

## Funk Rhythm And Music Style - History And Development Drummers Guide

Some of the earliest forms of Funk began in the city that gave birth to Jazz: New Orleans. Along with New Orleans native Fats Domino (whose recordings featured the grandfather of Funk drumming, Earl Palmer), one of the most influential musicians to contribute to this genre is piano player Henry Roeland "Roy" Byrd, popularly known as "Professor Longhair." His style includes the sounds of early Rock n' Roll and Blues with the Afro Cuban clave influence of New Orleans Second Line (featuring Earl Palmer yet again).

In the 1950s, another primary precursor of Funk arose Soul Music. It combined elements of Rock n' Roll and Rhythm & Blues, with Ray Charles being among the first to bring this new style to prominence. Near the end of the decade, another artist appeared who would become the driving force of Soul and Funk music for the next 40 years. James Brown ("The Godfather of Soul") created driving dance music which involved advanced musicianship utilizing the syncopated and displaced rhythms which have come to characterize Funk. In addition, in Detroit, beginning in 1960 Motown Records helped create what is now called "the Motown sound." Prominent Motown drummers include Richard "Pistol" Allen, Uriel Jones, and Benny Benjamin.

The other prominent Soul label at this time was Stax, whose recordings often featured drummer Al Jackson, Jr. By the mid 1960s, through the influence of James Brown, Stax, and Motown records, the style had become firmly established. Syncopated rhythms, displaced snare drum notes, and percussive horn arrangements all emerged as defining sounds of Funk and remain essential to the style today. Near the end of the decade, Funk music was further enhanced by the group Sly and the Family Stone, particularly through the innovative "slap" technique of bassist Larry Graham (later of Graham Central Station). By the early 1970s, Funk began to achieve worldwide popularity. Dr. John, with the Meters, and later the Neville Brothers, helped mature the sounds of New Orleans Funk and brought it national exposure.

During the rest of the decade Funk music blossomed through the success of artists and groups such as War, Tower of Power (with drummer David Garibaldi), Curtis Mayfield, George Clinton and Funkadelic, Earth, Wind and Fire, The Ohio Players, The Commodores, Stevie Wonder, Barry White, and The Average White Band. By the 1980s, Funk's extensive popularity began to diminish, though the grooves of the Funk rhythm section had made their way into pop music through artists such as Prince and Kool and the Gang. Even Rock bands of the past 15 years have relied on Funk concepts, Dave Matthews and The Red Hot Chili Peppers being two prominent examples.

Throughout the past two decades, the sounds of Hip Hop and modern R & B have also borrowed the rhythms and grooves of traditional Funk. Today the sounds and ideas of Funk pervade all popular music to such an extent that it has become an essential style for the working drummer. The patterns played by a Funk drummer range anywhere from the simplest Rock grooves to intricate rhythms matching those played by the rest of the band. Additionally, the feels in Funk span from relaxed and laid back ("behind the beat") to intense and driving ("on top of the beat").

### About the Author

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