



# Jazz Drumming

BY STEVE HOUGHTON

Often times, young drummers think that learning a jazz beat will enable them to play jazz. To develop a concept for any style of music, one must go far beyond learning a few beats or patterns. I feel that drumming, in any style, is 50% concept and 50% technique. Many drummers seem to have very good technical skills, while acquiring very little conceptual knowledge of the style of music they are attempting to play. To build a broad conceptual foundation for jazz drumming, a player must focus on at least six areas:

History  
Technique  
Rhythm Section Awareness  
Tune Knowledge  
Listening  
Practical Application

## History

- Students often don't take the time to examine the amazing history of jazz drumming.

Ed Soph, one of my early teachers is a true jazz drumming historian, who can demonstrate the drumming of Chick Webb or Baby Dodds and then turn around and sound like Elvin Jones. Ed encourages his students to go way back and do the necessary homework.

Gary Chaffee, one of the foremost teachers on the scene today, insists that his students learn the drumming styles of famous players. He exposes his students to the entire jazz songbook, from Miles to Metheny. He provides students with an extensive collection of classic jazz recordings, enabling the students to hear the original drummer on the recording and then play along with a classic recording.

## Technique

- Students haven't fully learned the technical language/ vocabulary associated with the jazz style.

Each style of music requires certain technical demands that define the style. The technical exercises used in funk or Latin won't be the same for jazz. A drummer must build a jazz vocabulary, creating a loose independence with all four limbs. Musicality is essential when transforming technical exercises into a personal style.

Although jazz rhythms might seem complex to a beginner, they are really just a collection of down beats and upbeats. If you are comfortable with a few standard jazz rhythms, you will be in the ballpark conceptually.

The following books are valuable resources, designed to build jazz independence and strengthen the jazz vocabulary as well as the overall concept.

*Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer* by Jim Chapin

*The Art of Bop Drumming* by John Riley  
*Essential Techniques for Drumset* by Ed Soph  
*Art Blakey's Jazz Messages* by John Ramsay  
*Syncopated Rolls* by Jim Blackley  
*Standard Time* by Steve Davis  
*Jazz Drummers -Masters of Time* by Steve Davis  
*Jazz Drumming* by Billy Hart

## Rhythm Section Awareness

- It is important for the jazz drummer to be aware of the entire rhythm section and their individual roles, as jazz music is not a “one man show.”

### Piano...

Drummers must spend some time listening to and analyzing jazz piano comping ideas. When listening to a jazz piano master comp (rhythmically accompany) behind a soloist, it reveals a treasure chest of ideas to be used for snare drum bass drum interplay.

Some piano players to check out...

Wynton Kelly  
 Herbie Hancock  
 Bill Evans  
 John Lewis  
 Roland Hanna

Chick Corea  
 Red Garland  
 Dave Brubeck  
 Keith Jarrett  
 McCoy Tyner

### Bass...

The more aware a drummer is of the bass player's role, the more successful the performance. Outstanding music can be made when the drummer and bass player are on the same page musically.

Some bass players to check out...

Christian McBride  
 John Patitucci  
 Ray Brown  
 Dave Carpenter  
 Larry Grenadier  
 Milt Hinton  
 Ron Carter

Paul Chambers  
 Reggie Workman  
 Rufus Reid  
 Marc Johnson  
 Tom Warrington  
 Eddie Gomez  
 Chuck Berghofer

## Tune Knowledge

- Young players don't know tunes

The true indication of a serious jazz musician rests with tune knowledge; that is, a broad, in-depth understanding of all “standard” jazz tunes as well as the newer tunes of the day. There are several tune collections found in fake books like “The Real Book”. The more a drummer knows about a tune's form, melody, and even harmony, the more effective the performance.

## Listening

- Usually, a player's record collection reflects playing strengths and weaknesses.

Listening may be the most important aspect of building the jazz concept and perhaps the most ignored. The following represent a sampling of classic jazz recordings with a cross-section of important jazz drummers:

Artist	Title	Drummer
Louie Armstrong Baby Dodds	Satchmo at Symphony Hall Talking & Drum Solos	Sid Catlett Baby Dodds

Miles Davis	Kind of Blue	Jimmy Cobb
Miles Davis	Four and More	Tony Williams
Miles Davis	Milestones	Philly Joe Jones
Wayne Shorter	Speak No Evil	Elvin Jones
Bill Evans	A Simple Matter of Conviction	Shelly Manne
Art Blakey	Moanin	Art Blakey
Chick Corea	Now He Sings, Now He Sobs	Roy Haynes
Bill Stewart	Snide Remarks	Bill Stewart
Keith Jarrett	At the Blue Note	Jack DeJohnette
Clifford Brown	Now's The Time	Max Roach
Ahmad Jamal	At the Pershing	Vernel Fournier
Art Pepper	Art Pepper + 11	Mel Lewis
Stan Getz	Sweet Rain	Grady Tate
Pat Metheny	Pat Metheny	Billy Higgins

Also, try attending as many live performances as possible.

### Practical Application

- Jazz can't be learned in a practice room

This is an important part of the process because it provides an opportunity to put your ideas and concepts to the test. Unfortunately, many students learning to play jazz are limited to practice room study, accompanied only by play-alongs or CDs. Jazz is an improvisational art form, where skills are honed by interacting with other musicians; reacting to soloists, comping patterns, bass lines, time feels, song forms, developing long-lasting musical skills that can only be found in live performance.

*Internationally respected as a jazz drummer, percussionist, clinician, and educator, **Steve Houghton** has shared both stage and studio with renowned jazz and pop artists, including Joe Henderson, Barbara Streisand, Arturo Sandoval, Gary Burton, Billy Childs, Scott Henderson, and Bob Florence. A Wisconsin native, Houghton received his first acclaim at age 20 as a drummer with Woody Herman's Young Thundering Herd; he was chosen for The Herd while a member of the One O'clock Lab Band at the University of North Texas. After two years with The Herd, Houghton polished his reading skills in Dallas studios for four years, then moved to California, where he quickly established himself through his tenure with Toshiko Akiyoshi. In 1980, a last minute call to substitute for Freddie Hubbard's drummer evolved into a two-year association. By the mid-'80s, Houghton, a busy Los Angeles studio musician, was writing, teaching at area universities and performing with symphony orchestras as a featured guest percussionist, activities he continues to pursue today.*

*Houghton's recent recordings (as leader) include Steve Houghton (Signature - Mesa Bluemoon) and Windsong (Warner/Belwin.), and he may also be heard on The Music of Pat Metheny & Lyle Mays with Bob Curnow's LA Big Band (MAMA Foundation). Houghton also is author of more than 20 composite educational publications, including The Contemporary Rhythm Section (text and video series), Essential Styles (play-along series) and his most recent collection, MasterTracks (play-along improvisation series).*

*A guest lecturer at the University of Southern California, Houghton is a member of the Percussive Arts Society board of directors and co-chairman of the International Association of Jazz Educators drum committee. He endorses Pearl, Zildjian, Calato, Remo, and LP (Latin Percussion) products.*

WWW.PEARLDRUM.COM

**Pearl**<sup>®</sup>  
The best reason to play drums.

