

HITTY HITTY BANG BANG: PERCUSSION BITTER AND SWEET

by Ian Muldoon*

Well into adulthood I had a recurring dream that I was in a jazz club, an underground one, perhaps The Basement in Sydney, or The Village Vanguard in New York, and I was with some beautiful people. I am not beautiful. These people were also hip. I am not hip. Of any measurable musical skill or talent, I am devoid as far as can be determined. This is not false modesty, just an acceptance of reality. In this jazz club there is a band playing - possibly one lead by Chico Freeman. It's a quartet and the drummer is Jack DeJohnette. Halfway through the first set, DeJohnette collapses during a drum solo. Mayhem ensues. Ambulance arrives and removes the drummer.



Jack DeJohnette: he collapses during a drum solo. Mayhem ensues....

When things settle Mr Freeman takes the microphone and announces that in the light of the circumstances, they have to cancel the remainder of the evening's music. He goes on "...unless there was someone present of Jack's genius on drums, we have no choice but to call it a night." I stand and say: "I know the great man's music. Give me a minute to show you..." Silence. I remain standing. I maintain my

**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales.*

sad/serious/concerned expression. Silence. Mr Freeman shrugs and nods to the drum kit. I make my way to the stage, sit down, and because I'm shorter in the body, longer in the leg, I adjust the stool, move a crash cymbal a tad closer, adjust the ride, turn the bass drum to align with my right foot, then launch into the drum solo of the number *Undercurrent* at the exact point that Mr DeJohnette collapsed. As I do, Cecil McBee picks up his bass, John Hicks laughs delightedly at me from the piano, and Mr Freeman clips on his tenor, wriggles his fingers down the keys, and watches with mouth a little open, as I perform one of the greatest drum solos ever heard anywhere. It was listened to in total silence by the audience and bar staff. No traffic passed by outside.



Chico Freeman in 1989: he clips on his tenor, wriggles his fingers down the keys, and watches with mouth a little open...

A deliriously attractive young woman entering the room stood frozen throughout the rest of the solo. No drinks were ordered, poured or drunk. No sound was heard from the kitchen.

They are still talking about it.

It may be that the drum, of all musical instruments, is the favourite instrument for most boys, big and little, whether jazz bands or marching bands or rock bands. Like Chick Webb, the smallest guy in the world can be the biggest guy in the room when sitting behind a very large set of drums. All band members in Chick's band dressed in white except Chick the drummer, who is dressed in black. He dressed in black because he is bad - in the old sense and the new - bad because he makes a lot of noise which parents hate, and good because he's very very good at drumming. Chick Webb may be every boy's role model for a drummer. Anywhere but behind his drum kit in front of his band, he may be overlooked, just like any kid. He was small. He was not especially handsome. Any boy could relate to that.



*Chick Webb: he was small owing to suffering tuberculosis of the spine...
PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

But Chick Webb was a drummer because he believed his life depended on it. He was small owing to suffering tuberculosis of the spine and a doctor had prescribed the drums as an aid to flexibility. Little sickly Chick became a truly big man and his band became the best swing band of the 1930s - at least according to the audiences at the Savoy Ballroom where the Chick Webb Orchestra had set up residency in 1931. It was at the Savoy where Battle of the Bands was run and Chick competed with Benny Goodman, Count Basie and any other big band contender willing to take their chances. Chick was the first bandleader to be called The King of Swing, beating all comers until Duke Ellington took the crown in 1937. Chick Webb could not read music. When very young he played "on pots and pans, garbage cans, marble stoops, and iron porch railings in his native Baltimore, long before he earned enough money by selling newspapers (reportedly \$103) to buy a second-hand set of drums."*

Duke Ellington, his loudest supporter, got Webb his first gig at Manhattan's Black Bottom Club in 1926. (Korall, *ibid*, p 12). Webb was a shy hunchback, but according to drummer Allen Paley, he "was a god. What he did was totally unbelievable. His huge fourteen-inch by twenty-eight-inch bass drum obscured him. The guy was so small and in some ways, fragile looking. He couldn't have been more than four feet tall. I wondered: how is he going to reach his cymbals, tom-toms, and the bass drum? But it was no problem for him. He had strong wrists, long arms, huge hands, long fingers and legs. Only his torso was short and relatively undeveloped. Sitting up high, he'd lean over the set and hit or softly touch the various drums, cymbals, and other accessories without moving. Sometimes he'd stand up and play.....What he did was the beginning of the bebop thing. Instead of putting together a bunch of beats on the tom-toms, as many of the drummers were doing in those years, he

**Drummin' Men -The Heartbeat of Jazz -The Swing Years* by Burt Korall, Schirmer Books, NY, 1990, p 11.

functioned in a more musical way, using drums to create rhythm and *melody*. Chick was the forerunner of what we began hearing on a broad scale five and ten years later... Big Sid Catlett was nothing next to the little man... Krupa was a salesman.”*. But being a great black musician with a fine band did not add up to a whole lot (financially) until he employed Ella Fitzgerald and achieved commercial success backing her popular songs.



Ella Fitzgerald singing with the Chick Webb Orchestra at the Savoy in 1938...
PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Webb died at the age of 32. Pallbearers included Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Jimmie Lunceford and Gene Krupa. It has been written by Theodore W Adorno in the context of Wagner that “works of art are not complete in themselves. They create a magnetic field of all possible intentions and forces, of inner tendencies and countervailing ones, of successful and necessarily unsuccessful elements”.** So it was with William Henry “Chick” Webb who will be cherished and remembered more for his brilliant big band work, his legendary drumming and the astonishing legacy he left, rising way above poverty, a profound disability, and life as an African American in a deeply racist society, than he will be for his backing of singers however talented.

**Drummin’ Men -The Heartbeat of Jazz -The Swing Years* by Burt Korall, Schirmer Books, NY, 1990, p 15-16.

***Grand Street* 1993, No 44, p 17.

Percussion then was central to the so-called era of Swing big bands and, as well as Chick Webb, there were great drummers like Sonny Greer, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich (Artie Shaw Big Band), Louie Bellson, Dave Tough, (both Tommy Dorsey), Jo Jones (Basie), Cliff Leeman (Artie Shaw). Needless to say, these drummers were all showcased in the big bands, either at the back on a raised platform or front and centre. Sonny Greer set the standard for size as he built a kit worth about \$60,000 in today's money which included chimes, a gong, timpani and vibes.



Sonny Greer in 1933: he built a kit worth about \$60,000 in today's money which included chimes, a gong, timpani and vibes.... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

But the drummer who first brought the instrument to real musical attention was Baby Dodds. He adjusted his playing to the style of each band he was playing with, and played something different for every chorus of every tune. He worked with Louis Armstrong on the river boats during which they played popular music, classical music and jazz. "It was my job to study each musician and give a different background for each instrument. When a man is playing it's up to the drummer to give him something to make him feel the music and make him work. That's the drummer's job".* He was a member of the bands which produced an immortal set of records known as Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives and Sevens, music which transformed the musical world like no other music.

* Larry Gara, *"The Baby Dodds Story"*, 1992



Baby Dodds: he adjusted his playing to the style of each band he was playing with...
PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST



George Wetling, a prominent devotee of Baby Dodds...

One of the prominent devotees of Baby Dodds was George Wettling, drummer, *inter alia*, for the Bunny Berigan big band. George Wettling's right leg and colourful sock were featured on the 1954 recorded album *Jammin' at Condon's* and the relaxed mood but sterling performances were captivating, especially the mid-tempo *How Come You Do Me Like You Do?* which has drummer Cliff Leeman providing superb time, doing the rim shots and stop breaks at the end of each solo. Wettling played drums on only one track on the album: a *Medley of Jam Session Blues* (Eddie Condon) and *Ole Miss* (W C Handy). Wettling was also the drummer on Condon's albums *Bixieland*, *Condon's Treasury of Jazz*, *The Roaring Twenties*, and *Chicago, My Home Town* around that period of recording activity with CBS.

Wettling came to prominence when he took Dave Tough's chair in the Wolverines, which featured Bix Beiderbecke (cornet) and later Jimmy McPartland (trumpet). Like Baby Dodds he used the whole drum set and cymbals for colour and rhythm. From 1943-1952 he was on the staff of ABC radio where his fine reading of music, flexibility and brilliance as a tympanist stood him in good stead, although the majority of his time was spent in small traditional jazz bands*.



Frank Carlson: he took a 34-bar drum solo on Woody Herman's "The Golden Wedding"...

My experience of recorded jazz and the emergence of an awareness of the power of drumming, began with the drummer Frank Carlson, and his 34-bar drum solo on *The Golden Wedding* by Woody Herman. My delight at attending Mr and Mrs Lee's Brookvale, NSW home in the 1940s with my grandmother was engendered by their backyard swing attached to a large branch of a tall tree, and their wind-up record player and the 10" 78 rpm Decca 9th November 1940 recording of *Golden Wedding (La Cinquantaine)* which was originally a chamber music composition written by Frenchman Jean Gabriel-Marie in 1884. It was now arranged by James "Jiggs" Noble for Woody Herman.

**Drummin' Men -The Heartbeat of Jazz -The Swing Years by Burt Korall, Schirmer Books, NY, 1990, p 312.*

This was in all probability in response to the huge, ground-breaking success of Benny Goodman's *Sing, Sing, Sing* (Prima) which featured the very first extended drum solo by Gene Krupa. *The Golden Wedding*, like *Sing, Sing, Sing*, begins with a drum solo. It is a simple 3' 11" piece featuring Carlson's drums and Herman's clarinet with a band climax. *Sing, Sing, Sing* builds and builds over 12 minutes with notable solos by Vido Musso, tenor sax; Jess Stacy, piano; Benny Goodman, clarinet; Krupa; and Harry James, trumpet. It was a resounding success at Goodman's Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert in 1938. Because of contractual problems the whole concert was not released until 1950 in a double album, which became Columbia's first million album seller.



Gene Krupa: he took the very first extended drum solo in Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing", which was a huge, ground-breaking success...

The extended drum solo had become something of a feature of bands, and a standout was Louie Bellson's *Skin Deep* recorded at Fresno, California on February 29, 1952 and included on the album *Ellington Uptown* with Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, pianos; Cat Anderson (tracks 1-3 & 5), Shorty Baker, Willie Cook (tracks 1-7), Clark

Terry, Francis Williams (tracks 4 & 6), trumpets; Ray Nance, trumpet, violin; Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman, trombone; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, tenor saxophone; Willie Smith (tracks 1, 4, 6 & 7), Johnny Hodges (tracks 3 & 7), Hilton Jefferson (tracks 1-3 & 5), alto saxophones; Russell Procope, alto saxophone, clarinet; Paul Gonsalves (tenor); Harry Carney, baritone saxophone; Wendell Marshall (bass); Louie Bellson (drums) and Betty Roche (track 3).



*Louie Bellson: a standout extended drum solo from him on "Skin Deep", was recorded at Fresno, California on February 29, 1952...
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

The next drummer who caught my attention was Joe Dodge when he performed with Dave Brubeck on a 1954 album called *Jazz Goes To College*. It had Brubeck, piano; Dodge, drums; Bob Bates, double bass; and Paul Desmond, alto saxophone. Some numbers on that album include *Balcony Rock* which has Desmond leading a blues-based song with great improvisation; and *Out of Nowhere*, made famous originally by Bing Crosby with Brubeck giving it an atonal twist.



Joe Dodge on drums, with the Dave Brubeck Quartet, L-R, Paul Desmond (alto sax), Dodge, Dave Brubeck (piano) and unidentified bassist, probably Bob Bates...

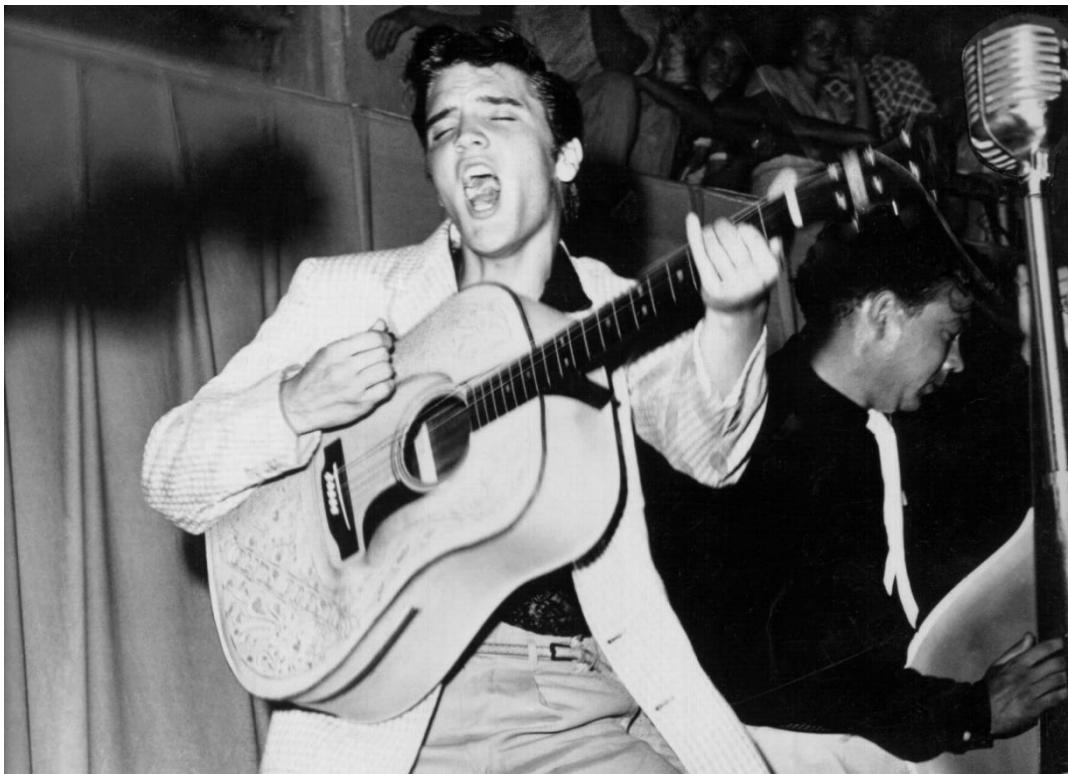
Two tracks stood out regarding Dodge: *Le Souk* and *Take the A Train*. On the latter he dropped a “bomb” at the opening on the first note by Brubeck, then another “bomb” on the entry of Paul Desmond’s alto saxophone. I loved it. *Le Souk* had Dodge with a solid backbeat whilst Brubeck’s percussive and assertive piano and Bob Bates’s double bass surged on, topped by the Turkish-tinged alto sounds of Desmond. Of all of Brubeck’s considerable recorded output this album remains his best in my view. Yet, it was a drum solo by Joe Morello on Desmond’s *Take Five* recorded in 1959 and included on the album *Time Out* which brought Brubeck’s quartet to jukebox fame on a single. Ironically, the single jukebox version of 2’55” had most of the drum solo removed from the album version of 5’28”. According to Wikipedia Desmond, upon his death in 1977, left the performance royalties for his compositions, including *Take Five*, to the American Red Cross, which has since received combined royalties of approximately \$100,000 a year.”



Alto saxophonist Paul Desmond: upon his death in 1977, he left the performance royalties for his compositions, including “Take Five”, to the American Red Cross...

Clearly, drum solos had their attraction to the listening public, way beyond the attraction they had for the jazz aficionado. Just as *Take Five* was hitting the jukeboxes rock and roll music was really taking off, and though the electric guitar was very important, the drums and a basic 4/4 beat (forte) was central to the

music's growth and success. Additionally, the focus of the set-up of the band often became the drum set, like Chick Webb, Gene Krupa and others of the Swing Era. Just as physical movement and dance were central to the swing movement, physical movement and dance were important to much of rock and roll. Performers such as Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley made much of the physical elements of the music; Presley's gyrations became iconic symbols of the music, emphasising suggestive sexuality, and colouring the image of the music for a generation.



Elvis Presley: his gyrations became iconic symbols of the music emphasising suggestive sexuality...

Thus the popularity of rock music during the 1960s brought the drummers from the back of the band to the spotlight, with several drummers cultivating around them an aura of the true rock stars (John Densmore of the Doors, Keith Moon of the Who, Mitch Mitchell who played for Jimi Hendrix, and Ringo Starr of the Beatles). Many of those popular drummers introduced new techniques for playing, new flashy solos and more. During 70s and 80s, rock drummers around the world experimented with sets that had no cymbals, or sets that had two or more bass drums (up to four with the case of Van Halen). Expanded kits came popular too.

These bigger kits may have been way out of scale to the rock drummer's musical ability. Mike Bordin, whom I saw performing with Mike Patton's band Faith No More at the 2010 Adelaide Arts Festival, is a left-handed drummer who uses a right-handed kit with his ride cymbal on the left. His kit is (wait for it!): Drums; Yamaha Oak Custom - • 14x6.5 Mike Bordin Signature Snare • 14x12 Mounted Tom • 15x13 Mounted Tom • 18x16 Floor Tom • 24x17 Bass Drum; Cymbals Zildjian: • 15" Rock Hi-Hat Bottom (used as top hat • 15" A Mastersound Hi-Hat Bottom (used as bottom hat) • 19" K Medium Thin Dark Crash

or K Thin Dark Crash• 20" A Medium Crash• 21" A Sweet Ride• 22" Z Heavy Power Ride• 19" K China. Hardware • Yamaha rack and stands • Drum Workshop 5000 Delta Series Strap Drive Double Pedals. Heads Remo • Mounted and Floor Toms – Coated Emperor (top), Clear Ambassador (bottom) • Snare – Emperor-X (batter)• Bass – P3 Clear. Sticks• Vic Firth Rock.



Mike Bordin, drummer with the US group Faith No More: his playing was flashy, entertaining, loud and musically boring...

I found Bordin's playing flashy, entertaining, loud, and musically boring. Brian Blade, on the other hand, who was performing on the same stage in the set with the Wayne Shorter Quartet with a much much smaller drum kit, was brilliant, punctuating the music with rapid reactions to musical statements by Shorter and the pianist Danilo Perez. Blade has said: "I'm so amazed at the privilege of playing with someone like Danilo Perez or Wayne Shorter - not thinking that consciously at the moment. It really drives you to move in a way. It makes me emote something that isn't tame. The drums naturally embody this wild element. Not that I'm trying to be



US drummer Brian Blade: he was brilliant, punctuating the music with rapid reactions to other musical statements by Wayne Shorter or the pianist Danilo Perez... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

provocative, but the nature of hitting things must go way back. Just the primal aspect or sensibility in that, and how to achieve a sound by hitting something, there are so many degrees within the subtlety. I'm always trying to get closer to what's needed at that instant as the music moves." The physicality of drumming is a significant element in the modern jazz mix, at least it may be, as the 60s and 70s did seem a time when the questions, "where is jazz going"? and "is jazz dead"? started to be asked.

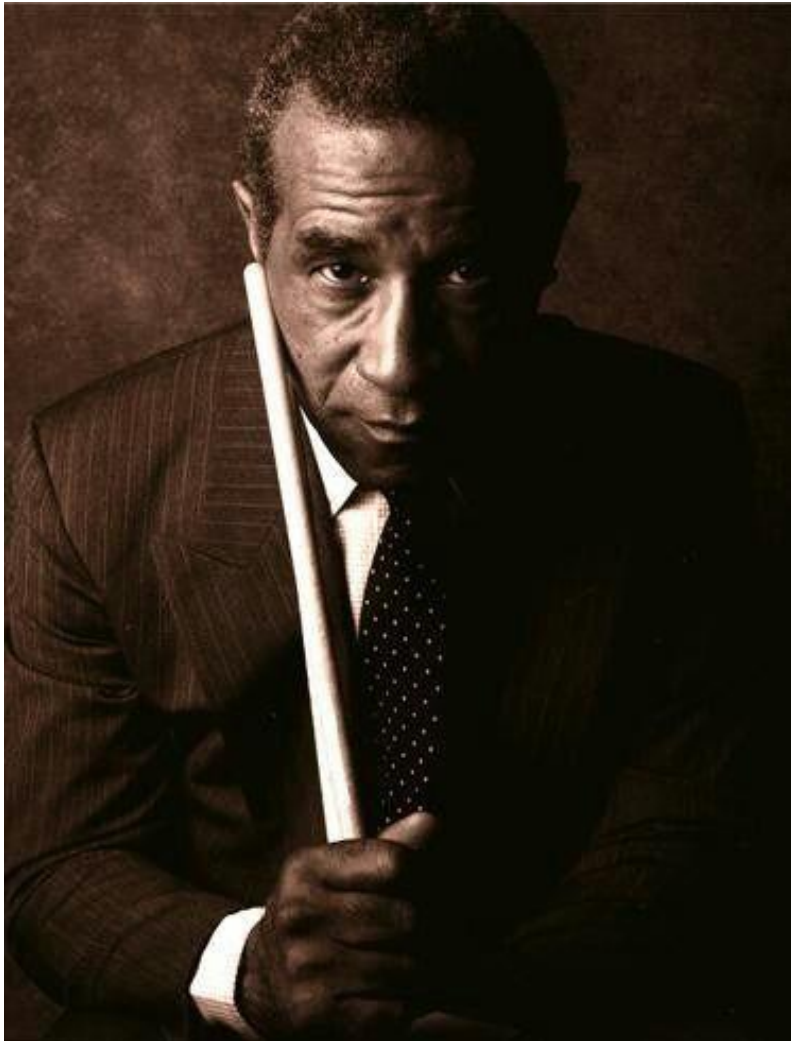
There is nothing wrong with entertainment, noise, and the flash of rock drumming, but they have their limitations, just as so-called blockbuster movies have their limitations. During the 1950s musical revolution in jazz, there was a move away from the roots of the blues, which had been taken up by rock and roll, and away from jazz as entertainment, and jazz as a background to dance. There was simultaneously in jazz a move towards the African roots of the music, and towards the complex bebop changes taken up by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and others, which placed little stock on melody but emphasised the intellectual challenges of complex rhythms and improvisation based on harmonic structure and instrumental virtuosity.

The African roots in drumming were most notably evident in the work of Art Blakey (aka Abdullah ibn Buhaina, 11/10/19 - 16/10/90) a drummer who was a self-taught pianist, but changed to the drums when Erroll Garner, quite a percussive pianist, came along. Blakey established his first band at age 15, and The Messengers in 1947. Although he was influenced by Dizzy Gillespie and is considered a bebop drummer, the power of his playing, sometimes referred to as loud and domineering, and his central place in the band, and his album titles such as *Africaine*, *Roots and Herbs*,



Art Blakey: he used African devices such as rapping on the side of the drum and using his elbow on the tom-tom to alter the pitch... PHOTO COURTESY TWITTER

The African Beat, Orgy in Rhythm, and The Witch Doctor attest to the attraction Africa had for him. Nevertheless, Blakey initially discouraged comparisons of his drumming with African drumming. However after his visit to Africa in 1948-9, he used African devices such as rapping on the side of the drum and using his elbow on the tom-tom to alter the pitch. He used multiple drummers in some recording sessions including African musicians and pieces. His trademark was forceful closing of the hi-hat on every second and fourth beat. Max Roach, who called Blakey “Thunder”, said “When I first met him on 52nd Street in 1944, he already had the polyrhythmic thing down. Art was the perhaps the best at maintaining independence with all four limbs. He was doing it before anybody was.” Notwithstanding the belief that Blakey was “loud and domineering” I distinctly recall about 1985 that I played the track *Autumn Leaves* from the album *Something Else* by Cannonball Adderley; Blakey’s quiet sensitive touch and sense of swing brought tears to my eyes.



Max Roach: he called Art Blakey "Thunder"...

The Back to Africa movement was also evident in John Coltrane's music, notably with *Africa Brass* with its stunning "jungle" opening and the drumming of Elvin Jones. Whether Roy Haynes ("the difference between Max Roach and me? Well, he liked to go ba ba BOM, and I liked to go Bom ba ba") or Elvin Jones, the drums played a central role in perhaps the greatest and best-balanced small jazz band of the 1960s, the John Coltrane Quartet. Rashied Ali as a second drummer was added and Elvin Jones left feeling that that was one drummer too many. In the end it was the saxophone voice of Trane alone, perhaps in a cry of existential anguish. Musically this was a dead end. What is meant by the phrase "best balanced"?

The melding of the physical elements of (African) drumming with the melodic and harmonic elements of classical (European) music created a wondrous natural balance in music which mirrored the nature of the ideal in humanity itself. The focus of Western intellectual development on the power of the mind, the importance of learning, the serious need for universal public education to engender an informed populace as the bedrock of a functioning democracy, has seen this balance lean too much towards the mind at the expense of our physical health. One seminal image of this imbalance towards the mind away from the physical is Freud in his rooms taking cocaine and pondering the mysteries of dreams. The drift away from the physical in Western society, not just in intellectual terms, has been that caused by the industrialisation of the provision of food and the technological revolution in

transport and communications leading to a culture such as in Japan, where thousands of young single adults remain in their rooms fixated on electronic communication afraid to venture out of their tiny apartments. Evidence of our physical decline is the obscene increase in obesity in OECD countries whilst much of the world is starving, including many of those on the African continent which has 15% of the world's population. In jazz terms, Art Blakey's Messengers represented a perfect musical balance between the physical and the mental, so to speak. Alumni from the University of the Jazz Messengers included Benny Golson, Donald Byrd, Lee Morgan, Jymie Merritt, Wayne Shorter, Joanne Brackeen, Cedar Walton, and Lonnie Plaxico. Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers was one great post-war jazz band.



An early version of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, L-R, Blakey, Benny Golson, Bobby Timmons, Lee Morgan, Jymie Merritt: one great post-war jazz band...

Another great post-war jazz band was featured on the Miles Davis album *Milestones*. It has Philly Joe Jones on drums and is to me the perfect manifestation of that balance. The spring-like bounce that Jones creates on the track *Milestones* is a small miracle of modern drumming that swings and pulses as if a life force, like the human heart itself. Along with Jones and Davis the band had Julian Cannonball Adderley (alto saxophone), John Coltrane (tenor saxophone), Red Garland (piano), Paul Chambers (double bass). With a deviation into modal jazz on *Kind of Blue*, which moved somewhat away from the drum (notwithstanding Jimmy Cobb's cymbal splash on the opening track of the album *So What*) Davis returned to



*Philly Joe Jones (left)
pictured here with Art
Blakey... PHOTO
COURTESY PINTEREST*

percussion with a vengeance in his venture into jazz fusion in the 1969 album *Bitches Brew* which included the drummers Lenny White, Jack DeJohnette, Don Alias (congas), Juma Santos (credited as "Jim Riley") shaker; Billy Cobham; and Airto Moreira on percussion and cuica.

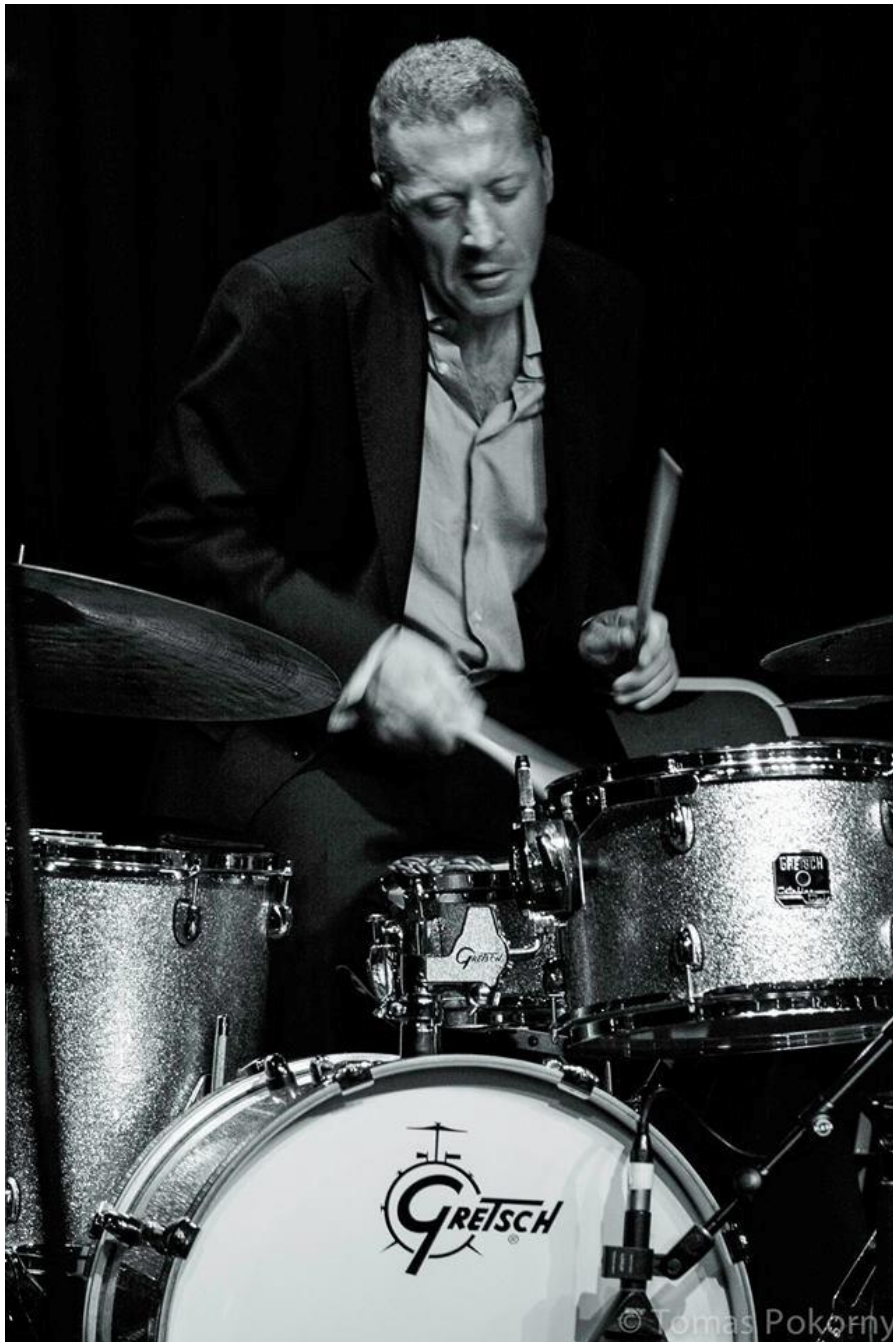
Nevertheless so-called rock and roll bands and the role drums played in the music, as well as the spectacle of the very large drum kits and the manic athletic gyrations of performers such as, famously, Mick Jagger, the physical became the province of that music whilst jazz drifted towards the cerebral, especially in its European manifestation and the rise of Editions of Modern Music (ECM). Keith Jarrett, Jan Garbarek, Pat Metheny, Gary Burton, Chick Corea, Charlie Haden, John Abercrombie, Dave Liebman, Eberhard Weber, Egberto Gismonti, Dave Holland, Terje Rypdal, and Ralph Towner are some of the well-known ECM jazz artists that featured in the 1970s, but note the absence of the drummer. This seems to me a drift away from the roots of our being, notwithstanding the beauty, the charm, the insistent inventiveness, of much of the ECM music.

When I first heard a version of the Ellington/Mills song *It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* on the 10" Clef album *Diz and Getz* which had Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet; Stan Getz, tenor saxophone; Herb Ellis, guitar; Oscar Peterson, piano; Ray Brown, double bass; and Max Roach, drums; I was taken aback, actually astonished at the drum solo by Max Roach. The tempo of the track was fast, so fast that Stan Getz seemed a little lost. Gillespie, relishing the speed (he opens the piece on mute) did a riveting 2'30" solo, with Brown grounding the whole thing, Peterson and Ellis hanging in there, and Max Roach doing a splendid 20-second drum solo: dahhh, deeh, daaahhh, deeh, deeh, smash....crash... shifting tones on the drums and lifting the track to another level. More Max Mum, says I! *Diz and Getz* was recorded on 9/12/53, and it was a completely different approach to the drumming I had hitherto encountered.



*Max Roach: a splendid
20-second drum solo...*
PHOTO CREDIT LEE
TANNER

Then I heard *The Clifford Brown Max Roach Quintet 10"* Emarcy LP, with Brown on trumpet; George Morrow, double bass; Harold Land, tenor sax; and Richie Powell piano; with a laughing Max Roach on the brown cover and Clifford Brown to his rear, with trumpet to lips. I was immediately taken by *Parisian Thoroughfare*, a composition by Bud Powell which featured extensive percussion work by Roach. He seemed all over the piece, a powerful presence. In the 1950s Roach played with Booker Little, Bud Powell, Sonny Stitt, and J J Johnson. He was a member of the great Toronto quintet of 1953 with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, and Bud Powell. He has played in duets with Anthony Braxton in 1979, Cecil Taylor in 1984, and Dizzy Gillespie in Paris in 1989. This last was particularly effective and in a strange way beautifully balanced between the consistent harmonic and melodic inventiveness of Gillespie and the percussive genius of Roach. I've only encountered one other drummer as musically interesting, exciting and consistently inventive as Max Roach in these extended works, and that's Sydney's Simon Barker.



Sydney's Simon Barker: the only drummer as musically interesting, exciting and consistently inventive as Max Roach in these extended works... PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY

We, about 20 of us, encountered the group Chiri in an outdoor space, possibly a roof, possibly the roof of a car park, in a free event at the Adelaide Arts Festival in 2012. It's interesting, perhaps sobering, to reflect on the elements of (inter alia) advertising that surround the presentation of the arts and entertainment industry. A very large hall, months of advertising in magazines, on television, and the long queues at the theatre, the reputation of the performers, the hushed expectancy of the audience, and then the performance. Be prepared to be disappointed. Somewhat akin to the drumming kit of Mike Bordin - looks amazing but how does that glorious looking pudding really taste?

Chiri was a trio consisting of Korean singer - *p'ansori* master - Bae Il Dong, trumpet player Scott Tinkler, and Simon Barker on a very small kit which if I recall included small gongs. It was an immensely moving performance, made perhaps more special ironically owing to the very bleakness of the surroundings - the modern life of the modern city where the most significant architectural works are multi-storey car parks - and here we witnessed three small human musicians on the roof top of one car park creating beautiful art in this bleakness, despite this bleakness. It was a musical message of hope fuelled by an impressively intense energy by the singer, which was responded to intelligently and powerfully by a master drummer and a master trumpet player. It was an unusually stirring conversation to witness.



The trio Chiri included trumpeter Scott Tinkler: an immensely moving performance made perhaps more special ironically due to the very bleakness of the surroundings... PHOTO CREDIT ANDREW COWAN

If my own thoughts about the necessity for the most stimulating and rewarding and moving music (jazz) to include indeed encourage the physical, as a response to the need for balance which represents the “best” life: if these thoughts have any merit, then Simon Barker’s ruminations on this subject from his website are worth considering:

In 2001, I spent several months in Korea for an intensive period of study with a wonderful young traditional drummer named Kang Sun Il. Sun Il’s approach to connecting rhythmic things to body motion, breathing, and sound production opened a pathway for me towards body motion as the fundamental starting point for rhythmic expression.

During one of our lessons, a group of drummers turned up and played through a collection of traditional ritual drumming pieces (the equivalent of a jazz jam session). In one of the pieces, the drummers played a rapid rhythmic form that required both hands to be sounding consistently at the same time...not linear patterning, but lots of continuous unison notes with little ornamentations popping through here and there. Watching the musicians play, I felt an incredible wave of physical pleasure, with the combination of body movements, sticking combinations, and rhythmic ornaments offering a deep and moving physical sensation that I had never experienced so intensely before.

Over the past few years, I've been focused on developing procedural connections between rhythmic language, sound production, and body motion (including a recording that explores physical pendulums and meditative states experienced during long barefoot runs, entitled 'On Running'). I've come to accept that, for me, physical movements (including cyclic body motions, barefoot running, and all sorts of physical pendulums), rhythmic layering/clustering, and interweaving rhythmic forms, activate very strong physical/aesthetic sensations and pleasures. With this in mind, my current aims as a drummer are to explore this pool of primary areas through the creation of personal drumming language that has a strong foundation in physical movement, whilst being led by feelings associated with scrambled, gurgling, or entangled rhythmic shapes.

Simon Barker is firmly in the jazz tradition then, in that by his appropriating, enriching, and expanding his musical toolbox and his mind and soul with this great music, in performance he adds to its beauty and intelligence, not to mention the contribution he makes to his students. A fellow percussionist, from De Paul University, USA (since 2012) is Dana Hall.



American drummer Dana Hall: in many respects, the drummer is now that chordal instrument... PHOTO CREDIT BEN JOHNSON

Dana Hall, (born 13/3/69) has played with Branford Marsalis, Ray Charles, Roy Hargrove, Joshua Redman, Horace Silver, Michael Brecker, Nicolas Payton, Kurt Elling, George Coleman, Lin Halliday, Betty Carter, Jimmy Heath, Benny Golson, Bobby Hutcherson, Wallace Roney, Diana Krall, Harold Mabern, Renee Rosnes, Clark Terry, the Mingus Big Band, Steve Lacy, Muhal Richard Abrams, Jim Snidero, Eric Alexander, James Spaulding, Buster Williams, Gary Bartz, Dick Oatts, Melvin Rhyne, Ira Sullivan, David Murray, Bobby Broom, Lester Bowie, Slide Hampton, Charles Davis, James Moody, David Hazeltine, Henry Butler, Shirley Scott, Sonny Fortune, Joe Williams, Dr Lonnie Smith, Billy Harper, Brian Lynch, Rick Margitza, Tim Hagans, John Swana, Ralph Bowen, Orrin Evans, Bud Shank, Phil Woods, Von Freeman, Ron Bridgewater, Kenny Barron, Maria Schneider, Jackie McLean, Mulgrew Miller, Marcus Belgrave, Hamiet Bluiett, the Woody Herman Orchestra, Patricia Barber, Joe Henderson, Curtis Fuller, Charles McPherson, Oliver Lake, and Steve Wilson.

Hall remarks on drumming without chordal instruments, as in Chiri, as follows:

*All of the study invested in learning how to comp with a chordal instrument need not be discarded when that instrument isn't present. In many respects, the drummer is now that chordal instrument... listen to masters for composing ideas ... Andrew Hill... Bobby Hutcherson... Nat King Cole... Jim Hall... Recordings of African, Cuban and other African diasporic musics as well as music from India, Eastern Europe and Western Asia provide me with a great deal of inspiration and ideas.**

Simon Barker is a brilliant instance of this direction in modern jazz drumming.

Although the likes of Sonny Payne (Count Basie) Sam Woodyard (Duke Ellington) Rufus Jones (Count Basie), and Louie Bellson (Dizzy Gillespie et al) pushed the limits of so-called swing drumming, Max Roach and others led to Simon Barker. Another drummer with a new direction was Chico Hamilton, beginning with his band



Chico Hamilton: his appearance in the films "Jazz on a Summer's Day" and "Sweet Smell of Success" were highlights...

**Downbeat*, November, 2018, p 73.

on the LP *Chico Hamilton featuring Buddy Collette* with *A Nice Day*, (Buddy Collette), 2:53; *My Funny Valentine* (Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart) - 4:16; *Blue Sands*, (Collette) - 6:30; *The Sage*, (Fred Katz) - 3:34; *The Morning After*, (Chico Hamilton) - 2:07; *I Want to Be Happy*, (Vincent Youmans, Irving Caesar) - 2:10; *Spectacular* (Jim Hall) - 5:12; *Free Form*, (Hamilton, Collette, Hall, Katz, Carson Smith) - 5:00; *Walking Carson Blues*, (Smith) - 6:08; *Buddy Boo*, (Collette) - 6:16; recorded at The Strollers in Long Beach (tracks 6-10) and Radio Recorders in Hollywood (tracks 1-5) with Chico Hamilton, drums; Buddy Collette, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet; Fred Katz, cello; Jim Hall, guitar; and Carson Smith, bass. This drummer-led album is an excellent mix of standards, eg, *My Funny Valentine*; originals eg, *The Sage* (Katz); improvisation, *Free Form*; swing, *Walking Carson Blues*; as well as providing showcases for individual instruments. The cello is perfect for *My Funny Valentine*, the mallets perfect for *Blues Sands*, and Jim Hall's guitar solo a masterpiece of controlled invention.

Mr Hamilton remarked in 1982: "I play a pretty small kit. Even my bass drum is a floor tom flipped over on its side. And I like to have everything low down. It's less tiring and I can get a softer, more exact sound. I don't want to be waving my arms in the air." His contribution to cinema was no small thing either: his appearance in *Jazz on a Summer's Day* and *Sweet Smell of Success* were highlights in both those outstanding works.

Drummers such as Paul Motian may not have set out to study and explore as much as the likes of Dana Hall, but have been led to experiment through natural desire. Motian has said: "I played 4/4 for three hours a night for 1,000 nights a row. I think I earned the right to play 'free' or 'abstract', whatever that means, once in a while."*



Paul Motian: he has earned the right to play 'free' or 'abstract', whatever that means, once in a while...

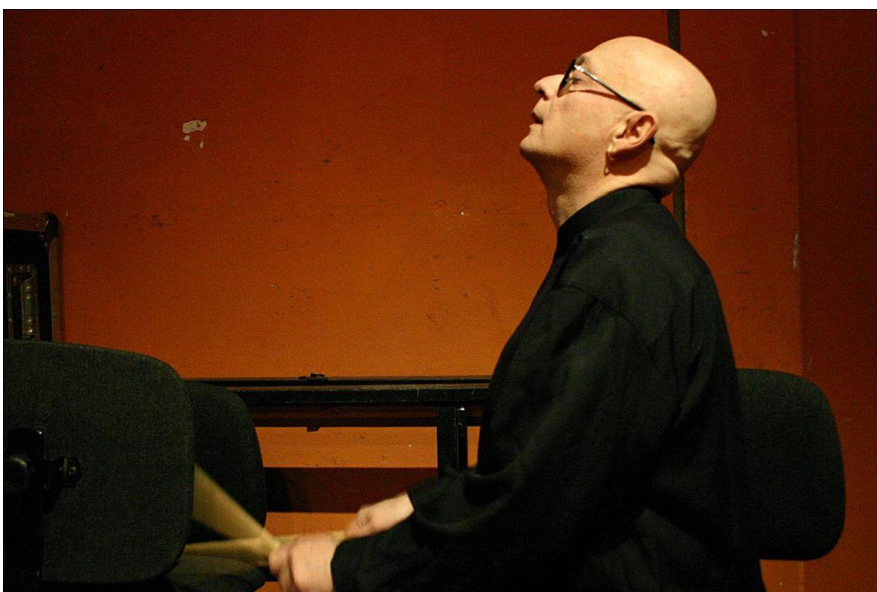
**Penguin Jazz Guide, 2010, p 413.*

A modest statement by a drummer who helped free the role of the drummer from conventional duties as they were once envisaged. Among the greatest of drummers in the vein of playing free was James Marcellus Arthur "Sunny" Murray (September 21, 1936 – December 7, 2017) who seemed to mirror in his playing the precise mood he was feeling at the moment - rage included, humour also. Murray spent considerable time out of his home country for the usual reasons and spent over 50 years musically active, much of it in Europe.



Sunny Murray, who died in 2017: he seemed to mirror in his playing the precise mood he was feeling at the moment...

One exceptional European percussionist is Italian drummer Andrea Centazzo who used a recording of himself and Steve Lacy to launch his own record label Ictus. The album *Clangs* was recorded in Udine, Italy on 18th February 1976. Lacy is listed as playing soprano saxophone, bird calls, pocket synthesiser; and Centazzo as playing percussion, drum set, and vocals. Centazzo has worked with Derek Bailey, Kent Carter, Evan Parker, Rova Saxophone Quartet, John Carter, John Zorn, Enrico Rava, Anthony Coleman and many others. He is acknowledged as using his considerable array of percussion instruments in a powerfully creative way.



Italian drummer Andrea Centazzo: using his considerable array of percussion instruments in a powerfully creative way...

A 12-CD collection

of Ictus Records' 30th Anniversary is available. After 1986 he turned to video-making and composed operas, film soundtracks and orchestral works. Since 1992, he has lived and worked in Los Angeles and has become a naturalized American citizen. He has conducted his own compositions with the American Youth Symphony, the L A Contemporary Orchestra, the Mitteleuropa Orchestra, and many ensembles. He has directed and staged his own opera compositions as well as theatrical plays by other US authors. He has recorded over 60 albums as well as developing new percussion instruments including the icebell, a bowl-shaped instrument made from a bronze alloy. In 1980 he introduced the ogororo, lokole, tamping, tubophone and square bell, based on Native American instruments, into his tapes on India.

A recent successfully drum-led band is that of Allison Miller, which issued *Boom Tic Boom* in 2010. Her album *Otis Was A Polar Bear* with Miller on drums and mallet percussion; Myra Melford on piano; Jenny Scheinman on violin and octave violin; Kirk Knuffke on cornet; Ben Goldberg on clarinet and contra alto clarinet; and Todd Sickafoose on double bass; has ten originals by Miller. She has assembled a very accomplished group which provides a great range of colours to her generally upbeat compositions, allowing plenty of room for solos. Goldberg's work on *Fuster* is attractively Klezmer in feeling, and there is also a satisfying contribution from Ms Scheinman on octave violin. Knuffke has a sweet mellow sound on cornet and does a fine extended solo on *High T*. Miller is a busy percussionist and is always pushing the music to a satisfactory conclusion. Rim shots, cymbal splashes, bass drum in concert with bass on the opening of *Slow Jam*, are just some moments I recall. All in all, a little piece of joy in this troubling world.



The cover of Allison Miller's album "Boom Tic Boom": Miller is a busy percussionist and is always pushing the music to a satisfactory conclusion...

Another current drum bandleader attracting plaudits is Tyshawn Sorey who has worked with Wadada Leo Smith, Steve Coleman, Anthony Braxton, John Zorn, Steve Lehman, Joey Baron, Muhal Richard Abrams, Pete Robbins, Cory Smythe, Kris Davis, Vijay Iyer, Dave Douglas, Butch Morris, and Sylvie Courvoisier. His recent 3-CD set called *Pillars* attracted the following comments in *Rolling Stone* magazine: "The album's climaxes are few and far between, but when they arrive, they do so with almost supernatural force. Part II ends with foghorn blasts of dungchen and deep percussive thuds that sound like ghostly reverberations from an underwater shipwreck. A similar passage surfaces in Part III, with tinkling bells accenting the otherworldly sound palette. Near the end of Part III, howling brass, glitchy electronics (courtesy of another one of the group's bassists, Carl Testa), scratchy electric guitar and rumbling percussion swirl together in a weird exorcism of sound."



Tyshawn Sorey: Another current drum bandleader attracting plaudits...

At the 2018 Women's International's Jazz Festival in Melbourne I attended the "Girls Do Jazz" Secondary Schools Concert rehearsal on 9th December 2018, and spoke to Alexandra Czarnecki-Roper (Alex Roper) (5/2/94) the drummer from Clayton, Melbourne, who attended Thornbury High and was providing backup for the students who had been tutored by Andrea Keller. A VCA graduate, Ms Roper studied all kinds of music but found jazz irresistible. She is a fan of Avishai Cohen the bass player and his trio, as well as The Penguin Cafe Orchestra. "Girls Do Jazz" aims to address the gender imbalance in jazz music by giving young students an opportunity to hear, interact, converse, and perform with women who are following professional pathways in jazz and improvised music. Alex Roper was providing such support to the students.



Alex Roper: she studied all kinds of music but found jazz irresistible...



For sheer delight, emotional resonance, joy and the quiet delirium of making a human connection with a great artist, I choose amongst others Max Roach (above) on the back of an upturned garbage can...

Ten thousand Chinese communist singers might sound impressive when singing together, but for sheer delight, emotional resonance, joy and the quiet delirium of making a human connection with a great artist, I choose Bob Dylan alone on stage, Andres Segovia solo guitar, Sarah Vaughan a cappella, Yo Ma Ma doing Bach's Cello Suites, Chiri, or Max Roach on the back of an upturned garbage can instead. Thank you very much, and good night.