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DRUM LOVERS ISSUE

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Pete Zimmer

By Gary Heimbauer

JJ: What is it about musical improvisation that you find so valuable? What does it offer to you, your band-mates, and the listeners? What motivates you and drives you forward?

PZ: I find that musical improvisation, within a jazz context, is so valuable because it is the art form I use to express myself. Jazz music, based on improvisation, is a type language that is used to communicate within an ensemble. Similar to poetry, the better one knows the language, the deeper you can dig into the music and communicate within the ensemble one is performing with. When this is done on a high level it is magical.

JJ: What was it that initially inspired you to become a drummer? How did it all start?

PZ: I started by playing pots and pans in my Mother's kitchen when I was about three years old. When I was four, my parents bought my older brother Nick, a toy drum kit from J.C. Penney. I decided I wanted to give it a try and ended up destroying his drum kit. Since I had so much fun with that my parents got me my own Muppets Drum Kit (with Animal on the front!) from J.C. Penney and I began playing along with Beach Boys albums at the age of 4. When I turned 5 my folks bought a real drum kit for both myself and my older brother. We started a cover rock band between the two of us, playing classics like "Jump" from Van Halen, and performed at my elementary school for their talent show starting when I was in kindergarten. This continued until I was in fourth grade and my brother went away to college. At this time my Mom thought I should start taking private lessons to continue my interest in music. During Middle School is when I discovered jazz and in high school I started to get very serious about it.

JJ: Do you feel that it is important for drummers to explore musical elements other than rhythm, such as melody and harmony in order to better empathize with their band-mates, or bring another dimension into their own playing?

PZ: I do believe it's important for drummers to explore melodic and harmonic interests as much as I believe it's important for non-drummers to explore

rhythms and play drums as well. I was fortunate that early on I played orchestral percussion which included melodic instruments such as marimba, vibes, tympani. This gave me a harmonic and melodic sense that I believe I carry with me when I play the drums and certainly when I compose music. I like to think of the drums as not only a rhythmic instrument but also melodic. Max Roach is a prime example of how drummers can play melodies on their instrument. I think it also helps develop a drummer's ear greatly when playing within an ensemble to accompany the soloist and also play appropriately with the rest of the group. Obviously, for composing music it is extremely important to study harmony and melody.

JJ: What are your top five desert island drum records that you couldn't possibly live without, and please state why?

PZ: (1) *Roy Haynes - John Coltrane, Dear Old Stockholm*. This recording captures Roy Haynes during the short period he subbed for Elvin Jones with the John Coltrane Quartet. Mr. Haynes is on fire and it's interesting to hear how it makes Coltrane play differently as well. My favorite track is "One Down, One Up," but I also love their beautiful rendition of "After the Rain." (2) *Elvin Jones - John Coltrane, Live at the Village Vanguard*. This is some classic Elvin Jones with John Coltrane. It really doesn't get much better than this. Elvin's constant swing continues to push Trane as they gradually keep building the intensity with each of his solos. Really Amazing! (3) *Jimmy Cobb - Joe Henderson, Four*. Jimmy Cobb's driving pulse on the ride cymbal is one of the things he's most renowned for. This pulse comes through loud and clear on this live recording with Joe Henderson along with the smokin' rhythm section of Wynton Kelly and Paul Chambers. (4) *Philly Joe Jones - Miles Davis, Milestones*. This is classic Philly Joe. Philly Joe's swing, time feel and soloing is all great on here. "Two Base Hit" is one of my favorites and his brushes on "Billy Boy" is something every drummer should transcribe. (5) *Art Blakey - Art Blakey, Ugetsu*. Art Blakey is one of my favorites for his constant driving swing and his abilities to lead a band from the drum throne. This was recorded live in Japan and features Blakey with one of his classic quintets with Freddie Hubbard and Wayne Shorter. Blakey's drive is second to none.

JJ: When you first embarked on the sophisticated journey of becoming an improvising drummer, or a jazz drummer, what were some methods that you found extremely useful to achieving your goals? (Perhaps something that you developed on your own, or your favorite instructional resource)



Courtesy of Pete Zimmer

PZ: In addition to learning technical facility on your instrument - one way is practicing and becoming proficient on all 40 rudiments - is to transcribe your favorite drummers. This is difficult as first. But I recommend finding a solo or accompaniment that is not very difficult to begin with. After beginning to transcribe it will become easier and easier the more you do. After learning some of your favorite drummers' vocabularies you can begin to combine different elements of various drummers and begin to create your own sound and your own unique vocabulary.

JJ: As a musician, what do you feel your role or responsibility is in our society?

PZ: I like to think of the audience as part of the performance. Musicians can feed off of the vibe and feeling you get from the audience, especially when performed in an intimate and attentive setting. No two performances are alike and that is one of the things that make live performance and 'jazz' in particular special. The audience is very much a part of that, and they contribute to the performance even if they are not aware of it. Also, I believe music is intended to touch people in an emotional way as well. Whether it's feelings of happiness, sadness, excitement, or well-being, this can all be achieved in with music.

PZ: I like to believe that I play music that satisfies my artistic integrity while still appealing to society and the music industry. I find that a lot of people are either going strictly the commercial route or they are strictly playing music based on their own needs and don't necessarily think about their audience. I try to encompass both, by playing music that true to my beliefs as an artist, while still being commercially viable.

JJ: What is the greatest compliment that you can receive as a musician?

PZ: The best compliment that I can receive as a musician is to know that people enjoy and appreciate

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"The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it."

—John Ruskin

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bilities we have here is to simply be helpful and caring to each other. As a musician I find many times that people will come to me after a performance and tell me that they were having a rough day and that the music made them feel better. I find that to be a very profound thing to be able to do for someone. We are truly blessed to be able to do what we do as musicians, and while I don't think it's necessary to over-think what our music is going to do for others at the very moment of creativity, I think being conscious of it and acknowledging it after the fact is very important, as well as rewarding.

JJ: What is the greatest compliment that you can

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live in a concert he did in my neighborhood when I was twelve, to the rumbas in the park, it was something that just called me.

JJ: Do you feel that it is important for drummers to explore musical elements other than rhythm, such as melody and harmony in order to better empathize with their band-mates, or bring another dimension into their own playing?

BS: It's mandatory if they want to consider themselves real musicians. I think like an arranger when I play because of my musical training. And that goes for playing styles outside of the realm of what one would call jazz. All drummers should also play some type of melodic instrument besides drums. It will give them a different perspective in their role as an accompanist and in their role as a soloist. The pay off is sensitivity, a wide range of vocabulary and techniques that one can utilize at a moments notice that will also give them a sense of pride in their craft. They'll simply play with more sensitivity and play more musically. If you look to the world of rock music, the best drummers are the ones who are good all around musicians that know theory, harmony, etc. Players like Carl Palmer and Dave Grohl are great examples of this.

JJ: When you first embarked on the sophisticated journey of becoming an improvising drummer, or

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my music and playing especially when it comes from other musicians. When I hear that from my peers, it is really the best and most gratifying feeling.

JJ: What is the most rewarding facet of your life as an artist?

PZ: The most rewarding facet as an artist would have to be the gratification I get from performing. I've always thought that "music chose me, I didn't choose music." If I couldn't play music I don't think I would be complete. There would be such a big void in my life. Even though jazz artists make many sacrifices in order to keep playing this music, we are very lucky to have this music. The music itself is what keeps me going.

receive as a musician?

WM: For me as a drummer, when someone says they'd heard me on the radio and "knew who it was", is one of the highest compliments! To have a truly unique and identifiable sound on any instrument is one of the true milestones of maturity as an artist. As a drummer, I believe it's particularly challenging, and very rewarding when you know you've found your own voice.

JJ: What is the most rewarding facet of your life as an artist?

WM: As a musician, to be able to create; as a band-

a jazz drummer, what were some methods that you found extremely useful to achieving your goals?

BS: Method? Find a good freakin' teacher. A good teacher will get you there faster than anything else you could possibly do on your own. For me that was the great Keith Copeland when I was student at the Berklee College of Music. Also, history. I'm a student of it and I'm constantly checking out what came before. It's something that I don't find many younger players doing today. It seems they're more into the "what is hip today" syndrome which strikes me as being very superficial. Everything we do today comes from something in the past, so why not study it. The philosopher John Dewey stated... "When the old has not been incorporated, the outcome is merely eccentricity. But great original artists take a tradition into themselves. They have not shunned but "digested it". Then the very conflict set up between it and what is new in themselves and in their environment creates the tension that demands a new mode of expression." John Dewey, from *Art as Experience* p.159. Translation? What you think is so hip today, might become passé, especially if doesn't have any grounding in what has come before.

JJ: As an artist, your state of mind and ability to dig deep is important. What do you do to break through all of the surface stress in our contemporary world?

BS: I like complete and utter silence with a little occa-

JJ: What are you currently working on and what is on the horizon for the near future?

PZ: I'm currently continuing to lead my own group that features many of my original compositions. I'm also expanding my record label, Tippin' Records, and adding additional artists to the roster. I'm always

leader, to be able to assemble groups of musicians and give them the opportunity to share their unique gifts with each other; as a husband and father, the ability to help put bread on the table doing what God gave me the gift to do.

JJ: What are you currently working on and what is on the horizon for the near future?

WM: I'm currently continuing my life as an independent artist and bandleader, constantly looking for new and exciting opportunities for my creative "family." I'm also looking forward to writing new material and embarking on the journey of my fourth production as a leader, hopefully later this year. ■

sional chirping of birds thrown in for good measure.

JJ: As a musician, what do you feel your role or responsibility is in our society?

BS: To be honest and not be bullshitting up on the stage.

JJ: Is what you do something only for you and the musicians you are sharing the stage with, or are you trying to achieve something outside of that microcosm?

BS: I am always trying to connect with audience and take them to the next level in my own performances. That next level is the spiritual - but not the prim and proper church of just getting on you knees and begging for forgiveness, but the church of taking no prisoners and getting down. That's why I usually say to the audience form the stage, "Thank you for coming to church tonight."

JJ: What is the greatest compliment that you can receive as a musician?

BS: You sound good, Man.

JJ: What is the most rewarding facet of your life as an artist?

BS: That I get to do what I love and get to share it with the audience, my students, and the World. ■

continuing to develop my playing and my sound as a drummer. I look forward as I continue to mature as a person that my playing will also continue to mature. It is always interesting to follow the lineage and progression of jazz musicians throughout the course of their career as they mature. ■

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