

2008 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic
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Clinic: Jazz Drumming 101: Swingin' Easy—Fundamental Concepts for the Young Jazz Drummer

Clinic purpose: This clinic will provide interested musicians and educators with the tools and information necessary to assist young drummers with the intricacies associated with jazz ensemble performance. In addition, this clinic will answer many of the questions that arise from both drummers and educators when faced with the many challenges of the drumset and its role in a jazz ensemble, including, but not limited to, technique, equipment, style analysis, and educational/pedagogical resources.

A. Technique

Preliminary Questions:

1. Who is the leader of the band?
 2. What is the role of the drummer?
 3. What is “comping”?
- I. Hands
 - i. Sticking combinations for comping.
 - ii. Rudiments: the scales of the non-pitched percussion family.
 - iii. Simple note values for swinging—triplets and their variants.
 - II. Feet
 - i. Feathering explained.
 - ii. Using the hi-hat.
 - III. Putting it together—Coordinated Independence.
 - i. Drum soloing—how to construct effective drum solos.
 - ii. The lost art of brush playing.

B. Equipment

- I. The basic drum and cymbal set-up for large and small ensembles and where it fits into both the rhythm section and the ensemble.
- II. Suggestions for the toolbox (stick bag) for the young jazz drummer.
- III. Drum tuning.

C. Pedagogical resources

See attached handout for recommended method books, periodicals, videos, and instructional materials.

D. Listening/Style analysis

See attached handouts for rhythm section teams, recordings, and other listening/style study materials.

E. Question and Answer Session

A Brief Guide to Tuning the Drumset

Head selection: On the toms, I prefer a coated, one-ply head on tops of drums and an uncoated one-ply head on the bottoms. Examples would include the Coated Ambassador by Remo. On the bass drum, the same would apply—coated, single ply on the batter and resonant sides. Here, however, both can be coated or the front (resonant) head can be clear or black. On the snare drum, a coated single-ply head on top and a thinner weighted head on the bottom. Examples would include Clear or Opaque Diplomats by Remo or Snare Side heads (manufactured by several companies).

No need for tuning torque wrenches or other “specialty” devices for tuning. A standard drum key will do the job just fine. If you have Sonor drums, and no Sonor drum key, a standard size screwdriver will also work.

1. Make sure that the edges of the drums are clean of lint and dirt before seating and replacing drumheads.
2. Inspect lugs and lug casings for wear and insure that they are straight. Replace any found to be out of alignment and lubricate as necessary.
3. Seat head onto drum and loosely attach lugs all around.
4. Working radial, as with a car tire, and thinking of a clock, tighten at 1 o'clock, then 7 o'clock; 2 o'clock, then 8 o'clock; and so on until the drum head begins to tension and lose its slackness.
5. Tap around edges of drumhead at lug points to insure that the drum is in tune with itself. Adjust accordingly.
6. **IF THE DRUM IS NOT TO BE PLAYED RIGHT AWAY**, tension the drumhead slightly higher than you would normally to insure proper stretching and “tuneability” of the head. After 30 minutes to an hour, detune the head down to an **APPROPRIATE TENSIONING FOR THE SIZE OF THE DRUM**.
7. Bottom heads of toms should be tuned and attached **FIRST**, before batter side heads.
8. Bottom heads of toms may be tuned slightly higher for a tighter, more controlled sound or at the same pitch as the batter head for a fuller, more resonant sound.
9. Check that all drum resonate with each other and adjust accordingly.
10. Drums de-tune and loose their tension as well as their pitch over time. Keep drums in tune and allow drummers to adjust tuning to insure that drums resonate for different environments.
11. **REPLACE DRUM HEADS AS NECESSARY.**
12. Re-read number 11 above.

Recommended Method Books

- Advanced Funk Studies—Rick Latham
- Stick Control—George Stone
- The Art of Bebop Drumming—John Riley
- Beyond Bebop Drumming—John Riley
- Art Blakey's Jazz Messages—John Ramsey
- Jungle/Drum 'n' Bass for the acoustic drum set—Johnny Rabb
- Syncopation, Volumes 1 & 2—Ted Reed
- New Orleans Jazz and Second Line Drumming—Herlin Riley and John Vidacovich
- Afro-Cuban Rhythms for the Drumset—Frank Malabe and Bob Weiner
- Afro-Cuban Grooves for Bass and Drums—Lincoln Goines and Robby Ameen
- Creative Coordination for the Performing Drummer—Keith Copeland
- Drum Essentials, Volumes 1, 2, and 3—Peter Erskine
- Modern Reading Text (odd meters and common time—two volumes)—Louis Bellson
- Studio and Big Band Drumming—Steve Houghton
- Six Unaccompanied Solos for Snare Drum—Michael Colgrass
- Modern Rudimental Swing Solos—Charlie Wilcoxon
- Sticking Pattern—Gary Chafee
- Linear Time Playing—Gary Chafee
- The Sound of Brushes—Ed Thigpen
- Drum Wisdom—Bob Moses
- Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer, Volume 1—Jim Chapin
- Essential Techniques for Drum Set: Book 1—Ed Soph
- The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drumset—Ed Uribe
- The Essence of Brazilian Percussion and Drumset—Ed Uribe

Topical Publications

Modern Drummer—featured articles on jazz and popular music forms as well as transcriptions of solos and performance/practice methods of jazz drummers. Occasional conversations with other musicians to get insight into what they like in a drummer. Usually have warm-up, practice, and exercises for drummers to learn and execute new ideas.

A partial (and incomplete) list of essential jazz recordings for the big band drummer

1. The Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra *Live at The Village Vanguard*

Mel Lewis—drums
Richard Davis—bass
Roland Hanna—piano
Sam Herman—guitar and shaker

Selected recordings: “Little Pixie”, “Don’t Git Sassy”, “Second Race”

This recording clearly demonstrates the impact a sensitive, creative, and hard swinging drummer can make on a large ensemble. A musician like Mel Lewis does not conform to merely a timekeeping function, but instead interacts and engages with each musician—be he soloing or playing within the ensemble. From his brushwork, to the way he kicks the ensemble, big band drumming does not get much better than this. Mr. Lewis, in tandem with Mr. Davis, pick and choose places to play “traditional” big band roles and places to play “traditional” small group roles making this rhythm team an important one to study. And the dynamics—all bases are covered. Essential listening.

2. Count Basie and his Orchestra *April in Paris*

Sonny Payne—drums
Charlie Fawkes—bass
William “Count” Basie—piano
Freddie Green—guitar

Selected recordings: “Shiny Stockings”, “April in Paris”, “Corner Pocket”,
“Midgets”

This recording from the mid-1950s illustrates how a rhythm section works together as a section. Each piece of the puzzle completes the groove here, with Freddie Green the most significant link. Payne, however, should not be ignored. His brushwork is electrifying, his swing deep and clear, and his set-ups are rock solid. He also displays great dynamic control. This recording, along with *The Complete Atomic Basie*, which contains “Whirlybird” and “Li’l Darlin’”, are required listening.

3. Duke Ellington *Ellington at Newport 1956 (Complete)*

Sam Woodyard—drums
Jimmy Woode—bass
Edward “Duke” Ellington—piano

Selected recordings: “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue”, “Jeep’s Blues”, “Skin Deep”

Perhaps the most complete exposition of big band swing on record to date. It is simply flawless at all tempos presented. Woodyard and Woode—magic. The way that they stay on top of the beat while never rushing is as much a revelation as the way they lay back without dragging. Woodyard’s use of cross-sticking and the appropriate utilization of the bass drum in all the right places make this recording a stand-out, not to mention his flawless tempo shifting, tasteful fills and set-ups, complete command of the drums, and the absolutely jaw-dropping solo and ensemble work on “Skin Deep”, a work written by and previously featuring drummer Louis Bellson. Absolutely essential listening.

4. Bob Mintzer Big Band *Incredible Journey*

Peter Erskine—drums
Lincoln Goines—electric bass
Don Grolnick—piano
Frankie Malabe—percussion

Selected recordings: “Latin Dance”, “The Ring”, “Incredible Journey”,
“Computer”

This recording, from the mid 1980s, features great writing and arrangements, and is an important recording for hearing how big band drummers play more contemporary Latin and funk rhythms in a large ensemble setting and adapt to the utilization of electric bass in the rhythm section, a not uncommon occurrence in many ensembles these days. Erskine is magnificent, setting up the band and providing greater energy and imagination behind all the soloists. This recording also illustrates how a drummer in a big band can work with a percussionist, especially on the Latin jazz numbers. Required listening.

Additional Big Band Recording for the Modern Jazz Drummer

Sam Woodyard, drums:

Duke Ellington Orchestra—Cote d'Azur Concerts (Complete)
Duke Ellington Orchestra—Such Sweet Thunder
Duke Ellington Orchestra—The Great Paris Concert

Mel Lewis, drums:

Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra—20 Years at The Village Vanguard
Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra—Soft Lights and Hot Music
Art Pepper—Art Pepper+11

Sonny Payne, drums:

Count Basie Orchestra—Live at Birdland
Count Basie Orchestra—Chairman of the Board
Count Basie Orchestra—Breakfast Dance and Barbecue

Peter Erskine, drums

Kenny Wheeler—Music for Large and Small Ensembles
Bob Mintzer Big Band—Spectrum

Dennis Mackrel, drums:

Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra—Evanescence
Village Vanguard Orchestra—To You

Herlin Riley, drums:

Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra—Blood on the Fields
Jazz at Lincoln Center—They Came to Swing

Charlie Persip, drums:

Dizzy Gillespie Big Band—Live at Newport
Dizzy Gillespie Big Band—The Complete Verve Sessions

Jeff Hamilton, drums:

Clayton Hamilton Big Band—Live at MCG
Bill Holman—Bill Holman Big Band

Other drummers to seek out: Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Mickey Roker, Grady Tate, Sonny Greer, John Riley, Dave Tough...the list goes on and on...