



Zoro

R&B Drummer with Lenny Kravitz,
Bobby Brown, and Frankie Valli

Legendary drummer, Zoro, has toured and recorded with such prominent artists as Lenny Kravitz, Bobby Brown, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, The New Edition, Jody Watley, Sean Lennon, and Lisa Marie Presley. He has been voted “#1 R&B Drummer” in the *Modern Drummer Magazine* readers’ poll four times. He has also received “Best Funk Drummer” honors in *Drum! And Rhythm* magazine in the United Kingdom.

Zoro’s best-selling book, video and DVD series, *The Commandments of R&B Drumming: A Comprehensive Guide to Soul, Funk & Hip Hop* were awarded the “#1 Best Educational Products Title” in the *Modern Drummer & Rhythm Magazine* readers’ polls. You can see his latest performance on a double DVD called, *The Modern Drummer Festival–2005* (*Hudson Music/Modern Drummer Magazine*).

Dubbed “The Communicator,” Zoro inspires and entertains audiences around the world as a player, educator, motivator, and Christian speaker. He also speaks at churches on the strategies and biblical principles needed for success and godly living. To find out more, visit www.zorothedrummer.com.

I grew up in an environment of poverty and hardship. Still, I look back at my childhood with fond memories because I had a wonderful mother who loved me and taught me about the Lord. And for that I will be eternally grateful.

There were seven kids in my family, and our mother raised us all by herself. She was from Mexico City originally, so we didn't have any extended family—no grandparents, uncles, or aunts. They were all still in Mexico. She was all alone taking care of us.

We were very poor. My mother had some significant health issues, including debilitating arthritis, which made it impossible for her to hold down a job. Consequently, we were a welfare family, getting food stamps and barely getting by. And we were always moving. We moved about 30 times by the time I was in the fourth grade. Sometimes those moves would just be a mile or two down the street to a different home. In those days, there was a limit on how many kids could live in an apartment. My mother would have to lie and say there were only four or five of us so that the landlord would rent to us. But eventually, we'd be found out and have to find a new place.

I can still keenly remember those moving days. Because it wasn't far enough to use a U-Haul truck (we couldn't have afforded it anyway), we had to move things by hand. My youngest brother, Robert, and I would physically move things like beds and dressers on our little red Radio Flyer wagon. We had a lot of hardship and heartache in our lives, but there was always a sense of adventure with our mother.

To me, growing up without a father was a difficult thing. I had always wished I had a dad—always wished for that special male figure to mentor me. But just having a father isn't the answer. Having a great one would have been the answer. I actually met my father for the first time when I was 18. I understood then, that if my true father had been in my life, I would have turned out to be a completely different guy. As it was, I had only my mother's influence, which was one of total love and passion. She had a tenderness about her that I now give to my own children. If my father had been in the mix, it would have changed that...he didn't have those tools. God protected me—something meant to be bad really turned out to be a blessing. A father was the very thing I was looking for but

never found. But the Lord showed me that I was to become that which I was looking for—someone to mentor and motivate others.

I received the Lord as a young boy of eight or nine at one of those vacation Bible school church camps. I remember walking up to the altar crying while they were singing a song called, “Lamb of God.” That was the beginning of a journey.

My love for music started in childhood. We didn’t have much money, but my mother always had albums. She’d play her music and dance and sing with me. I used to put two Folger’s coffee cans together and just bang them with my hands like I was banging on the drums. The gift of rhythm was in me from the beginning. Then one Christmas my mother bought me a Mickey Mouse drum set out of the Sears catalog. But the drum skins were made of paper, so it lasted all of Christmas Day before I destroyed it. That was that.

In 1977 Elvis died. I was a big fan as a kid, and for some reason his death was like a spark for me; all of a sudden I wanted to play music. I tried playing the guitar; I tried singing but those weren’t my natural gifts. Eventually, I got around to the drums. When I was 16, I bought a used set from a kid at school for \$80. From the second I picked up the sticks I knew that’s what I wanted to do. I began diligently studying, practicing, and dreaming. In order to join bands and start making some money with my music, I needed a new drum set and a set of wheels. After school I worked as a janitor at the high school. That was a very humbling experience. As soon as the bell would ring at the end of the day, my classmates could see me vacuuming the library. They’d make fun of me, but I was doing it for the money. That summer I worked two jobs, a total of 16 hours a day, so that I could save up enough money. For eight hours I worked as a cook/cleaner at a whitewater rafting business. Then in the evening I worked another eight hours as a janitor and groundskeeper at a community college.

I was busting my behind, but at the end of the summer my goals were achieved. I had my new car and my new set of drums and I was able to join local bands and develop as a young player. I also joined all the school bands—the stage band, the jazz band, and the marching band.

Two years later I graduated from high school and moved down to Los Angeles with a family band that was trying to score a gig at Disneyland. The band never went anywhere, but because of them I did end up in LA, the music capital. I know now that God was directing my path to where there was more opportunity. Had I not hooked up with the Robell Brothers, I don't know how I would have ever gotten out of Oregon.

I had the good fortune of having a sister who lived in Beverly Hills. It was even more fortunate that she was a model and spent more time traveling the world for photo shoots than she did at her place. But since she was paying rent anyway, she asked me if I wanted to move in.

I was only 17 or 18 and was starved to meet other musicians my own age. Even though I had already graduated high school, I started hanging out at Beverly Hills High to see if I could meet some new people. I had a plan...I dressed up real slick, took a huge boom box, a pair of drumsticks, and a practice pad, and sat out on the lawn playing along with the music...just waiting for somebody to come up and talk to me.

That's how I met Lenny Kravitz. He was going to school there and came up to me one day. I met him and a few other musicians, including Kenny Gordy, the son of Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown Records—my favorite record label. Some of the people I met at Beverly Hills High have proved to be lifelong friends.

When I moved down to LA at 17 my heart started on fire for God. I started tuning into some church programming and really liked the way this old guy was talking. Soon I was sending away for his books and really got into them. Around that time there was a big event called "Jesus at the Roxy." It was a Christian concert with several great soul and R&B artists headlining it. One of the groups was Earth, Wind and Fire, which was my all-time favorite group. I went to the concert with the intention of meeting them to further my music career. And I wasn't disappointed. I met Philip Bailey, the lead singer, and Ralph Johnson the drummer.

I spent quite a bit of time talking with Ralph. When I told him about the TV evangelist I was into, he told me that it was a cult. I remember being so discouraged after I heard that. I was trying with all my heart to find the truth and I was lead astray by this guy. The whole experience got me offtrack spiritually. Instead I focused on the drums.

In 1983 I got a break. Philip Bailey needed a drummer to substitute for Ralph. For me, it was a dream come true. There I was, this young kid playing with all these experienced pros. It gave me so much confidence.

After that, Lenny set up an audition for me with a band called The New Edition. Before the final stage of the audition, I sat in my car and prayed, “Lord, if this is Your will, then give me Your favor to get this gig. Let me go in there and play with the confidence and the zeal that You know I have in me. If it’s not Your will, then close the door down.”

I got the job, and that put me on the big stage in a worldwide tour. It was an incredible experience. From there I joined Bobby Brown and toured with him in his heyday—the “My Prerogative” era. While this was happening to me, Lenny’s career was just starting. I joined him on his first two albums and tours, *Let Love Rule* and *Mama Said* (1989-1992).

But let’s go back for a moment. During the Bobby Brown days, I got married. He was even the best man at our wedding. I was 26, and my wife was only 19. God was still in my heart at this time, but He wasn’t in charge. If He had been, I never would have married this person; I would have at least consulted God first.

I was still seeking God though and along came Mrs. Affifi, the most incredible Christian woman. Her son, Osama, was a very close friend of mine from the Beverly Hills High days. Every time I went over to his house his mother would ask me, “When are you going to get right with the Lord? When are you going to go to church?”

Well, a couple of years into my marriage I was at Mrs. Affifi’s house and she was still asking those questions. When some of her friends dropped by, we started talking and I shared some things that were going on in my life. They all ended up praying for me. It was such a powerful moment; I had never experienced anything like this before. It was probably the biggest spiritual turning point in my life. I didn’t leave Mrs. Affifi’s house for a week, and I went home a changed man. I made a commitment from that point on to pursue the Lord with all my heart.

My wife wasn’t too excited about my commitment, and we started to grow apart. I got a job with a French superstar named Vanessa Paradis (now married to Johnny Depp) and was on tour with her in Europe for

about six months. When I came back from the tour, my wife told me that she was having an affair and wanted to be separated. It rocked my world.

Looking back, I can see we didn't have a very healthy relationship, but I didn't really know any better. My mother had never had a husband the whole time I was growing up so I didn't know what a good marriage was supposed to look like. I tried to reconcile. I was willing to forgive and start all over again, but she was unwilling and wanted a divorce. My heart was completely, absolutely, 100-percent broken.

During the time I'd been on tour I was sending money home. I believed strongly in tithing 10 percent of our earnings to the church, and together we'd made a commitment to doing that. But when I got home from France, I looked in the checking account and asked if she'd been doing the tithing. "No, I blew all that stuff off. Who cares?" I remember getting very upset.

After doing the math, I found out that the amount of money that was left in the bank was almost exactly what I owed for my tithe. I made a cold, hard, calculated decision to tithe the money anyway. That left me with practically nothing to operate on and no promise of any future gig in sight. I was really in dire straights.

We had a house together in Seattle and a small, modular home in Los Angeles. I told her to take the house in Seattle and I'd take the place in LA because that's where I rehearsed and was closer to the action. Not long after we broke up, there was a big earthquake in LA. My place was devastated and I lost everything. I literally had to move in with a little old lady from Pasadena. There I was, going from these hot gigs, being on MTV and thinking I had everything going on, to renting a room from a 90-year-old lady from my church. I was broke; I even had a yard sale and sold my lawn mower, my stage clothes, everything that was of any value.

I still owned the house after the earthquake and I didn't know how I was going to make the payments. I knew I was going to lose my house and my credit. But my landlord, Lorraine, said, "In the name of Jesus, you are not going to lose your house and you're not going to lose your credit. God is going to make a way."

And He did. It turns out the insurance adjuster was a Christian and the company paid my claim. I wasn't expecting anything at all, but God blessed me and I got everything back. When the money came in, I paid all the back payments and saved the place. And after the repairs were completed, the house was actually nicer than it had been before. I believe that God blessed me because I honored my commitment to tithe. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces. Then He will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine."

Just when I needed it most, God blessed me with an audition for Jodi Watley who was really big at the time. The problem was that I hadn't even been practicing; I wasn't in shape musically because I was so depressed. But somehow I found the strength to go to the audition. Again I prayed, "Lord, if it's Your will, please give me favor to get this job. If not, close the door down." I did get the job and that sparked my hope and confidence. When I got in my car afterward, I cried tears of joy. God was so faithful; He never let me down. I was right down to the wire again and He came through.

After the gig with Jody Watley, I found myself working for Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. We often played in Las Vegas, and one day, God made a divine appointment for me with an unlikely character named Frank Dimatto. Little did I know that Frank was about to change my life forever.

I was at a watch outlet store outside of town shopping for a sports watch. When I walked into the store, I saw this big, buff guy with long hair—the biker type. He had earrings in both ears, and he really looked like a mean pirate. For some reason I caught his eye as I walked in the door and we got to talking. He was really into working out and was a fired-up Christian. We made a connection right away. I'd never met anybody like this cat. He was the first guy who made faith real to me. My whole life I'd gone to church and I believed I had faith, but I'd never seen this kind of faith operate. I was at the end of my rope, and he was like my lifeline. He started powering me up, started filling me with the spirit and praying for me.

By this time I was divorced and I'd made a deal with God to not sleep with anybody until the day I got married. And this time, I was going to let Him select the wife. I'd done it once my way and it blew up in my face. I told Frank my story and what I'd been through and one night he asked me, "So, you want to get married, dude? Because when Frank Dimatto prays, people get married. Everybody I've ever prayed for who wanted to be married was married within a year." I didn't even know anybody to marry, so I thought, *Why not?*

Frank had a friend named Dennis Tinerino, who was Mr. Universe at one time. Dennis and his wife, Anita, were going to this little church in North Hills, California called Overcomers. About a week after I'd met the Tinerino's and told them my story, Anita was in church and the pastor was talking about celibacy. Anita was sitting behind a girl named Renee who happened to be the pastor's daughter. Renee was 28 and single and had been waiting on the Lord for a husband for almost eight years.

After the service Anita called me up and said, "Zoro, I found your wife." Anita played cupid and set us up on a date. Now, I'd been on blind dates before that had been pretty awkward, but when Renee answered the door there was a connection between us right away. Anita, Renee, and I went to church together that night and then a few days later Renee and I went on another date—this time alone.

The next weekend I went to her church and during the service I looked over at Renee and I just felt the Lord saying, "This is who I have for you." It was crazy—I'd only known her for a week! I met her mom and dad that day and two weeks later I asked Renee to marry me. I found out later that Renee had told her friend about me after we'd first met. She said I was the man she was going to marry. So her parents met me only once, and there I was asking for her hand in marriage. But they felt totally at peace about me; they felt like I was the man God brought for her. Within four months to the day of us meeting, we were married. Remember Frank Demotte telling me that when he prayed for anyone to be married, they were married within a year? Well, you can add me to that list! After 11 years of marriage, Renee and I recently renewed our vows. We have two beautiful children, Jarod (7) and Jordan (4).

Since the time I married Renee, everything I have laid my hands to has prospered—my walk with God, my profile, my career, my finances, and my ministry. God honored two of the right choices I made—not that I didn't make a lot of wrong ones along the way, or that I was perfect. But I did make two commitments. One was to stay celibate until my wedding night. Both of us honored that. The other commitment was that I wrote that tithe check and continued to tithe.

I'm still reaping the rewards of those two decisions. And it's only getting better and better. In the fall of 2003 I had a dream about Lenny Kravitz. It was a very vivid dream where we were back together again on stage, just like the old days. We were young and having a great time. It was especially weird because Lenny and I had been busy doing our own thing, and I hadn't heard from him at all in over four years.

The next day he called. Yeah—out of the blue I had a dream about him and the next day he called. I told him about the dream and he got goose bumps, "That's crazy, Z. Last night was the first time I ever opened your instructional drum videos in the four years since you gave them to me. I was watching your videos while you were having the dream about me." Obviously, God connected us again.

In December I told my wife that I felt like something was around the corner. I didn't know what it was, but I felt like God was going to bring me something great. A couple of weeks later Lenny called and asked me to join his band again.

The year 2004 was an incredible year. We played on a gazillion television shows; we played a concert for over 100,000 people in Hyde Park in London; and Lenny and I were on the covers of loads of magazines. We even played at the opening night of Monday Night Football! It was the best year of my life.

Many people talk about the Lord and know a lot about the Bible, but there aren't too many people that fully believe Him and trust in Him. But I'm learning to. Too many of us trust Him with only certain things...but not the big ones. Instead we like to carry the weight on our own shoulders. Well, I'm learning to go to sleep at night without a single worry or concern. I just give it all back to Him and leave it at the throne. I've seen the power of God move in my life...and it is moving rapidly!

HOW DO YOU KNOW HE'S REAL

God brought me through an underprivileged childhood and helped me accomplish some pretty amazing things through His faithfulness. I always felt rejected because I didn't have a father. But after 43 years, God has healed my broken heart. I thought I needed to earn God's love, but I know there's nothing I need to do for Him to love me unconditionally. That's what grace is all about.

I may have grown up without an earthly father, but I'll always have a heavenly Father to show me the way.

GOD'S ROAD MAP

The Holy Bible is a guide to help you live a happy and satisfying life. To learn more about the concepts presented in the chapter you've just read, take a look at these passages:

GIVING

Everything we have comes from God. We may earn it, but ultimately He's the one who gave us our jobs in the first place. We are merely stewards of His property, and to give some of it back to further His Kingdom and help those less fortunate should not be a hardship; it should be an honor. God particularly blesses those who tithe at least 10 percent of their earnings.

Malachi 3:10

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

First Chronicles 29:14

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand.

Second Corinthians 9:7

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

EMOTIONAL HEALING

It's a complicated world full of pain and brokenness. Zoro felt the sting of poverty and the bitterness of growing up without a father. But through his faith in Christ, he was able to overcome his trials and be fully healed.

HOW DO YOU KNOW HE'S REAL

Psalm 147:3

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Isaiah 40:31

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Second Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

