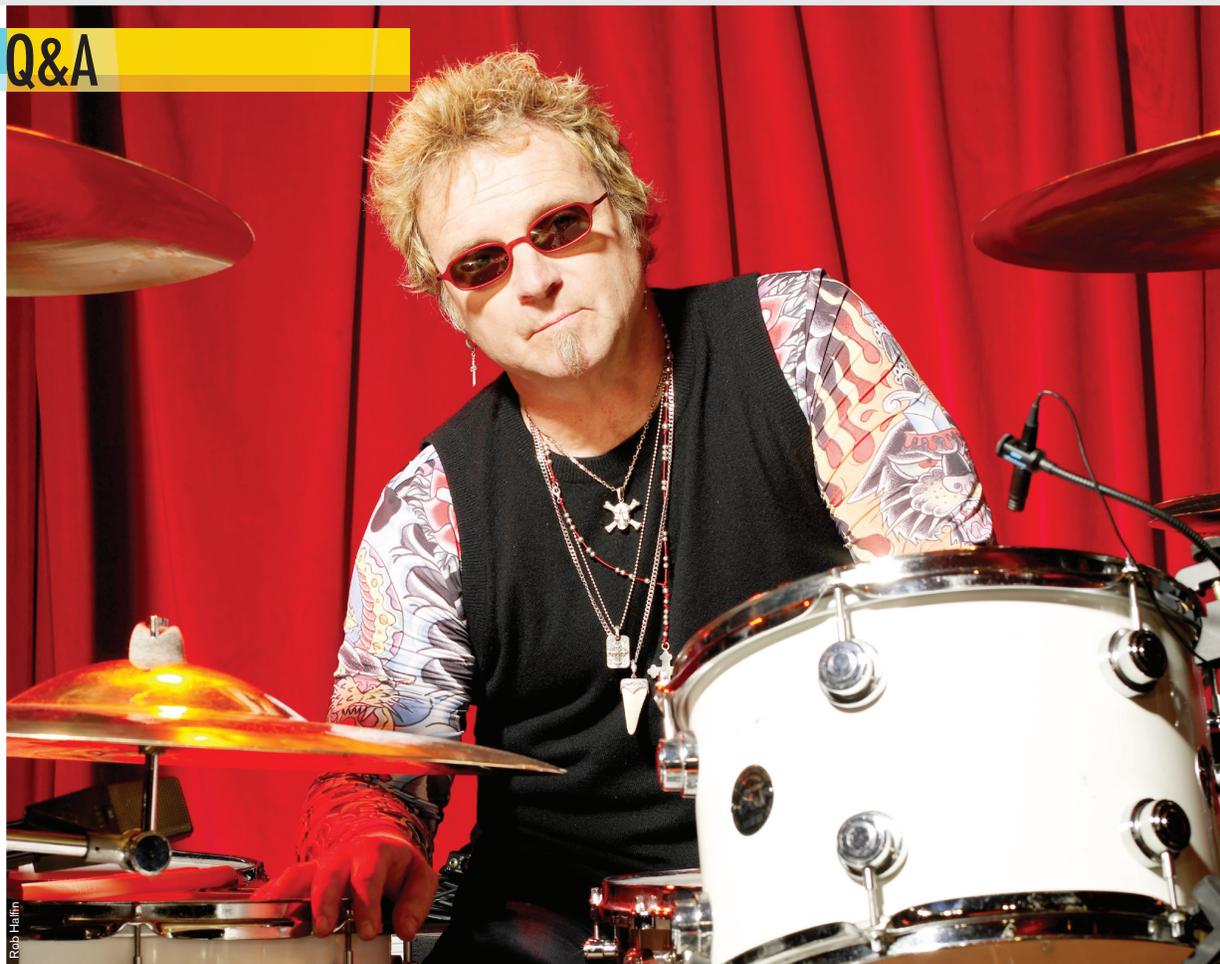


## Q&amp;A



## JOEY KRAMER

**Aerosmith's hard-hitting drummer sounds off about recovery and rock**

AS RECENTLY AS A FEW MONTHS AGO, it appeared the 40-year story of Aerosmith could be coming to an end. Lead singer Steven Tyler was out of touch with the band and focused on solo projects, and guitarist Joe Perry announced that he and his fellow members were looking for a replacement. Uncertainty and speculation reigned for months before the group surprised the world by announcing it would be touring this summer with Tyler back in the fold. "We finally had a meeting and ironed things out, and everything in Aerosmith-land is copacetic at the moment," says Joey Kramer, the Boston-based group's drummer since its formation in 1970. "For a while I wasn't really sure it was going to go on, but I never lost hope."

Kramer declines to say more about the circumstances of either the near-breakup or the reconciliation. "It's basically a private matter," he says. "A family matter, so to speak." Certainly, Aerosmith has been together for long enough to feel like a family—if at times a dysfunctional one. During its initial 1970s heyday, the members became almost as famous for drug-fueled offstage debauchery as for hits like "Walk This Way," "Sweet Emotion" and "Dream On." Kramer was no stranger to such behavior, struggling for many years with drug abuse, anxiety and depression—a journey he recounts in his recent memoir, *Hit Hard*. We spoke with him at home in Boston.

### What drew you to the drums?

The major thing was seeing the Beatles on Ed Sullivan. It wasn't necessarily that I zeroed in on Ringo or the position of the drums. What I honed in on even more than the music was the camaraderie, being part of a little gang that was going to take over the world together. It was just a question of finding guys that had the same mindset that I did.

### When did you first play?

I was about 14. I had an accident with this little mini-bike that I had and then sold it. I always had an interest in the drums, so I bought my first set, put them in the house and there I was.



**'There's nothing like being up on stage playing, especially in this band!'**

**Did you drive your parents nuts?**

Pretty much, yeah. *(laughs)*

**How has your style evolved?**

I wouldn't say it's evolved, I'd say it's matured. I come from a really heavy, heavy school of rhythm and blues. That's what I bring to the band. My influences were the likes of Clyde Stubblefield, who played with James Brown, Mitch Mitchell and Dino Danelli from the Rascals. I used to play with a band called the Unique Four, which eventually went on to become Tavares. I played in the backup band. I used to go with these guys to see artists like the Temptations and the O'Jays. They would sit me down and say, "Watch the drummer, because he's accentuating the dance steps." I used to go to rehearsals with just the singers. That's where I learned a lot of my stuff. That's where my roots are, really. Tower of Power, Earth, Wind & Fire—I love that stuff.

**How do you keep your chops up when you're off the road?**

I play here at home and practice. That's basically it. I don't worry about it too much.

**What's your practice routine?**

I sit behind my drums, pick up my sticks and whack the piss out of them. *(laughs)* No, I play with CDs and noodle around by myself for a while. I'll put on a Michael Jackson album, or some Tower of Power or Sly & the Family Stone and just play along. It's fun. I do that for an hour or an hour and a half at a time.

**What's your setup like now?**

It's a four-piece kit. I'm keeping things really simple. Less is more. It makes your voice come out more. I used to use a much bigger kit, but the days of that are over. It's kind of passé.

**What's your relationship with Steven?**

We work a lot together, because he used to be a drummer. He was a big help to me when we first started the band because he was a little further along than I was. We collaborate on a lot of stuff, we always have.

**During recording, are you under pressure because the drum tracks go down first?**

Yeah. The other guys know that what they're doing is not necessarily for keeps. If they get a good track and decide it's a keeper, that's all well and good, but I know I'm going for it. Most of the time the whole band is playing,

but everything will be discarded except for maybe a bass track—but what we're really looking for is the drum track, the bed for everything else to lie in.

**How do you learn the songs?**

Unless you're in on the song to begin with, [Tyler and Perry] usually use a drum machine or a loop and I'll put my stamp on it from there. Whatever their inspiration is, I try to stick to that, either to embellish upon it or make it better.

**What was writing the book like?**

It was very cathartic, actually. Once your memory gets rolling, it's pretty amazing what's inside there. One thought leads to another and another, and before you know it you're remembering things that you haven't thought of in years. Some of it was hard,

about the alcoholism, the drug addiction, the anxiety and the depression in addition to it being a rock 'n' roll memoir.

**You turned 60 in June. How is it?**

It doesn't feel any different to me than when I was 30. I feel better, actually.

**What are your hopes for the future?**

I see us touring and making records. I don't see any reason why not. If anything we've gone through so far hasn't stopped us, I don't see anything that's going to do it at this point. Playing with the band challenges me all the time. There's nothing like being up on stage playing, especially in this band. But I'd like to get out and play with other people, because that challenges you, too. It's always great to play with other musicians of the same caliber because it's nice to be



On stage in London with Steven Tyler and Joe Perry, 2007

**'I'm keeping things really simple. Less is more.'**

some was fun, but overall it was a great experience. Seeing it in print and having other people read it was fantastic.

**Was it scary to write about that stuff?**

Yeah, because you're putting yourself right out there—or at least I am. The one thing I'm proudest about is that I was really honest in the book. I tell it like it is.

**Why did you decide to write it?**

Just by journaling. I started reading what I was writing and realizing that I could add a little bit more of a dimension to it. I could write

around people that you appreciate and have admired over the years. The ability to play with them is a joy.

**What do you get out of playing now?**

It's the same thing as when I was 19 and first joined the band, except that I have the ability to appreciate it a bit more now. Appreciate my situation and my gig, and also appreciate the fact that I'm helping to bring as much joy to people as I am. That's what really floats my boat about it now.

—Chris Neal