is amazing. There are times when we can't bring certain things to other artists' tables, so we save it and use it for Warrior Charge."

Wayne: "It allows us to develop our own ideas and it also shows other artists what we are capable of. We don't need to wait for the phone to ring, as we always seem to have projects on the go, and with all that going on we are always physically and mentally ready to take projects on. We can't make a big enough point of drummers and bassists hooking up and finding your musical soulmate and just getting out there and playing together. Build that rapport and understand sonically what is required and the work will come to you."