

Contemporary Jazz History From The Drummers Point Of View

By 1946, the swing era was declining rapidly, and by the mid 1950s, America's youth had swapped swing for rock 'n' roll altogether. After World War 2, however, jazz continued to thrive, but it was about to undergo major changes. In the late '40s, a new style of jazz called bebop gave birth to many of jazz's most celebrated drummers, namely Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, and Roy Haynes. The fathers of modern jazz drumming, these players ushered in a whole new approach to playing the drum set. For example, they were among the first to develop intricate left-hand and bass drum comping techniques.

As sub styles of jazz emerged, players such as Elvin Jones, Art Blakey, Philly Joe Jones, Paul Motian, and many others added their own distinctive stamp to the music, and thus contributed to jazz's rapid percussive advances.

Contemporary jazz, beginning with bebop, brought about radical changes in the ways drummers interacted with a band. Bop drummers were the first to reject the idea that the drums should be used for timekeeping purposes only or for flashy, crowd-rousing cadenza solos. Also, bebop artists found themselves playing small, listening clubs, not large crowded ballrooms. Since jazz was becoming more intimate, drummers began experimenting more with subtle tone colors (especially on cymbals) and knotty rhythmic counterpoint.

Further, rudimental solos became more and more popular as the desire to create melodic lines, like that of a horn, became more prevalent. Increasingly drummers used space more in their playing, and they began to incorporate rhythmic phrases that were angular and disjointed. They created patterns that didn't necessarily end on downbeats or even upbeats. They left dangling sixteenth notes and other unresolved flourishes of notes. Also, they began using poly-metrics to coast over bar lines. Poly-metrics is the superimposing of two or more time signatures on top of one another. The rhythms that result are called polyrhythms. Drummers such as Tony Williams (Miles Davis), Elvin Jones (John Coltrane), and others also began using a great deal of metric modulation, which in basic terms is the morphing of one time signature into another. In the 1960s, jazz became a vehicle for freewheeling, unbridled expression.

The avant-garde jazz movement pushed the boundaries of harmony and rhythm to the very edge. In many cases, the music played had no specific time signature or even tempo, nor did it have any pre-conceived harmonic underpinning. This allowed drummers a great deal of freedom of expression, as they were able to completely separate themselves from a traditional timekeeping role.

Jazz drummers regularly experiment with a wide variety of drum setups and drumming styles. The jazz-drumming lexicon is constantly being revised as drummers reinterpret the teachings and artistry of previous generations, and as drummers become influenced by other cultures, styles of music, and advances in technology.

Other jazz players in the 60s and 70s began to explore genre combinations such as Brazilian jazz, Afro-Cuban jazz, and rock-jazz. By the 80s and 90s, some artists were even merging jazz with rap or techno. These changes forced jazz drummers to become more versatile, or multifaceted.

Since the decline of the swing era, jazz has never lost its ponderous, intellectual foundation as evidenced by its complex use of melody, harmony, and rhythm. On the other hand, jazz has also managed to maintain its roots in the blues and in popular song. More than anything, jazz continues to be a creative, improvisatory art form.

About the Author

Like many other jazz drummers Eric is using [Paiste](#) and [Meinl](#) cymbals and a few [African Drums](#) in his setup. Eric is also an active member of Drum Solo Artist where he is answering drum related questions, and helping drummers with tips and advices.

Source: <http://www.tntarticles.com>