Do drummers read music? What are the pros and cons of reading music?

This is not as simple a question as many might think.
The skill of reading music is not a yes or no, can or can't situation. There are different degrees of skill and different levels of usefulness depending on the musical situation you're in.

I like to think of reading music in terms of different levels of skill.

Level 0: At this level the drummer can't read music at all, these drummers usually learn music through listening, imitation and large amounts of repetition. Some musicians and bands get together and play songs over and over until the music is memorised. This is a perfectly legitimate way to learn music and many feel it adds more enjoyment and allows for more interaction with the audience and other band members as the players are not being distracted by having to read music.

Level 1: The next level up is where the drummer can read some basic music, but usually only well enough to decipher material they want to practice. They use their reading ability to decipher exercises, understand website or magazine articles and to gain a basic idea of what rhythms to play during a song. They can use their reading skills to help them learn a song, but usually don't have enough skill to use it in a live situation, and prefer to memorise all the music they want or need to play.

Level 2: The next level of music reading involves what I sometimes refer to as *a general reading ability.* The drummer can perform from written music but they are not reading all the information on the page. They rely heavily on previous playing experience and improvisation to cover their lack of knowledge, practice or other gaps in their performances. **This type of playing is very common, and is a great skill to have. A mixture of reading and improvisation is a very powerful thing.** If you see a drummer reading music you could probably make a safe bet that they are doing this type of music reading, or that they are tapping into this skill to some degree while they play. This type of music reading is very common with drummers playing in high school bands. Even many professionals read at this level, especially jazz / big band players who are given charts with basic instructions and are told "Don't worry about the dots, just make it feel good".
Songs and music performed from written music are usually learnt through practice and sight reading, (The ability to perform written music with no practice) is usually limited and covered with improvisation and previous performance experience.

Level 3: Level three is the ability to read music in fine detail and read it well.
This involves the ability to decipher complex written figures and structures, write songs out in full detail, using note values and understanding detailed music theory. You could almost consider this type of reading as being "classically trained" as this skill is more typically found in drummers that have worked and played in concert bands, brass bands, orchestras and music theatre ensembles. And it is in these areas where you will typically find this skill being used. Large ensembles where long or complex parts are written out so the players can be confident in their parts so they know they aren't going to step on anyone else's toes, overshoot their endings and or throw other players off.
This type of drummer is reasonably rare, if you meet one you can be pretty confident they have spent time in some sort of music course, music school or a university that has insisted they spend time in the concert band or orchestra. These drummers can perform comfortably from written music if given some time to practice and can sight read (perform from written music with no practice) although they may need to improvise parts if the music is more demanding.

Level 4: Virtuosic music reading. These are the drummers and percussionists who have a very highly trained and extremely strong ability to read music. If you write it down, they can usually read it. This is the ability to sight read complex music with almost no preparation. This is rare skill in the general music community but can be found in high end professional orchestras and world class touring and recording acts. These musicians have often worked very hard on their music reading skills and maintain it with either regular performance of demanding pieces or regular practice.

I don't want to play in an orchestra, why should I read music?
Many high-end professional drummers that play pop, rock and heavy metal got their early breaks because they were able to be versatile, could play with a variety of other musicians, work things out quickly and understood the music they had to play in fine detail.
Many of them played music in high school and or attended college and learnt the skill of music reading there. Many drummers use music theory and music reading as an analysis and learning tool that is only seen in their practice studio. And when they play live, they commit the music to memory.

In other cases people can assume that just because there isn't a big clunky orchestral music stand blocking their view of the drummer that they aren't reading music live on stage. Often the written music is subtle, hidden from direct view or placed in a more discrete place. And with today's technology the use of tablets and laptops allow for more subtle ways to bring written music to the live stage.

Success in the music industry is usually gained through networking and playing with different people from all different sorts of backgrounds. These people will refer you to other musicians who are looking for someone with your skill set. The question is whether you want the ability to read music to be one of the reasons that people call you. Who knows who you'll meet at the next gig you're asked to read music at.