

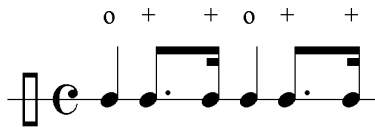
Evolution of Bebop Drumming

By: Tony Edwards

Where it Started

The bebop style of drumming occurred in the 1940's. The drummers that were associated with this new way of playing completely revolutionized jazz music and their influences are still with us today. But before we can examine "bop" we must first understand its origins. Jazz evolved from a fusion of European harmonies and African rhythms around the turn of the century. From about 1900 to 1920 the beginnings of jazz were present in a form of a New Orleans popular music called "ragtime". This music was closely associated with vaudeville. The style of drumming during this period was more similar to a military way of playing than the traditional jazz approach. All of the rhythms were played mostly on the snare and bass drum with emphasis on beats two and four. Sometimes these patterns were played on a wood block or rim. Cymbals were mainly used to accent the end of phrases. One of the techniques used was called double drumming. W.F.L. explains "The bass drum was placed to the right of the player with the cymbal of top. The player would strike the bass drum and cymbal with the snare stick, then quickly pass to the snare drum for the afterbeat with an occasional roll squeezed in."¹ This technique still existed through the 20's. Although variations of the bass drum pedal appeared in the late 1800's, it did not really begin to be used until the 1910's. This invention made double drumming obsolete. The suspended cymbal holder was invented in 1909 by C.B. Wanamaker.² The ragtime drum set consisted of snare, bass drum (large), cymbal (Chinese), and accessories called "traps". These accessories included woodblocks, cowbells, and Chinese toms. It is believed the reason for the Chinese influence was due in part because of the great many Chinese people that settled in the large American cities. These instruments would be readily available. The early ragtime drummers included James Lent, William Reitz, Buddy Gilmore, Tony Sarbaro and the infamous Baby Dodds.

By the 1920's some major changes began to take place. First the jazz scene moves from New Orleans to Chicago; second the ensembles become larger (thus the term "big band"); third drum solos become common; and fourth new innovations in the drum set. At the turn of the century ragtime was spreading across the US. The bands of New Orleans would travel to other big cities to play. Jazz groups began to pop up all over the US. One of the major cities for this to occur was Chicago. It was here that drummers such as Vic Berton and Gene Krupa revolutionized drum playing and it was here that big band became popular. With the advent of the bigger ensembles new techniques had to be developed. Drummers now began playing the bass drum on all four beats and playing, what is now referred to as the jazz pattern (ding-ding-da-ding), on the cymbal. Vic Berton is considered to be the first to use this technique. The pattern would be played either as a choked cymbal or on the hi hat.



Until the 1930's jazz was rarely considered a medium designed to display virtuoso drum performances, but during the 20's the drum solo came into being and by the late 20's the extended solo became common. Because of this, the technical demand on the drummer was much greater. Drummers such as Gene Krupa became famous for their technical prowess. Major changes in the drum set started to occur. Drummers discarded the Chinese cymbal in favor of the European model. The most popular size ranged from ten to thirteen inches in diameter. Drummers such as Zutty Singleton began to use a device by Ludwig called "Bick-a-da-Bock Hand Cymbals". This would later become the hi hat cymbal. The first hi hat pedal cymbals appeared around 1927. In 1937 Leedy advertised a tom-tom which contained separate tension adjustments for both the top and bottom heads. Other drummers from this era included Chick Webb, Sonny Greer, and Jonathan "Jo" Jones.

Big band hit its zenith during the 30's and 40's. One of the most important drummers of this time was Jonathan "Jo" Jones. Not only did his playing typify the swing era but he also served as an important transitional figure into the bebop genre. Martin Williams states that "Jones not only played lightly and differently, he gave jazz drumming a different role in the music. He pedaled his bass drum more quietly and he moved his hands away from his snare drum to keep his basic rhythm on his double, high-hat cymbal. Unlike some of his imitators, he achieved a momentum, a kind of discreet urgency in his cymbal sound by barely opening the high-hat as he struck it. All of which is to say that Jo Jones discovered he could play the flow of the rhythm and not its demarcation. And he perceived that the rhythmic lead was passing to the bass, which he could complement with his cymbals."³

Jones was born in 1911 in Alabama. His first musical experience included playing a variety of instruments (trumpet, piano, saxophone). In 1934 he joined the Count Basie Orchestra of which he is most closely associated. As stated before Jones is an extremely important transitional figure. One of his most important contributions is his use of the hi hats. By the 30's the cymbal pattern of Vic Berton had become common place. Jones, like many other drummers of the time, also used this pattern but he began playing the hi hat differently. He would leave them slightly opened causing the cymbals to sizzle. Although this may not seem to be very important it was a turning point for jazz drumming. This innovation began the legato sound of the ride pattern, which as we shall see becomes the trademark of bop. In addition to his use of the hi hat, Jones would often accent the weak beats (two and four) on either the hi hat post or by using rim shots (by placing the stick on both the head and rim). On the recording of One O'Clock Jump (Decca 1363) Many of Jones' influences can be heard. Jones sometimes plays his ride cymbal in much the same manner as his hi hat. Again this was unusual for a jazz drummer of the 30's.

Most drummers of the 30's used a straight-forward two and four measure phrasing, but Jones often overlapped rhythmic ideas from one section to the next. An example of this can be found on the recording I Know that You Know. Another innovation that can be found on this recording is Jones' use of the bass drum. Whenever jazz drummers played the bass drum during an extended solo, they usually played it on all four beats of the measure, or they would use it to reinforce the snare accents. Some drummers would incorporate the bass drum into their solos as an independent voice, but this was rarely done in the 1930's; except by Jones. Jones also made changes in the drum set itself. He was one of the first drummers to discard the accessories or traps. He also reduced the size of his bass drum (20-18") and started using bigger cymbals.

Swing was considered to be the pop music of the 30-40s. Bebop would change this forever. During the 40's the jazz scene moved Chicago to New York. Dennis Brown writes "Within the social turbulence preceding World War II, significant changes were taking place in jazz. The 1930's was the incubation period for a new kind of jazz, later called Bebop, Bebop or simply, Bop. to many, bop was a revolution against musical standards developed during the Swing Era."⁴ William Russell writes:

"Bebop is music of revolt: Revolt against big bands, arrangers, and vertical harmonies, soggy rhythms, non-playing orchestra leaders, Tin Pan Alley--against individuality of the jazz musician as a creative artist, playing spontaneous and melodic music, the framework of jazz, but with new tools sounds, and concepts."⁵

Whereas swing was music for entertainment and dancing, Bebop was, in essence, art music. In bop melodies and harmonies became more complex. Tempos became faster and soloing more important. With these changes in style came a change in drumming. Technically, bop drumming differed from all previous jazz drumming styles in three ways: 1) the constant use of the ride cymbal to create a wash of sound within the ensemble, 2) gradual removal of the bass drum from its time-keeping role, and 3) the evolution of coordinated independence.⁶

The bop drummer's prime objective was to produce a wash of sound over which the soloist could improvise. It is during the 40's and 50's that drummers began to use large ride cymbals (18-22" in diameter). Whereas the swing drummer accented the weak beats in his ride pattern the bop drummer accented them with his hi hat foot. This is the pattern that most people associate with jazz. One of the first drummers to use this pattern was Dave Tough. In addition to this use of ride cymbal another technique developed called "tipping". As stated before the swing drummer would accent the weak beats (2 & 4). Bop drummers would accent all four beats within the ride pattern.

These accents would produce a momentum to the rhythm. Some people feel that the accents on the ride replaced the four beats in the bass drum, but there is no foundation for this proof. It is apparent that tipping is a typical characteristic of the early bop style.

Don DeMichael writes:

"Bop broke one of the last restraining links of the chain that bound the drummer to the military tradition--the bass drum. The bop drummer saw no logical reason for his duplicating the steady four of the bassist with his right foot; instead he used the bass drum as another tone color in his expanding spectrum of sounds."⁷

One of the reasons that the bass drum began to be omitted from its time-keeping role was the simple fact that tempos were too fast. It was not possible for the drummer to play the four beats. The technique of playing what seem to be random bass-drum beats is frequently heard on early bop recordings. Later, these bass-drum punctuations were called "bombs" and "dropping bombs". A technique echoed by Jo Jones.

The role of the bop drummer was quite different from that of the swing drummer. In the past his role was primarily to keep the beat. During the bop period the role changed to more of a communication between other players of the group. We will see this idea now begin to evolve through the 70's as drummers gravitate more away from the role of playing "the beat" to producing a wash of sound. In order to do this, drummers had to develop coordinated independence--the ability to play several different rhythms simultaneously. One of the determining factors for this development was a drum method book that was published in 1948 called *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer* by Jim Chapin. When this book was first published many players felt that the exercises were simply too difficult for anyone to play; of course by the 1970's this book was used by most beginning jazz drummers.

Kenneth Spearman "Kenny" Clarke (1914-1985)

"In the history of jazz, Kenny Clarke stands as the undisputed founder of bop drumming."⁸ Clarke's earliest playing experience occurred in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the 20's. In the 30's he toured the mid-west with the Jeter Pillars band and in 1935 he played with a New York based ensemble led by Lonnie Simmons. It is with this band that Clarke began experimenting with new drum techniques. By the end of the 30's Clarke began working with Teddy Hill's band. Clarke tried out some of his new ideas and as a result of his "rhythmic tampering", he was fired. Nevertheless, Hill hired Clarke to manage the houseband at a club called Minton's and Clarke in turn hired several musicians who shared his experimental views on jazz. By early 1941 the experiments at Minton's began to take the shape of what is now called "bebop". In 1954 Clarke began recording at Rudy Van Gelder's studio. The recording techniques had improved greatly in comparison to those of the swing era. On these recordings one can hear the traditional bebop style. It was here that Kenny Clarke recorded the famous Miles Davis tune *Walkin*.

Max Roach (1925-

The next great bop drummer to make an important contribution was Max Roach. Roach was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1925. His record debut as a bebop drummer, the famous Parker session in November 1945, established his importance in the new idiom. Musicians that Max worked with included Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Dizzy Gillespie. He is considered by most to be the top bop drummer in the world. Thomas Owens writes: "Beginning in the late 1940's Roach's recordings showed him to be a more aggressive player than Clarke. When Clarke's bass drum bombs occurred every few measures, Roach's fell every two to four beats; where Clarke played just an occasional snare drum fill to supplement his ride-cymbal pattern, Roach played so many that his snare drum often was more active than his cymbal."⁹ Here we begin to see the drummer's role gravitate away from that of merely time keeper to more of keeping a wash of sound and improvising. Probably the most important contribution of Max Roach was that of "melodic drumming" In a PAS article in 1979 Roach describes his view of drumming.

"One of the prime functions of the drums is to serve as an accompanying instrument. This can be developed by listening to every thing around you and by fitting yourself in without being smothered or smothering others... You can play lyrically by phrasing and dynamics. You set up lyrical patterns in rhythm which give indications of the structure of the song you're playing."¹⁰ In addition to this new concept of playing Roach also explored different time signatures such as 3/4 and 5/4. He also used devices such as

superimposing 6/4 on 4/4 and groups of five. Other drummers that came out of this early bop style included Roy Haynes, Joe Morello, Billy Higgins.

Shelly Mann (1920-

Toward the end of the forties, the nervous unrest and excitement of bebop were replaced by a tendency toward calm and smoothness, and this was the beginning of "cool jazz," or the cool school. Musicians important in developing this style were Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Gerry Mulligan, and Chet Baker. An offshoot was "West Coast" jazz, so called because it was mainly California musicians who played it. The most important drummer of both the cool and west coast styles was Sheldon "Shelly" Manne. Shelly was born in New York in 1920, and his father was a drummer. In 1946-48 he became well known as Stan Kenton's drummer. In 1952 he moved to California and worked with Howard Rumsey. "Manne was always a colorist, and melodic drumming has always been a large element in his work, to the extent of sometimes tuning his drums to a definite pitch."¹¹ His style of playing included such techniques as rolling with timpani mallets on cymbals and toms without regard to keeping time. Here again we see the role of the drummer move closer to shaping phrases and coloring.

In the late fifties and sixties there was a reaction against the cool movement that became known as "hard bop", which was characterized by strong, emotional drive. Important musicians in its development were Horace Silver, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, and Charles Mingus. Drummers of this style often used complex, out-of-meter patterns in their playing, while keeping the beat with their cymbals. The playing was also loud and more aggressive than previous styles. Three of the main drummers of hard bop were Art Blakey, Philly Jo Jones, and Elvin Jones.

Art Blakey (1919-90)

Art Blakey was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In the early 1940's he played in Fletcher Henderson's swing style band. He also played with the Billy Eckstine band and Buddy DeFranco's quartet. In 1955 Blakey formed his own group which he called the Jazz Messengers. He was one of the few bop drummers to lead his own band. "Blakey was the wildest and most basic drummer in modern jazz, whose rolls and explosions are famous. His fiery, volcanic playing is sometimes raucous, and he has been known to knock over his floor tom while playing."¹² Blakey's two most idiosyncratic devices are his press roll and his shuffle beat. Thomas Owens writes: "When he began that great press-roll crescendo in the last measure of a chorus he seemed to lift the band and the audience in his powerful arms and deposit them of the threshold of the next chorus."¹³ Some would say that his technique was sloppy (for example his single stroke rolls) but what was important about his playing was his ability to execute his musical concepts.

Philly Jo Jones (1923-1985)

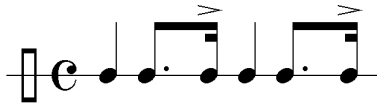
Philly Jo Jones was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1923. He played there for several years, then moved to New York in 1952 where he received recognition as a member of Miles Davis' Group. Jones' playing was said to combine the best elements of both Roach and Blakey. Philly Joe's drumming was dynamic and explosive, with melodic elements in it. He was a master of the brushes.

Elvin Jones (1927-

The next important change in style came with the introduction of Elvin Jones. Elvin Jones was born in Pontiac, Michigan in 1927. He played in Detroit for several years before moving to New York in 1956. There he played for Donald Byrd, Tyree Glen, and Harry Edison in the fifties. In the sixties he spent eight years playing in John's Coltrane's band. Elvin Jones is responsible for three major changes in the bop style: 1) Greater use of four limb independence, 2) dialogue with the soloist, and 3) change in ride cymbal accents. Elvin Jones took the concepts of independence to new extremes. We now see the use of complete four-limb independence. Most previous drummers would keep the hi hat on two and four throughout an entire tune, but Jones would improvise the hi hat as though it were a second snare drum. In a PAS article by Thomas Schultz he writes: "Jones's playing contains a melodic instinct, which is coupled with the ability to make complex rhythmic juxtapositions and superimpositions."¹⁴ Most drummers when accompanying a soloist would provide a wash of sound on which the player would improvise over. But Jones would also "carry on a conversation" with the soloist through his playing. "He would rhythmically converse with the soloist he was accompanying, and often deliberately play rhythms that were opposite those of the soloist."¹⁵ By the fifties drummers used two main accents within the ride cymbal pattern.



Elvin would accent the &'s of the pattern.



This became a trademark of Elvin Jones' style. Elvin was the last of the hard bop players to come to the forefront, and accordingly he has carried over into the next style of playing, the Avant-Garde.

The 1970's marked the Avert-Garde style. This style gave drummers many freedoms. No longer did they state the rhythmic pulse in a prescribed manner, but employed free polyrhythms which served as both rhythmic and melodic functions. The hi hat no longer marked off any regular beat, and the accent on two and four in each measure of 4/4 has disappeared entirely. Often various forms of triple or compound meter are superimposed upon the standard 4/4. The drum set again goes through some major changes. The number of toms increased, drummers experimented with varying sizes of toms and cymbals, and the Chinese cymbal again becomes popular. One of the most important drummers to come from this school was Tony Williams.

Tony Williams (1945-1997)

Tony Williams (born in 1945) astounded the jazz world when he joined the Miles Davies Quintet in 1963 at the age of 17. In a detailed study of William's early solos, Craig Woodson found that he played rolls "in single-, double-, combination-, buzz-, and flam-stroke stickings, usually on the snare drum, in both measured and unmeasured rhythm, and that the speed of these rolls were anywhere from 3 to over 30 strokes per second. He also used the basic ride-cymbal pattern, but regularly split it among cymbal, snare drum, bass drum, and high hat in a variety of ways. As with rolls, Williams used the ride pattern in both measured and unmeasured time."¹⁶ Tony Williams would go on to inspire many other great jazz drummers such as Steve Gadd, Peter Ershkine, and Jeff Watts. Another drummer that made important contributions to this style was Jack DeJohnette.

We have seen how the role of the jazz drumming has changed from the 1940's to present date. Drumming has evolved from its role of time keeping to that of music making, and the role of drummer from time keeper to musician.

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The Evolution of Bebop Drumming Footnotes Bibliography

1 Brown, History and Analysis of Jazz, p.98

2 Ibid., p.107

3 Ibid., p.444

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7 Ibid. p. 471

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10 Schultz, Percussionist, p. 124

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