

TUTORIAL #1: SO YOU WANT TO BE A MUSICAL DRUMMER?

As one who was involved in music and musical performance from a very early age I am nonetheless thankful that I experienced various aspects of learning at a high level of understanding and performance before being led to a life devoted to the art of jazz drumming.

From these experiences, I have found no other music or musicians anywhere who swing harder than the pipe band drummers and the sophisticated musical lines they play in unison around the music is second to none in musical artistry.

How you may ask can so many drummers who are pure hobbyists play at such a high musical level? The key lies not in the chops they have developed, but in understanding the music and being able to sing every composition they perform. The pipe band drummer must know every nuance within the musical score for without this their interpretation will lack feeling, meaning and musical expression.

Whatever field of music you wish to enter the key is the same - know the music. Playing latin rhythms does not make you a latin drummer. You must know the music. Playing classical snare drum studies does not make you a classical musician. You must know the music. Being able to play classic independence studies does not make you a jazz drummer. You must know the music. I am continually asked why my transition from pipe band drumming to jazz drumming posed only minor difficulties and the answer is simple - I knew the music. As I moved into the world of jazz and jazz drumming I encountered many drummers who were armed with massive chops, but the quality of their musical performance left much to be desired. Why? Because they did not know the music and the technique they had developed did not relate to jazz performance, but to rudimental execution. It must be clearly understood that music is a language and only thru exposure to the environment in which a particular language is being spoken will the ear be naturally activated and the ability to sing the song, dance the dance, and speak the language be achieved. There is no substitute for early exposure.

To all musicians planning to commence private studies as preparation for a professional career, I say this:

#1 Be sure your teacher is capable of preparing you for the field of music you wish to enter.

#2 Start the study of jazz harmony as early as possible and develop the ability to play at least functional piano. Do not postpone this area of development. Start now, especially the drummers.

#3 Be sure you are hearing the music from the bottom up. The key to everything lies in the bass.

#4 Listen. Listen to the past and present masters and try to sing, by ear, every tune being performed. Learn tunes thru the ear, not thru fake books.

#5 Play. Play at every opportunity and with as many diversified players as possible.

#6 Study rhythm. This is the key to all music, but is the weakest link of most melodic players. Very few can put melodies to rhythmic phrases. They are locked in to harmonic movement and have trouble in playing with and relating to a creative improvising drummer. You must improvise off the composition being performed, not from a set of changes. *What Is This Thing Called Love* is not the same as *Hot House*. You must be able to move harmonically, melodically and rhythmically around the composition with ease and flexibility. Listen to Bird and Sonny Rollins. This should clarify what we mean.

Everything a jazz drummer plays is, in my opinion, an extension of the time generated by the right hand on the cymbal. From this fundamental concept extended musical lines are developed, and it is from the playing of musical lines not rudiments that the drummer gives movement, shape and improvised meaning to the composition.

The major artists with whom my students past and present have performed are too numerous to include here, but the reason for their success lies in being exposed to good listening habits and in having access to material relating to musical performance in all idioms.

The personal ingredients needed to study with me are patience, determination and humility. All of us must never forget that we are not the doer, but merely the instrument.