

**THE INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIENCE: A CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF THE ART  
OF THREE PITTSBURGH JAZZ DRUMMERS**

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This dissertation presents an ethnomusicological study of the art of three Pittsburgh jazz drummers, Joe Harris, Ron Tucker, and Roger Humphries with particular reference to the nexus relations between performance practice and the interpretation of experience. Following the work of Davis, Nketia and others this study argues for an approach to the analysis of black music which takes into consideration the viewpoints of the musicians who produce the music as well as those of the community who participate at performance events. Accordingly it examines the art of these drummers not only in terms of sound and structure but also in respect of the cultural factors that govern the operation of style and the meaning systems behind the music.

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## **PREFACE**

### Acknowledgements

This work is the result of years of research on the Pittsburgh jazz scene and would have been impossible without the cooperation, support and help of many people. I would like to acknowledge my debt to Joe Harris, Ron Tucker, and Roger Humphries, all of whom believed in the value of such a study and generously shared their time and musical knowledge, insights and experience with me.

I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their contributions to this study. My committee director, Nathan Davis, has advised me since I first started graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh. His insistence that I become a competent practitioner of the music as well as a scholar of jazz was crucial in my formulation of the research strategy. I am grateful for his guidance, wisdom, and sustained support which allowed me to see this work to fruition. Akin Euba and Mathew Rosenblum both provided practical suggestions in structuring the dissertation. J. H. Kwabena Nketia's contributions to this work are invaluable. In addition to helping me sort out several theoretical issues, his invitation to work with him in Ghana allowed me to experience the musical grandeur that is the Ghanaian cultural heritage. His comments on my writing, his questions; both challenging and stimulating, and his overall interest in my development as an ethnomusicologist is both inspiring and humbling.

Portions of this work were written while I was a Frederick Douglass Fellow at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, and while I enjoyed a residency at the International Centre for African Music and Dance, University of Ghana, Legon Campus.

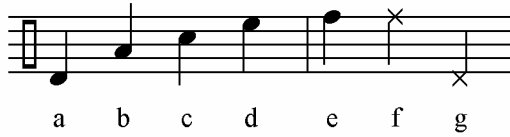
Finally, words cannot express my gratitude to my wife, Teresita and sons, Nathan and Christian, whose unconditional love and faith sustained me throughout this endeavor.

This work is dedicated to my brother, John J. Foley who first brought the drums into our parent's house, and to my brother in music, Mike Taylor, who first brought me into the Crawford Grill.



## Key to Musical Transcriptions

### Drum Notation



- a. Bass Drum
- b. Floor Tom
- c. Snare Drum
- d. Small Tom
- e. Cowbell
- f. Cymbal
- g. High Hat with Foot

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 THE INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIENCE**

This dissertation presents an ethnomusicological study of the art of three Pittsburgh jazz drummers, Joe Harris, Ron Tucker, and Roger Humphries with particular reference to the nexus relations between performance practice and the interpretation of experience. It argues for the inclusion of studies which focus on the perspectives of individual musicians as a subject for ethnomusicological discourse which, heretofore have been concerned, primarily, with the abstraction of individual perspectives to make statements of a general kind in regards to a particular people's musical culture. The later kinds of studies emphasize the group often at the expense of the individual as cultural agent. In this way music is reduced to being merely a reflection of society. Music as a cultural theme tells us but little of the processes by which creative individuals generate their art nor does it tell us much about their art as lived human experience.

There are two central concerns which form the basis of this study. One of the things I was interested in learning about was the social processes through which these musicians acquired the specific knowledge of the improvisational techniques necessary to perform jazz on the drumset. Related to this was my interest to know how they developed their unique or personal approach to performance. The idea of jazz music as an expression of experience was

brought up early when I began the research for this study. In fact, I was directed to it by the musicians themselves. My enquiries were oftentimes first met with the response, ‘that all comes with experience.’ Upon prompting they might offer further explanation usually by relating a social or musical situation through which they gleaned some kernel of musical knowledge or self-understanding. Over time I began to see that these anecdotal statements varied greatly in regards to thematic material. Some referred to incidents in their youth; early exposure to music at home; formal lessons; performing with peers. Other times they talked about ethnicity or black communal life; personalities in their neighborhood; playing for the congregation in church; learning on the bandstand from their musical elders; attending live shows at local theaters; popular recordings. Some anecdotes had to do with interiority; a recollection of their first awareness of music; becoming conscious of what it takes to make a good drum sound; noticing an audience’s response to the affective power present in their drumming. While these themes are divergent and touch on many issues the thing that unifies them is that they’re all drawn from the personal experience of the musicians telling their lives as participants in African American community and culture.

However, the various manifestations of experience brought up by the jazz artists under consideration here are more than mere recitations of life accounts. The telling of these experiences -- whether teased out haltingly or flowing from memory in spontaneous fashion or perhaps having been told and retold and in the process taking on the dramatic quality of the master narrative -- produces constructions in the form of subjective cultural memories. Floyd argues that it is in such cultural expressions as tales, stories and music, especially their performative aspects, that cultural memories become “conscious and culturally objective in practice and perception” (Floyd, 1995: 8). As such, they open up for us windows of

interpretation through which we can understand how individuals, and, as Ramsey (2003:33) tells us, by extension groups, construct meaning in musical performances and the cultural activities that surround them.

The work of Wilhelm Dilthey addresses the dyad of individual experience and its expression in cultural texts, and his thinking was the inspiration for Victor Turner's anthropology of experience. Edward Bruner (1989: 4-5), in writing about Dilthey's concepts of experience and expressions tells us that lived experience is the primary reality. He goes on to say that how events are received by consciousness, for example, feelings, desires, images, verbalizations, sounds, sensations, impressions, and reflections is how individuals actually experience their culture. However, experience is personal, and in the telling it is self-referential. As individuals we not only participate in social activities but in doing so help to shape them as well. Yet, we can only experience our own lives, what is received by our own consciousness; we can never truly know another's experience. For Dilthey, the way to overcome the limitations of individual experience was by understanding and interpreting cultural expressions. According to Bruner, encapsulated in expressions we find a "people's articulations, formulations and representations of their own experiences" (1989: 9).

Bruner writes that in Dilthey's view, the problematic relationship between experience and expression can be understood as a hermeneutic circle. Experience structures expression in that one understands cultural expressions based on one's own experiences and self-understanding. On the other hand, expressions structure experience in the way they are "more intense, complex, and revealing than everyday experience and thereby enrich and clarify that experience" (1989: 6).

In this study the expressions analyzed are oral texts, that is, texts that are spoken, heard, or seen; cultural forms of discourse with links to the past, present and future. The choice of cultural expressions as the unit of analysis has its advantages because it leaves the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people rather than one imposed by the researcher. (Brunner, 1989: 9) A key concept in all of this is the performative aspect. As texts, cultural expressions, in order to be experienced, must be performed. And it is in their actualization that expressions or performed texts, marked off from the temporal flow of everyday life, become constitutive of meaning. Brunner explains, “It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture” (1989: 11). This study seeks to examine the how, what, why, when, where, and for whom by which the individual’s experience of culture is manifest in cultural expressions, in this case the African American art form known as jazz.

## **1.2 CONTEXTUAL STUDIES**

As the title of this dissertation suggests, this study incorporates the techniques of contextualization as a method of inquiry and interpretation. The need for such a method emerged as I encountered a number of issues doing preliminary research and throughout the fieldwork stage. For example, Pittsburgh is a city with a strong jazz tradition whose foundation is rooted in African American culture. I was interested to know how the contemporary jazz scene relates to past practices. Yet, as of today, a comprehensive study of the city’s jazz history does not exist. Drawing on archival documents, newspapers clippings, oral testimonies, photographs, posters, first hand observations, and other bits of contextual information, I was able

recover significant aspects of African American musical life in Pittsburgh, and therefore, was able to fill in that historical void.

The artists under consideration in this study all made mention of the fact that where they performed would likely have an impact on the outcome of the performance. Statements like these are referring to the participatory nature of African American music. The enthusiastic response of an audience in the form of verbal affirmations, handclaps, head and bodily sway or other such movements including dance are important modes of communication and, if we understand the performer-audience as a single unit, they serve to intensify the performance. Performers look to such signs and interpret them or the lack of such feedback and may adjust aspects of what they are doing as the performance progresses. (Maultsby, 1990: 195) This, of course, presumes that the audience has a certain familiarity with the aesthetic criteria associated with jazz and black music. This is but one example but it serves to demonstrate the complexity of situation and is why, in my observations, I paid attention to the performance venue as well as the make-up of the audience in regards to the ethnographic context.

Another issue has to do with the fact that jazz is a partly oral and partly written music tradition. Oral tradition is not necessarily codified. In jazz, much of the knowledge necessary for effective performance resides within the individual musician having gained it through hard won experience on the bandstand. Even when musical scores are employed, when performing the score, the musicians are expected to “add something” to the notations. Further, jazz musicians, through musical interaction in performance, attempt to “do something” or “take the music somewhere” using an approach that allows for individuality within a group dynamic. Nketia tells us “since a performance in many ways brings a renewal of shared knowledge and

experience, the contextual approach enables one to observe how this experience unfolds both in the musical processes and in the interaction of those present” (1989: 4).

Nketia’s defines the parameters of context and contextualization as follows:

Simply stated, any setting or environment – be it physical, ecological, social, cultural, or intellectual – in which any unit of experience is viewed in order to define its identity or characteristics as well as its relations in comparison with other entities or units of experience constitutes a *context*. The identification of entities in a context involves techniques of observation, while *contextualization* – the process of viewing such entities in a context in terms of their internal and external relations and relevance – is both analytical and evaluative. Context may thus be situational (spatial or temporal) and thus observable, or it may be a conceptual or notional frame of reference. It may be something within the observer’s own experience as a carrier or ethnographer of a tradition, thus allowing for analysis of experience as a technique of contextualization. Or it may be distant and somewhat removed from the observer’s immediate experience, thus necessitating the use of techniques that enable him to bridge this distance which may be temporal and historical or spatial and cultural. (Nketia: 1989: 5)

When I first began this study I spent a great amount of time attending performances in local nightclubs and other venues in order to get acclimated to the drumming of the three individuals under consideration here. As they began to notice my presence and over time got to know me, they would sometimes ask me ‘Is there anything I can tell you? Do you understand?’ Sometimes when I would make an observation about their playing or something that I noticed occurring on the bandstand during a performance, the introduction of a rhythmic / melodic idea or perhaps a facial expression or body posture on the part of a musician or audience member,

they would respond; ‘Yes, but why?’ In one instance Mr. Tucker remarked on the questionable intonation of a particular pitch, ‘It may be sharp or flat but there’s a meaning behind that note. It does something for the tune.’ Contrary to notions I’ve heard expressed by those unfamiliar with the tradition -- ‘all jazz musicians do is play scales’ – jazz represents a particular kind of thinking and its meaning is in the practice<sup>1</sup>. Nketia’s observation on traditional music in Africa I think applies to African American jazz as well; “the musical tradition did not consist only of a repertoire but also a body of knowledge in terms of which music took place or was interpreted” (Nketia, 2005: 25).

In the jazz tradition the musician is expected to interpret the music when he plays it. However, importantly, he interprets his experience in the way he plays it. This dissertation addresses the individual’s experience and the kinds of things that are built on it and through analysis it serves to exemplify the interpretation of that experience as cultural expression. In light of the above and following the work of Nketia using the techniques of contextualization allowed me to deal with the multi-dimensional nature of jazz as a music which overlaps and intersects with social and cultural spheres.

### **1.3 JAZZ AS AN ETHNIC MUSIC**

The term ‘ethnic’ is generally used to refer to a particular group or culture with its own distinctive traditions. An ‘ethnic group’ can be defined as a group of people who speak a common language, share a common historical origin, culture, or world view, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as in the statement attributed to Duke Ellington, ‘It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing.’



geographical location. Ethnic music, then, would refer to the music of such a group of people distinguished by cultural norms and practices, among them being a shared and held musical tradition.

Nettl tells us that the term 'ethnic music' came into common usage as a way of categorizing music that allows the ethnomusicologist to get around the problematic aspects of older terms such as folk, popular and art music.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the problem with these terms arises in jazz studies. A glance through the literature will show that one can find all three being used in reference to jazz music. For example, the use of the term 'folk' as typically applied to jazz ascribes rural origins and identifies it with the social base equated with the so-called common man. Jazz is understood as an urban phenomenon and a music that cuts across all levels of society. The use of the term 'popular music,' in reference to jazz, implies something short-lived and transitory and therefore denies the acknowledgement of jazz as a long standing historical tradition. The concept of jazz as an ethnic music enables us to situate the music within the context of its early history, art and culture, while recognizing its transformations in new urban and global contexts.

The notion of identity is relevant to the definition of jazz as an ethnic music. Jazz music fits within the larger musical continuum created by Africans and people of African descent in North America. Burnim and Maultsby (1987: 111) argue that although social context and historical determinacy serve to differentiate black vernacular genres such as jazz, gospel and blues, they are at the same time, for African American people, unified into a conceptual whole by a similarly held and shared world view and that it is this shared world view which serves to distinguish African Americans from other groups of people. Nettl writes that although an ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Bruno Nettl, "Recent Directions in Ethnomusicology," in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, Helen Meyers ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 380.

group or individual within may participate in a variety of musical repertoires and styles there is often one music which is properly considered to be the music of the culture.<sup>3</sup> In the contemporary music world jazz is universally recognized – both within and without the group -- as the proprietary cultural domain of African Americans.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the premise of jazz as an ethnic music cannot be contested as the music originated within the cultural milieu of the African American community where it continues to remain a vital force.

While this restricted definition of jazz has historical validity, it must be recognized that acceptance of jazz has grown throughout the United States to the point where the music is now considered to be a “rare national treasure” belonging to everyone in the nation.<sup>5</sup> Further, in its present state, jazz is embraced by people who belong to different geo-cultural areas and therefore, jazz is now also regarded as a music of the world.<sup>6</sup>

Jazz can be studied in the field of ethnomusicology because it is a partly oral and partly written music tradition. Much of the knowledge necessary for effective performance resides within the individual musician having gained it through hard won experience on the bandstand. Jazz is a living tradition in the sense that it is in a process of continual change, adapting to musical trends and audience tastes. It is a living tradition because through performance, it brings the past into the present while making it relevant for contemporary audiences. And jazz is a living tradition in its performance practice. Jazz musicians, through musical interaction in performance, attempt to “do something” or “take the music somewhere” using an approach that can be thought of as perpetual creation. In this sense the emphasis is not on what is created, the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt; 1990); Ingrid Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48 (1995): 397-398.

<sup>5</sup> House Concurrent Resolution 57, introduced by Rep. John Conyers, Jr. of Michigan, 3 March 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt; 1990.

“art product”, but rather on the creative act itself. This approach privileges process over product and is a hallmark of jazz.<sup>7</sup>

Ethnomusicology, as a field of study, is concerned with the music of the world’s people, and in particular, with the nexus relationship between music and culture. Culture, in the sense that I am using the term, refers to a shared body of knowledge and an established way of doing something that people in a particular community or ethnic group use, in this case, to make music. The ethnomusicologist’s orientation is toward understanding music sound, in terms of its structure and constituent elements; he then looks outward from the sound in attempting to account for the cultural factors that govern the operation of style and the meaning systems behind the music. Jazz is a multi-dimensional musical phenomenon which overlaps and intersects with social and cultural spheres. The ethnomusicological approach gives the study of jazz a broad dimension. Ethnomusicology has developed a wide array of theories and techniques of investigation and it draws upon a number of disciplinary perspectives – history, analysis, anthropology, theology, linguistics, aesthetics, ethnography -- to name a few. Accordingly, the ethnomusicological study of jazz requires a degree of intellectual acumen consistent with those established in other fields. An approach to jazz within the field of ethnomusicology enables us to go beyond the limited study of jazz history or its formal aspects to “one that embraces the socio-cultural content that brings the music to life as expressions of human beings.”(Burnim and Maultsby, 2006:2)

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<sup>7</sup> Yung proposes the term, “living tradition” to characterize the musical and social dimensions of Cantonese Opera. I have borrowed his term while adapting it to fit the situation found in jazz. See Bell Yung, *Cantonese Opera: Performance as Creative Process*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.)

## 1.4 ANALYSIS OF JAZZ AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC

Jazz scholar Nathan Davis raises several questions concerning the development of new analytic techniques for the study of jazz. In Davis' view, what is needed is a methodology that can examine jazz music in terms of sound and structure while also accounting for the cultural factors that govern the operation of style. His questions form the springboard for the theory and methodologies I have developed in researching the jazz drumming tradition and are worth quoting at length.

...Because since the inception of jazz and the packaging and commercialization of its contents for world distribution, jazz has been denied an existence of its own. Critics, historians, and laymen alike have been guilty of referring to jazz in the only musical context with which they are familiar—West European music. Intentional or not, this has prejudiced the recognition of jazz as an original musical form. How can we correct this? New theoretical terms and concepts must be developed. Now that jazz has entered the arena of academia, it is necessary for us to do more than merely interview the few innovators who are still alive. In addition, we must now undertake the difficult task of analyzing and deciphering this information. (1990:14)

Davis (1990: 71) also notes the problem of distortion that takes place when using an analytic technique that doesn't take into account the principles of the music and meaning systems to which it is applied. "One of the major problems in interpreting the blues and other forms of Afro-American folk music today is that we have not developed a system for analyzing the music. If we are going to continue to use European terminology in analyzing the music, we cannot expect to preserve its originality."

Like Davis, Samuel Floyd (1991: 265-287) argues that “Analysis” is an activity that emerged as a way of examining European works of music. And, therefore may be useless when examining non-European music. He cautions us to be wary of applying theoretical frameworks and aesthetic criteria to a music whose musical and aesthetic reference system lies outside the European tradition. Floyd calls for an approach to analysis, which takes into account the meaning systems, which takes into account the meaning systems behind the music.

The zeal for jazz among some musicologists and musicologically oriented scholars and critics, who feel that they have to justify black music to the larger scholarly community, has been both fortunate and unfortunate for African-American music. . . . The mannerisms, limitations, and traditions of academic form and substance help give the impression that the music is merely a species of European-derived music, causing both these critics and their listeners to miss the point of the music’s real and essential aesthetic power. Explanations that result from their analysis are usually limited and aesthetically uninformative, for they presume cultural and artistic goals different from those of the tradition from which jazz springs. If the purpose of analysis is to explain and illuminate the aesthetic power of the music, the exclusive application of positivistic analysis to works and performances of black music is not only inadequate, but also a miscarriage of analytical purpose; such an analysis reveals nothing about most of the culturally expressive features of the music.” (1991:273)

For Floyd, then, the essential power of black music lies in its ability to translate culture into aesthetic statement.

## 1.5 RELEVANT LITERATURE

As of this writing, scholarly studies on jazz drumming remain few and the topic appears to be of only recent interest to academicians. Theodore Brown's dissertation, *A History and Analysis of Jazz Drumming to 1942* dates back to 1976 and represents the earliest dissertation on jazz drumming. As such, this work has been cited by subsequent scholars and those working outside academia as an authoritative source. Brown's study offers an overview of the history of jazz drumming up to the beginning of bebop in the early forties. His survey draws on existing jazz literature including book length musician biographies and profiles, historical surveys and style studies, and articles in popular music magazines such as *Downbeat*. Brown's study is augmented with analysis based on commercial recordings and includes ample transcriptions which he deems are representative of a number of well known and less well known drummers. Brown begins with a discussion of the African influence on jazz drumming, early American military drumming styles, and pre-jazz dance drumming. This is followed by a style survey organized chronologically by decade beginning with the 1920s. He also includes commentary on the organology of the drum set throughout the development of jazz.

Jazz drummer and scholar, Anthony Brown, finds that Theodore Brown's discussion of the African influence on jazz drumming is flawed. He is particularly concerned with the fact that the later Brown failed to incorporate the existing research conducted by Africanist scholars which illustrates the rhythmic basis and distribution of instrumental roles throughout West African drum ensembles, and therefore, identifies their similarities to organizing principles found in jazz drumming. Instead, T. Brown relied almost exclusively on the works of Gunther Schuller and A. M. Jones, works that, according to Anthony Brown, have come under scrutiny as ill-conceived and filled with misconceptions of African music practice. Further, T. Brown

neglected the existing research of Nketia and Wilson whose work clearly demonstrated the conceptual relationship between West African and African American music. (Brown, 1997: 64-65)

Brown's dissertation is further problematic in that he devotes an entire chapter to swing era drummer, Gene Krupa. This chapter reads more like a fan tribute rather than the eruditions of a scholar of the music. Krupa, while respected as a humanitarian, is not considered a jazz innovator although, through his high profile gig with Benny Goodman, he did much to help popularize the drums within the public imagination.

Jazz historian, Lewis Porter's article, "An Historical Survey of Jazz Drumming Styles," was published in *Percussive Notes* in 1982. Although the article is brief in length Porter makes several important observations with relevance to my present study. Porter places jazz drumming within the African musical continuum by identifying distinct African retentions found in jazz drumming. While he recognizes the European origins of drum rudiments such as rolls and paradiddles, he correctly points out that it's in the way that black jazz musicians utilize these rudiments that makes the practice uniquely African American. Porter also notes the attention paid to timbre and shading on the part of African American jazz musicians as having conceptual origins in West African musical practice. Further, he relates the rhythmic structure, in particular, the principle of off-beat timing as expressed on the cymbals and bass drum, as well the distribution of instrumental roles found in jazz ensembles to those found in West African drum ensembles. However, I think Porter (1982: 42) misses the point when he says, "African music ... is collective traditional music, whereas jazz is an art geared toward individual expression." For those of us who play jazz know that what works for the collective good of the ensemble always takes precedent over individual desires. Finally, Porter makes an important link when he

connects the changes or technical improvements in equipment such as the bass pedal and hi hat stand with developments in jazz drumming style.

Brian Thurgood (1992) completed the masters' degree in music education with the production of his thesis, *Analyzing and Synthesizing the Jazz Drummer's Personal Performance Style*. This work is geared toward educators and offers a practical approach to the formal training of jazz drummers through the analysis of recorded performances. Limited in scope, it provides analysis of the playing style of five historically significant drummers; Warren "Baby" Dodds, Jonathan "Papa Jo" Jones, Max Roach, Elvin Jones, and Tony Williams. Working from commercially available recordings, Thurgood's study centers analysis on select musical transcriptions, augmenting his own work with published transcriptions and analytical reviews. His goal is to identify and describe what he calls the personal performance practice of each drummer using the criteria of time feel, interaction with the soloist, and solo performance. His study includes a listening/transcribing guide for each drummer which, in addition to the factors above, incorporates two additional criteria; timbre and comping. Thurgood makes a valid point when he argues that a misdirected emphasis on drum solo transcriptions over accompaniment style results in a distorted understanding of an individual drummer's personal performance practice. This notion is reflected in the words of the drummers under consideration in my study, all of whom attest that the basic function of the jazz drummer is keeping time albeit in a manner that is both creative and interactive. While Thurgood's overall aim is to provide student drummers with musical transcriptions from which they can re-create and eventually synthesize the work of master artists into their own performance style, his directive that one must seek out and listen intensely to the recordings while studying the material is well worth noting.



Recently, a new group of scholars, including ethnomusicologists amplifying the techniques of historical musicology and analysis by employing field research and other ethnographic methods, sought to establish jazz performance as a process grounded in culturally specific meaning. Ingrid Monson's (1991) dissertation, *Musical Interaction in Modern Jazz: An Ethnomusicological Perspective* examines the theme of interaction on the musical, social and cultural levels found in jazz. Monson's focus is on the modern jazz rhythm section of piano, bass and drums. Her field research was conducted on the jazz scene in New York City and incorporates extended interviews with several prominent players. Monson's goal is to situate jazz performance within the larger domain of African American cultural practice. Her work draws on musicology, anthropology, literary, and sociolinguistic studies. She places particular emphasis on black speech modes and language metaphors as an interpretive framework for analyzing the musical interaction which takes place within the rhythm section. Monson finds that the operation of the jazz rhythm section is analogous to black conversational modes where signification, that is, the interactive dialogue that takes place between participants in conversation is the norm. The concept of signification is expanded to include dialogue which takes place over time. Here, it is understood to mean that musicians are not only in dialogue with each other as they play in the present moment but they're also in dialogue with the jazz tradition itself as their knowledge of past performances, musical form, and stylistic conventions is drawn into play with each performance. By dissecting the language metaphors musicians employ to talk about the various musical dimensions under consideration, she uncovers the insider's perspective with regards to performance practice. Monson's draws on LaRue's (1970) theory of "growth" and "development" to analyze what she calls the Intensification process. This approach focuses on the way in which large scale musical form grows out of small scale

musical activity and gestures. Her theory is applied in the analysis of a recording which features a piano solo accompanied by bass and drums. Monson incorporates the pianist, Jackie Byard who provides additional commentary on the musical processes taking place which she then interprets for the scholarly audience.

At eight hundred and eighty-two pages, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Paul Berliner's (1994) monumental study is perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of the jazz performance tradition ever published. Berliner, an ethnomusicologist and jazz trumpeter spent over fifteen years conducting field research in various jazz scenes in order to document jazz improvisation as compositional process. He conducted ethnographic interviews with over fifty musicians and their words and perspectives are integrated throughout the text. Although unknown to me at the time of my initial research, Berliner's work parallels that of my own, only on a much grander scale and with one important distinction. Both works focus on the artist's viewpoint of the subject and how they define their own musical practices. Yet, Berliner uses the accounts of his interview subjects, a mixed gendered, racially diverse group of various ages, with wide ranging interests, instrumental expertise and experiences in order to write a collective account of jazz as musical practice whereas my study concentrates on the viewpoints and unique experiences of three distinct individual African American male elders who all play drums. While a full discussion of Berliner's work would take us well beyond the scope and limits of this study certain aspects are pertinent here as well. Berliner opens his study with an examination of the impact of the early musical environment on potential musicians and follows through the collectivity as they learn within the jazz community which, according to Berliner, and I agree with, functions as an educational system. He notes that the community system places responsibility for learning on the individual. This is followed by an extensive

discussion on developing the skills of soloing which includes the viewpoints of drummers among other instrumentalists. Several chapters are given over to the principles and nuances of musical interaction in group performance. Berliner addresses the criteria musicians use for evaluating performances; the social interaction amongst musicians within bands and informal performing units; and the impact of varying performance contexts and audiences on performances. Of particular relevance to this study is his chapter on the conventions that guide the rhythm section. Here, he discusses the individual and sectional roles of the string bass, the drums, and piano as informed by the collective. The work is appended with two hundred and fifty pages of transcribed musical examples which serve to illuminate the text.

Anthony Brown's (1997) dissertation, *The Development of Modern Jazz Drumset Performance, 1940-1950* examines the seminal recordings of Kenny Clarke and Max Roach; two African American innovators whose work is most closely associated with be bop drumming. Brown provides a chronological overview of the development of modern jazz drumming. He seeks to contextualize his subject by drawing on the secondary literature along with interview material culled from the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program to provide the social and historical background in which bop developed. Through musical analysis and narrative description Brown attempts to delineate the salient features of modern jazz drumming as exemplified in the recordings of Clarke and Roach and as distinct from earlier jazz drumming styles. Brown buttresses his study with a critical survey of bop recordings featuring Clarke and Roach's contemporaries on drums. Here, the purpose is to asses the extent to which these drummers assimilated the musical innovations of Clarke and Roach. He concludes that the features of modern jazz drumming can be summed up in the drummer's emphasis on

polyrhythmic interplay between the components of the drum set and the shift to a lighter timbre via playing time on the ride cymbal. On these points I concur with Brown.

Brown's methodology is of concern here as well. Although his dissertation appears to be more along the lines of historical musicology – Brown conducted no fieldwork per se -- he cites that his identity as culture bearer (African American) and a tradition bearer (jazz drummer) with extensive academic and performing credentials allows him to speak from a position of ethnomusicological authority.

This last point suggests the work of other scholars which doesn't necessarily address jazz drumming directly nevertheless relates to this study in regards to research methodology. Linda Williams (1997) conducted her field work amongst the jazz community in Harare, Zimbabwe. Her dissertation, *The Impact of African American Music on Jazz in Zimbabwe: An Exploration in Radical Empiricism* discusses the views of Zimbabwean jazz musicians in regards to theories of creativity and improvisation against the background of the historical development of jazz in Zimbabwe and within the local context of the jazz nightclub scene in Harare. Williams employed the theory and methodology of radical empiricism as a way to challenge the limitations of the more conventional 'objective stance' prevalent in much ethnomusicological research. A professional jazz musician, Williams arrived at this approach through her interactions with other musicians as a performer on the Harare jazz scene. Williams became totally immersed in the scene, participating in rehearsals and performances as well the social life of jazz musicians she encountered. Radical empiricism allowed her the flexibility to develop as a player while at the same time providing a framework to explain her experiences with jazz musicians in Zimbabwe. In this way radical empiricism works to integrate the ethnomusicologist's perspective with the perspective of those with whom she interacts.

Guthrie Ramsey (2003) integrated several theoretical and methodological strategies while researching his book, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Be Bop to Hip Hop*. His study focuses on specific historical and social contexts, what he calls “anchor moments in the cultural, social and political realms of twentieth-century African American history,” in particular, the 1940s, the late 1960s to early 1970s and the 1990s, as worked out in post-World War II African American musical “texts;” the blues in its many manifestations, religious music, bebop, and hip-hop (27, 37).

Ramsey’s interpretative analysis draws on personal experience as well as ethnographic interviews with family members as a way of reconciling the objective evidence of history with the subjective experience of memory. Like Maultsby (1990: 184), Ramsey believes the performative aspects of cultural forms, including music, function as reservoirs of usage in which cultural memories reside. As such, social identity in the form of cultural memories can be learned and transmitted from generation to generation. Further, drawing on the work of Christopher Small, he argues that “cultural, communal, and family memories associated with forms like music ... often become standards against which many explore and create alternative and highly personal identities for themselves” (33). Finally, Ramsey argues his use of personal and family narratives opens up windows of interpretation that allows him to “uncover some of the experiences through which individuals – and by extension ethnic groups – construct meaning in musical “acts”” (33). As a research strategy, his use of family narratives expands upon our knowledge of experience and musical practices and provides an alternative history from the “bottom up,” while serving to both “compliment and complicate” the underpinnings on which conventional musical studies rest, that is; “the reflections of the musicians themselves, the

popularity chart histories of a specific piece, and the written criticism that surrounds a musical style” (33).

Recognizing that music and ethnicity are socially constructed, Ramsey grounds his analysis in practice theory. According to Ramsey, a theory of practice comprises two kinds of analysis. One kind of analysis attempts, by looking at the ways “historical subjects, cultural categories and various aspects of subjectivity are shaped by structure or “the system,”” to understand how and what kinds of identities are formed by cultural and historical discourse (35). The other “tries to identify how real people in real time resist or engage in a given system” and, in doing so, become agents “making meaning within the larger system of hegemony and power structures” (35). For Ramsey, music works as an important part of the materiality of ethnicity. As a signifier of identity, black music, like African Americaness, is a dynamic and fluid process that is in a constant state of definition and redefinition in dialogue with both past and present. He considers the musical contexts he studies as being “important sites within which the very process itself is worked out and negotiated” (37). By paying attention to specificity of context he hopes to avoid essentialism and the totalizing effect that labels such as “folk” “modern,” and “vernacular” imply in their usage with regards to black music traditions.

## **1.6 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH**

I began to formulate an ethnomusicological perspective toward the study of jazz under the tutelage of Dr. Nathan Davis. Davis was instrumental in developing the program in ethnomusicology and jazz studies at the University of Pittsburgh; one which acknowledges the significance of the relationship between African and African American music.

My introduction to the orientation and methods of scholarly research included; seminars in the theory and method of ethnomusicology; transcription and analysis; jazz arranging and composition; jazz improvisation; area studies in African American, Latin American, and African Music; and special topic seminars, most notably an African American Music Seminar, The Cultural context of Creativity, and Creativity in Music of Oral Traditions. Further, a key component of Davis' jazz studies program is the annual Pitt Jazz Seminar which brings jazz scholars, performers, and industry people to the university. This annual academic event provided me with opportunities to gather insights from leaders in the field in both short seminars and informal dialogue.

In addition to the academic perspective, throughout the duration of my course work, Davis emphasized the importance of knowing the music from personal experience. He continually encouraged me to keep developing my performance skills as a jazz drummer. Davis arranged for me to study with Gregg Humphries, who, at that time, had recently begun teaching drums in the Jazz Studies program. For this I am grateful, because not only did I grow as a player, but also under Gregg's tutoring, I became active as a drummer on the Pittsburgh jazz scene. Moreover, Davis, through his insistence on my becoming a competent practitioner of the tradition—in effect by requiring me to put myself into the social process through which one acquires competence—had provided me with an approach to research through which I was able to identify key concepts in jazz drumming and relate them to African American musical culture.

Donald Byrd, who, in writing about the research methodology developed by Dr. Davis, defines it as the “comprehensive method” in which the scholar “combines library research,

participant observation of musical scenes and performances, and personal interviews with knowing the subject from personal experience.”<sup>8</sup>

This commonsense approach is most useful in studying the music of an oral tradition where knowledge of music theory and practice often resides with individuals rather than in written texts. As I became an active participant in the music scene, moving away from the role of observer, my understanding of jazz drumming began to open up. As the learning and performing of music takes place within the confines of social discourse, the integration of that experience into objective analysis allows one to interpret music as both a sonic entity and cultural practice.

## **1.7 FIELD WORK**

The idea for this particular study began to take shape during my weekly drum set lessons with Gregg Humphries. In the beginning, our lessons consisted of technical exercises. I also committed to memory the basic drum set grooves found with jazz and related black music forms. Humphries is an active player on the Pittsburgh jazz scene, and I would often go out to local nightclubs to hear him perform when I first began studying with him. During the week, I would bring up questions about something I heard him play on a gig, and for a time our lessons centered on discussions of those musical ideas and concepts. At this point, Humphries suggested I listen to other local drummers who had strong, fully developed musical personalities. In other words, I should seek out musicians who, by way of performance acumen, could serve as role

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 5.



models for my continual development. This is when I first became exposed to the drumming of the three artists under consideration here. Through Gregg Humphries I was introduced to the three artists under consideration here: Joe Harris, Ron Tucker, and Rodger Humphries, as well as other members of the Pittsburgh jazz community. Gregg Humphries can be considered an important link between me and the participants in this study for several reasons. He was my drum set instructor while I attended graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the nephew of Roger Humphries, whom he grew up listening to, and a former student of Joe Harris. Gregg also works in the same playing networks<sup>9</sup> as Ron Tucker, Roger Humphries, and Joe Harris.

My fieldwork experience can be divided into two distinct phases. The first may be understood as the exploratory phase. It is simply the period when I began to explore the cultural context of jazz drumming in Pittsburgh. My aim was to familiarize myself with the scene and become acquainted with the various players involved. I attended nightclubs, concert halls, churches, and other public venues where jazz is performed. Although in actuality I was conducting fieldwork as a participant-observer, in this initial phase, most people I came into contact with tended to identify me simply as a student<sup>10</sup> in jazz studies at the local university.

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<sup>9</sup> Many jazz musicians work within a loose network of musicians related by various factors. These could be based on shared social and educational backgrounds, perceived performing skills or experience, and numerous other factors including financial considerations. In some cases I was able to hear ensembles made up of the exact same personnel with the exception of one drummer for another. This was especially true in listening to the Dave Budway Trio, in which Ron Tucker and Gregg Humphries both often shared drumming duties on different nights. In these instances, I was able to ascertain elements of individual aesthetic sensibilities. During the course of this study I had the opportunity to hear Roger Humphries and Joe Harris perform as leaders of their own ensembles and as sidemen in other groups. Although Ron Tucker also leads his own groups from time to time, throughout this study I only heard him as an accompanying sideman.

<sup>10</sup> Concurrent with the initial fieldwork phase, I developed a circle of student musician friends enrolled in the various colleges in Pittsburgh. We spent many hours engaged in listening and practicing together. We would often be present together at jam sessions, occasional gigs, or sitting in at clubs, and afterwards we spent hours discussing and comparing our experiences. These musicians are, most notably: P.J. Oh and Ian Gordon (CMU), Paul Thompson, Mike Chobey, and Tom Lynn (Duquesne University), and Vernon Lewis (University of Pittsburgh).

When I first began attending their performances<sup>11</sup> on my own, these drummers would acknowledge my presence with a smile or nod from the bandstand. Sometimes we would engage in casual conversation during the break between sets. After knowing them for a period of several months, I would occasionally be invited to sit in at their gigs. In the case of a jam session, I would be encouraged to perform along with others. As our relationships grew, I found that our conversations became more focused on music and drumming. I began to get the sense that each musician, in his own way, was testing my knowledge and level of sincerity before going into the deeper meaning of the music. For example, Mr. Tucker seemed particularly concerned that I was receiving the “right” instruction at Pitt. Mr. Harris often questioned my knowledge of general percussion topics such as the differences between the French and German timpani grips. Roger Humphries would listen to my playing at his jam session and sometimes offer helpful comments about my performance. During this time, I felt these musicians were “checking” me out, I perceived they were gauging my reactions before becoming further involved with me.

In my encounters with these musicians I became intrigued with two thoughts that were continuously expressed to me: “Jazz has to be creative,” and “You can’t learn jazz in school.” These concepts are well-known tropes in the jazz community, yet they seem to be at odds with the current situation in the education of jazz musicians. Jazz music has been an increasing presence in academic settings for the last thirty or more years.<sup>12</sup> Many of the jazz musicians performing today, especially those born after 1960, began training in high school and college.

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<sup>11</sup> Porter tells us, “musicians like to use the word gigs for professional engagements because there is no other word that encompasses all the categories of work-nightclubs, concerts, private parties weddings.” See Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 36.

<sup>12</sup> Some historians cite 1947 as the year in which the first jazz program was organized at NTSU. A recent study by Andy Goodrich suggests this to be inaccurate, citing the presence of jazz ensembles at several Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) prior to 1947. Alvin Batiste told me that the first full program – performance, composition, improvisation, arranging, jazz history – offering a degree in Jazz Studies was initiated at Southern University in the Summer of 1969, a historically black college located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

While older jazz musicians whose backgrounds do not include college or conservatory training see value in teaching jazz in the institutional setting, they caution learners to remember what schools do best—that is to teach one to read and write. In other words, jazz education is good for teaching instrumental technique and the specifics of theory and harmony, but there is a gap between what can be taught in a conservatory and what one needs to know to be able to play the music well. An individual's book learning must be tempered with live experience, which can only take place on the bandstand among seasoned musicians. (Jackson, 2003)

Another question that arises from this thinking is, if you can't learn to play jazz in school, where do you learn to play it? Or, how do you learn to play? I began to realize that as students of the music, the backgrounds of these musicians were quite different from my own, and, while each was unique, there was a commonality to their life experiences that represented a way of learning jazz that is unique to black culture. This idea of the cultural factor of music and creativity was discussed early in the fieldwork period by the musicians themselves. I was constantly reminded of its importance in subsequent interviews. A few examples help illustrate this point. Mr. Roger Humphries mentioned that people often come to him for lessons but they don't realize you have to go deep within the culture to truly understand the music and by inference, be able to perform it convincingly. According to Humphries, one has to "go to the well, drink the water from the people who did it." Once, when I mentioned that a local trio comprised of symphony musicians was advertised playing jazz at a club, Ron Tucker asked incredulously "How they gonna play jazz?" They didn't grow up in no ghetto." Joe Harris remarked that with non-African American audiences he doesn't usually get the responsiveness or feeling that he needs to communicate his art.

After some time, I began to realize that these musicians (as well as others I encountered), through the intent of statements such as those above, were directing me toward an approach to research that takes into account the cultural meaning and relevancy to be found in African American jazz. This is similar to the approach employed by John Baugh in his study of Black street speech. Baugh refers to this methodology as “ethnosensitive fieldwork.” He explains,

Ethnosensitivity requires the fieldworker to collect the data . . . in such a manner that the values and cultural orientation of the native consultants are taken into account. . . . Ethnosensitivity therefore requires acute self-awareness in addition to an in-depth knowledge of the community under investigation. (1983:40-41)

In my effort to develop an accurate and culturally relevant characterization of the jazz drumming tradition, I found that my own abilities as a player became the crucial element in opening avenues for deeper research.

The second phase of my fieldwork began in earnest when I was invited to join the Mike Taylor Trio as drummer for the Friday Matinee at the Crawford Grill in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. As my performing abilities grew and I built up positive musical and social relationships with other players, I was increasingly called upon to perform in professional ensembles. As a musician, I became part of the Pittsburgh jazz tradition. These gig experiences afforded me with opportunities to witness musical life from the vantage of a practitioner as opposed to being simply an observer on the scene. Although jazz is commonly performed as entertainment music in nightclubs, it also is performed in numerous situations where, in the context of black life, the

presence of a jazz ensemble may be interpreted as a symbol of ethnic or cultural identity.<sup>13</sup> Due to my performing ability, I was brought into culturally specific situations in which music was closely integrated with events designed to mark the course of social life, and in which, if I had not been a performer, I might otherwise have been excluded.

Throughout the fieldwork period, I have performed at church socials, jazz festivals, street parties, ethnic celebrations, awards ceremonies, birthday celebrations, retirement parties, wedding ceremonies and anniversaries, funeral ceremonies and remembrances, black religious services, Mothers and Fathers Day events, picnics and barbecues, house blessings, political events, and black fraternities, sororities, and social clubs such as North Easterners, AKA, Kappa Alpha Si, Masons, and FROGS Club. An additional opportunity for participant observation and analysis of black musical culture in Pittsburgh came when I was hired to provide drum instruction at the Afro-American Music Institute, Inc. (AAMI) located in the Homewood neighborhood of the city. Dr. James T. Johnson, Jr. and his wife, Pamela Johnson, founded the AAMI in 1982. The program is modeled on the community music schools found throughout the South. The AAMI offers instrumental and vocal instruction, classes in jazz and gospel music performance, and instruction in European classical music. The AAMI boasts several performing ensembles, including a Boys Choir, Youth Jazz Lab, and Faculty Ensemble. Although instruction is open to anyone, the core student enrollment is predominantly African American, both children and adults, who mainly come from Pittsburgh's black neighborhoods. During my tenure at the AAMI, I took classes in jazz improvisation and gospel keyboard. I was the first Director of the AAMI Summer Music Camp and held that position for three years. These

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<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that jazz, when played in nightclubs, may not also function as a symbol of cultural identity or that entertainment is not a purpose for jazz at other social events.

experiences provided me with a chance to observe the enculturation process within a formal setting.

My experiences at the AAMI added an extra dimension to my understanding the parameters of black musical life in Pittsburgh. My work as a teacher and camp director and other activities with the AAMI brought me into a wider social circle. In the process of dealing with students, parents, church groups, community leader, and civic and government organizations, I was able to gain a fuller perspective regarding the meaning of music in black society. I came to realize that, not only through my knowledge of music and jazz drumming, but also as an individual in society, the people I came into contact with accepted me as being able to make a contribution to their lives. I consider my relationship with the people surrounding the AAMI to be special. In many ways there is little distinction between the fieldwork as an ethnographic technique and my lived experience of becoming a jazz drummer. Unlike researchers who have limited contact with the people and culture they are studying, I have been able to maintain an ongoing reciprocal relationship with my musical colleagues and friends. Of the former approach to research, African Musicologist Akin Euba has coined the phrase “drainage scholarship,” which, in his words, is used to describe the practice of ethnomusicology in which “The principle seems to be that you go into someone else’s culture, grab as much material as you can in as short a time as possible, then go back to your own culture and build up a lucrative career on what you have grabbed.”<sup>14</sup>

My approach to fieldwork is not without precedent in ethnomusicological studies. In “Integrating Objectivity and Experience in Ethnomusicological Studies,” Nketia (1985: 15-16) points out;

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<sup>14</sup> Akin Euba, “Issues in Africanist Musicology” in *Revitalizing African Music and Performance Studies in Higher Education* (University of Michigan, African Music Forum, April 6-8, 2000)

Although he must work as an outsider at the moment of investigation in order to gain objective information, it is now customary not to limit field work to this kind of “objective contact,” but to supplement it with practical involvement in events as a way of “internalizing” aspects of a musical system and “tuning in” to the contexts of music making. It is this kind of experience—experience of the musical culture being investigated—that can properly be integrated into one’s analysis and interpretation of music as language, music as an object of aesthetic interest and music as culture.

It must be stressed that for the ethnomusicologist committed to knowledge about music and its cultural context, field work is not only a matter of data gathering, but also a learning process and a way of gaining access to aesthetic values and modes of expression of a musical culture.

Doing ethnographic fieldwork in Pittsburgh allowed me the opportunity for continuous study of the scene, and this study utilizes extensive field observation and first hand account oral data. As a musician I attended rehearsals in which, after technical considerations such as key and chord structures were worked out, and the concern to “get it right,” the discussion of aesthetic principles that guide performance were often the focus of the session. My status as a musician allowed me to interact with participants in the scene in meaningful ways that enabled me to bridge certain musical and cultural gaps.

Over the spring of 1996, I was able to observe Roger Humphries work with his students at the Creative and Performing Arts High School (CAPA), which is part of the Pittsburgh Public school system. I took a few formal lessons with Humphries and Harris. However, long-term study was impossible due to lack of funds on my part. Mr. Tucker, on occasion, provided me with informal instruction on brush technique.

## 1.8 ORAL HISTORY

According to Portia Maulsby (1985: 26), the Black oral tradition serves as a repository to “communicate and document the philosophies, values, attitudes, aspirations, feelings, hardships, relationships, work experiences, social status, community life, mode of behavior, aesthetic priorities—in other words, the world view which has been a part of Black culture throughout each stage of its evolution.”

This study is unique in that it uses firsthand information from interview with the individuals under study. This type of data belongs to the category generally known as oral history. However, the associated terms are often used interchangeably, which leads to confusion in their meanings. For the sake of clarity, in this study I use the terms oral history, oral tradition, oral testimony, and oral historian following the understanding of David Henige. Henige defines the terminology in his discussion of oral history as follows:

[Oral history is] the study of the recent past by means of life histories or personal recollections, where informants speak about their own experiences. In order for anything to be regarded as a tradition, it should be widely practiced or understood in a society and it must have been handed down for a few generations. . . .Strictly speaking, oral traditions are those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture. Versions that are not widely known should rightfully be considered as ‘testimony’ and if they relate to recent events they belong to the realm of oral history. . . . In contrast, ‘oral historian’ is used collectively to include anyone who seeks to learn about the past by word of mouth, whether the most recent past or a more remote one. (1982: 2)



### **1.8.1 Ethnographic Interviews**

All three of the artists under discussion know that I am writing a thesis paper as part of my degree requirements for the graduate program at the University. All were willing to help me and agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of my research. They expressed concern about whether I understood the nature of their work and the musical, theoretical, and philosophical concepts we discussed. Over time my relationship with them progressed to that of mutual friendship, and this relationship continues as such today. In this study, due to the limited existence of published literature on Pittsburgh's jazz history and the jazz drumming tradition itself, oral testimonies became a primary source of knowledge about musical life among the city's jazz musicians. The interviews I conducted for this study may be divided into two classes: interviews with the three artists under consideration and interviews with members of the Pittsburgh jazz community. This second class of interviews was necessary to gather information on the local context and gain perspective on the three artists. The interviewees included former students of, as well as musicians from, the same playing networks as the artists under discussion. Interviews were recorded on tape and later transcribed. Also, throughout the fieldwork process, I had numerous conversations, ranging from casual observations to in-depth discussions, with other participants on the Pittsburgh jazz scene. These conversations often yielded bits of information with significant historical or cultural meaning. Notes from these conversations were incorporated into the data for analysis.

As for the drummers under consideration here, the purpose of the interviews was to elicit information on three main areas; (1) the basic facts of the individual's biography, (2) early musical experiences and the learning process, (3) individual performance concepts regarding the

art of jazz drumming. Taped interviews were conducted face to face, and with few exceptions,<sup>15</sup> took place at the home of the interviewee. In response to my questions on biographical facts, Mr. Harris provided me with a short autobiography and Roger Humphries directed me toward his internet site, which contained biographical information. Both Harris and Humphries maintain promotional materials<sup>16</sup> for distribution to potential clients. In addition, brief career profiles of Harris and Humphries appear in Feather and Gitler's *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*.<sup>17</sup> Facts on Mr. Tucker's musical biography were limited to the information gleaned from our interviews.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, once we got together, the interview process itself was a smooth one. Joe Harris and Roger Humphries were more familiar with the journalistic interview format, having been interviewed numerous times for newspapers and trade publications. However, all three drummers readily adapted to the ethnographic format utilized in this study.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes they would stop talking and ask to make sure I was getting their point, or upon hearing the mechanical click, pause in their talk until I had turned the tape over and resumed recording. My intent was to approach the interviews as closely as possible to the norms of conversation that goes on amongst musicians in the jazz community. Here again, I found my role as a performer to be

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<sup>15</sup> The first interview I conducted with Joe Harris was done in my car on the way to a local music store! A few of the interviews I did with Roger Humphries were held were at a local restaurant where he was performing regularly.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Harris provided me with other materials from his promotional packet, including copies of several short articles that appeared in newspapers or magazines.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* (Oxford University Press, 1999). Harris is listed in earlier versions of this work, *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties* (New York: Horizon Press, 1966) and *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Seventies* (New York: Horizon Press, 1976). Roger Humphries is also listed in *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties*.

<sup>18</sup> By comparing Mr. Tucker's recollections of musical life in Philadelphia in the forties, fifties, and sixties with Lewis Porter's descriptive writing on the Philly scene during the same era in his study of John Coltrane (1994), I was able to corroborate much of the information given in the Tucker interviews.

<sup>19</sup> In my early interviews, one of the musicians purported his assumption that the journalistic format was in play. His responses to my questions were rather short, and he would indicate that he had completed his response to a particular question by stating, "Next question." In our subsequent interviews I learned to wait out these requests in silence, thereby encouraging him to elaborate on his initial response as well as orienting him to the ethnographic interview, which was an important part of the methodology employed in this study.

advantageous. As a fellow drummer, I could relate to the musicians' performance concerns more closely than another instrumentalist or non-performer. The interviewees could assume my knowledge of the fundamental concepts of jazz drumming. These assumptions allowed our interviews to be more of a sharing of information between junior and senior members of the same profession, which, in turn, led to detailed discussions of musical techniques and concepts.

Another source for jazz oral histories are the interviews that are featured in jazz magazines and books written for the general public. These materials are most often presented uncritically with little or no contextual commentary. Even so, these materials provide useful information. Peretti's comments about the materials found in the Smithsonian Institute's Jazz Oral History Project (JOHP) apply here as well. Peretti argues for the veracity of jazz oral history testimonies despite factors that limit, but do not prohibit their usefulness.

Peretti and Welburn note that interviews with musicians have been central to the jazz community almost since the inception of the music.<sup>20</sup> According to Peretti, informal interviews with musicians conducted by jazz popularizers and historians, few with any training in oral history methods, led to the publication of jazz literature in the form of "as-told-to" autobiographies, the digest of musician's recollections as well as anthologies of jazz interviews. These materials, along with interviews published in jazz magazines, are most often presented uncritically with little or no contextual commentary. Peretti suggests that the defining difference between the informal jazz interview and the scholarly oral history interview has more to do with the interviewer rather than the person being interviewed. He finds that the "interviewer's level of preparation, goals, question topics, and the intended final form of the interview help to

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<sup>20</sup> Burton Peretti, "Speaking in the Groove: Oral History and Jazz" *Journal Of American History* (September 2001), 582-595; and Ron Welburn, "Toward Theory and Method With The Jazz Oral History Project," *Black Music Research Journal*, 7 (Spring 1986), 79-95.

determine whether or not the interview is an oral history.”<sup>21</sup> He notes that as advocates for jazz, interviewers from the jazz community (those without training in oral history methods) are less inclined to “challenge the musicians to dig deeper into their thoughts and experiences” and they “rarely analyze critically the circumstances surrounding their interviews and the veracity of the musician’s statements.”<sup>22</sup> Peretti argues these factors, while limiting, do not prohibit the usefulness of such materials. He finds that much of what is considered jazz history is lacking in written documentation and verbal evidence is often contradictory. The historian using oral testimony should seek to verify the historical record by corroborating evidence. For example, he suggests comparing interviews to each other and to written sources from the period in question. Further, the historian must work to contextualize the information gathered. For Peretti, the veracity of oral histories may lie in the speaker’s notion of things, and the testimonies speak a ‘truth’ of the phenomenological variety.<sup>23</sup>

As oral history interviews figure prominently in this study, and despite my expressed intent, it may be helpful to remember that, in actuality, an interview is not a normal conversation. Bruce Jackson’s text on fieldwork includes a chapter on the issues surrounding the interview process most useful in folklore and ethnographic studies. As a form of human discourse, the ethnographic interview can become quite complex in scope and detail.

The interview situation permits you, the interviewer, to ask far more questions about far more subjects and in far greater detail than would be permissible or reasonable in conversation (about the same subjects). Once in the interview mode, most informants understand that a greater measure of detail may be necessary, so they don’t automatically think you’re stupid if you ask for a step-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 585.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Peretti, 584-586.

by-step explanation of a process or if you ask the names of things or a lot of other questions.<sup>24</sup>

A technique known as the feedback interview<sup>25</sup> was of particular use for identifying topics of significance and to generate questions for further discussion. This technique allows the interviewee to respond to or trigger recall thinking<sup>26</sup> while viewing or listening to tapes of performances previously recorded. With my tape recorder running, I would play recordings and ask the interviewee to openly comment on any performance aspect that caught his attention. I could stop the playback recording and explore an idea while it was still fresh in the mind of the interviewee. I also used an adaptation of the feedback technique in which I would attend live performances, and during break or after the gig, ask the musicians to respond to my questions about the immediate performance and record their responses in my field journal for future discussion. This later variation worked especially well with Roger Humphries who, for a period of several months during the field experience, I could hear performing three nights a week.

Recent trends in jazz oral history practices are reflected in the collections housed at the University of Pittsburgh. Under the direction of Nathan Davis the University of Pittsburgh-Sonny Rollins International Jazz Archives has become a valuable resource for jazz scholars. Davis developed guidelines for interviewers which gave the musicians being interviewed the authority to emphasize the matters that they found most important to their careers and musical development. The archive contains a wealth of material culture related to jazz history. The scope of its oral history collection is expansive and includes interviews with producers,

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Jackson, *Fieldwork* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 89.

<sup>25</sup> See Ruth and Verlon Stone, "Event, Feedback, and Analysis: Research Media in the Study of Music Events," *Ethnomusicology*, 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Example of Joe Harris at Hill College listening to Carnegie Hall concert more than fifty years after the performance.

promoters, music critics, and jazz educators and other participants on the scene. By not limiting itself to performers only, the International Jazz Archive holds a rich source of data from which scholars may develop a broad understanding of the complexities of the jazz world.

The work of the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) represents a community-oriented approach to oral history. The organization was started by surviving members of the Black Musicians Union Local 471 in an effort to document the history of Pittsburgh's African American jazz community. The goal of the project is to produce a book length study as well as ongoing programming. Working with university professors and public sector arts professionals the musicians of AAJPSP have guided the direction of the project while also serving as both informants and "community historians." Their archive is located in the University of Pittsburgh's United Electrical Workers/Labor Collection. While many of the musicians in the AAJPSP project have made few, if any, recordings, their importance to Pittsburgh's jazz community as mentors and model performers to successive generations of musicians is significant. The testimonies collected by the AAJPSP are helping to write the history of a "local scene" and in doing so provide a balance to the jazz historian's tendency to focus attention on national figures and discographical data. This material includes transcribed interviews with Joe Harris and Roger Humphries as well as other former members of AFM Local 471. In addition, Butch Perkins, a jazz collector, radio personality, and longtime observer of the Pittsburgh jazz scene provided access to the audio portion of an interview he recorded with Joe Harris (date unknown).

## 1.9 JAZZ RECORDINGS

The importance of sound recordings in the study of jazz cannot be overestimated. The development of the recording industry parallels the emergence of jazz as a unique American art form. Both were relatively new mediums in 1917 when the first jazz recordings were made. Most of the existing jazz recordings were made, and continue to be made, for commercial entertainment.<sup>27</sup> DeVeaux argues that of the many ways in which jazz differs from European art music, none is as dramatic as the means by which it is preserved and disseminated. “The jazz tradition as we know it could not exist without recording technology. The special nuances of jazz – the details of rhythm, timbre, pitch variation, and dynamics, to say nothing of the art of improvisation – simply cannot be accurately represented with conventional notation. For better or for worse, the history of jazz is a history of recordings.”<sup>28</sup>

Jazz scholar, Dr. Nathan Davis, notes the significant impact these recordings have had on the written history of jazz. Davis cited the example of John Jackson, the Kansas City alto saxophonist, who, although an influential player among other musicians was given little attention by historians due to the fact he recorded on a limited basis. The assumption here is that only those who are “worthy to be recorded” are “worthy to be written about.” As Brian Priestly observes, “In the past, most authors ostensibly treating the history of jazz wrote instead about their favorite records. . . . But what is especially confusing is that such writers did not admit to

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<sup>27</sup> There are exceptions to this condition. For example, the Baby Dodds recordings made by Alan Lomax in the 1940s for the Library of Congress were specifically designed to document Dodds’ ideas on drumming in the New Orleans tradition. They include recorded conversation between Dodds and Lomax, as well as Dodds’ explanations and insider perspective on his drumming concepts along with musical demonstrations.

<sup>28</sup> Scott DeVeaux, “Bebop and the Recording Industry: The 1942 AFM Recording Ban Reconsidered,” in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 41, no.1 (1988), 126

themselves or to their readers that they were only writing about what had been recorded, implying that this was the only jazz worth writing about.”<sup>29</sup>

While recognizing their commercial purpose, Davis feels that these recordings have value to the researcher, in their own right, as historical documents. As sonic texts, jazz recordings not only make audible the history of jazz to all that can hear, they also are utilized as a primary resource for learning to perform the music.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the course of this study, musicians relayed to me their use of listening to recordings to get a general sense of jazz history, or as one musician put it, “to check out what the cats were doing back then.”<sup>31</sup> In discussing their early training, these musicians recalled having spent seemingly unending hours listening to their favorite players on records and copying their solos note for note, which they would later put into effect during performance. This type of intensive listening is crucial for the jazz neophyte, not only in that it provides one with model performances, but as a pedagogical technique, it allows one to develop the ability to hear a sound, whether originating from an external source like a record or from within one’s mind, and immediately transfer that sound through the medium of their instrument. This type of skill, while useful to all musicians, is crucial to those who perform within a tradition in which much of what is considered composition is spontaneously improvised. In addition, recordings serve as source material for compositions and arrangements, which the musicians transcribe to paper or commit to memory directly from the disc.

The audio recordings I used for this study fall into two categories; those made for commercial purposes and those recorded in the field. Collectively the commercial output of the

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<sup>29</sup> Opinion cited. For an in-depth discussion of the impact of and theoretical orientation to the use of recordings in the writing of jazz history, see Jed Rasula, “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History,” in *Jazz Among the Discourse*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 135.

<sup>30</sup> Field notes, Nathan Davis, personal conversation.

<sup>31</sup> Field notes, Kenny Fisher, personal conversation.



musicians in this study represents over fifty years of recorded jazz history. The commercial recordings I collected cover the time period from 1945 to 1997. As “sonic texts” commercial jazz recordings serve as an important source of data for our analytic studies. However, they have certain limitations that the analyst needs to be aware of when assessing various aspects of the jazz tradition; a number of which are discussed below. In the pre-1960s recordings, the sound quality tends to suffer due to the limited recording technology of the time. In particular, the quality of the drum sound captured on disc is less than ideal. Certain aspects of the sonic detail, most notably aspects of timbre, are indistinguishable on the recordings. Given that timbre is an important aspect of jazz drumming, this limitation is unfortunate.

The constraints are also a factor in commercial recordings. Again, due to technological weakness, the length of individual tracks on the 78-rpm recordings issued during the forties was limited to four minutes or less, whereas in live situations, the length of individual song performances often exceeded the four-minute limitation. These recordings, typically produced on 10-inch discs, held two tracks per side or a total of twenty minutes, whereas the average length of a 12-inch LP recording, introduced in the 1950s, increased to forty minutes. The compact disc, introduced in the 1980s, may contain over an hour of recorded sound.

Due to the technological limitations of recordings there is often a discrepancy between the music of recorded performances and the music performed at live events. For example, the booming low frequencies of the bass drum would interfere with capturing the sound of the rest of the ensemble. Accurate representations of the cymbal were also difficult to obtain with the result often being a continuous hissing sound. As a result, early jazz drummers were forced to muffle their drums and to use the woodblock as a substitute with which to play the cymbal rhythms when recording in the studio whereas, by most accounts, this was not the practice used in live

performance. In the case of Kenny Clarke and Max Roach it is thought that the recording engineer's inability to capture the soft four-four pulse achieved through "feathering" the bass drum had a direct influence on jazz performance practice. Unable to hear the bass drum on recordings, musicians assumed it was no longer being played, and therefore many dropped the practice of keeping time with the bass drum.<sup>32</sup> While the length of individual song performances in the "live" situation could be adjusted in relation to the ebb and flow of audience response, the time limitations of the pre-1960s recordings, in some circumstances could be seen as a constraint on the musician's creativity. One should also consider the musician's perspective towards the recording process itself. Several of the jazz musicians I interviewed expressed the view that the best approach to a recording session is for one to limit the amount of "stretching out," that is, to play more conservatively when the goal of the recording is to achieve a balanced portrait of a particular set of compositions. Not all musicians agree with this idea, yet the principle is recognized throughout the jazz community. Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers of the 1960s were known to make their studio recordings after the repertoire had been honed through several months of performance on the road. On the other hand, Miles Davis' bands from the same period showed an increasing propensity toward composing in the studio. In many instances, the recorded performances captured the first time the accompanying musicians had ever even heard the compositions let alone played them prior to the session.<sup>33</sup> These ensembles represent two

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this see Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1992), 124-125 and Rick Mattingly, *The Drummer's Time: Conversations with the Great Drummers of Jazz*. (Cedar Grove, NJ: Modern Drummer Publications, Inc. 1998.), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Liner notes to Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, Columbia CK-65337, 1997. And *Nefertiti*, Columbia CK-46113, 1998. For a discussion of how time considerations influence the recording of studio performances see Duke Pearson's notes to the Grant Green recording *Idle Moments*, Blue Note Records BL-84154, 1999.

distinct approaches to recording jazz, what Bob Bowman calls, “composition-and product-oriented” and the “performance-and process-oriented.”<sup>34</sup>

The audio recordings I made in the field were done on a Marantz Superscope PMD-101 monophonic cassette recorder utilizing either the built-in condenser microphone or a MPG external microphone. For music performance recordings, I usually followed the same general process each time. I would arrive early at the site, while the musicians were setting up, and secure permission to record from the musicians before setting up my equipment. As the fieldwork progressed, most of the musicians involved came to know me and were aware of my work. My identity as a student and fellow musician may have been a factor. Therefore, my requests did not appear too unusual and securing permission to record was never an issue. In some instances, bands members would ask me to make them a copy of a particular evening’s performance. Field recordings differ from commercial ones in that one has less control over the information that gets on tape. An advantage of the Marantz recorder is its half-speed function, which increases the recording time to twice the tape’s original length. For example, a 90-minute tape, normally 45 minute per side, can be increased to a total length of 180 minutes or 90 minutes per side. The point here is not just a matter of economics, that is, more time for the same amount of money. Using this function I was able to record an entire set of performance, including what goes on in the time between tunes, without interruption. I was able to pick up musician’s conversations between tunes while also documenting the audience response to their performance.

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<sup>34</sup> Bob Bowman, “Stax,” In Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maulsby eds. *African American Music: An Introduction*. (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 452-469.

Video recordings also played a limited role in this study. Video allows one to document the kinesthetic and other aspects of nonverbal behavior associated with jazz performance. This layer of data proved instructive in the analysis of areas of aesthetic significance.

In addition to audio and video recordings I made in the field, I also had access to personal recordings made by musicians or other members of the local jazz community.<sup>35</sup> Jazz musicians often document their own performances for later study or to share with colleagues and family members.

### **1.10 TRANSCRIPTIONS OF MUSICAL SAMPLES**

To paraphrase Charles Seeger, the purpose of transcription in jazz studies is to provide a descriptive report of how a specific performance actually did sound, the objective being to represent it in visual form, as well as define and exemplify the significant features of a piece of music. A transcription takes a musical performance and freezes it; so to speak, so that one may have time to ponder the sounds represented in relation to their musical and cultural implications. Jazz transcribers have been aided by technological advances in recording playback technology. The use of variable speed tape and compact disc players, linear and elapsed time counters, A-B loops, automatic repeat and memory functions are a common practice for serious transcribers. There has been limited use of auto transcription machines while computer software programs are beginning to show promise as a tool for jazz transcription and analysis.

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<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to the following people and organizations for the use of their recordings: Dr. Nelson Harrison, owner of Time Slice Archives; Butch Perkins; the late Paul Crenshaw; Ron Tucker; Delano “Volcano” Choy; and material from the archives of The Afro-American Music Institute, Inc. In addition, Hosea Taylor let me read a manuscript copy of his autobiography, and Roger Humphries and Joe Harris shared photos and other materials from their personal scrap books for my perusal.

A problem central to the ethnomusicology of jazz is the efficiency of using Western notation to represent the characteristic elements found within the music. Jazz musicians have developed particular ways of phrasing, articulating, and accenting that are difficult to represent visually. For example, as is the convention in jazz performance, evenly noted eighth notes are assumed to be swung, that is, played with an accent on the second of two notes or the upbeat. Additionally, in jazz performance, the realization of the same passage of written eighth notes may differ according to tempo and feel. Much of the subtlety of performance is related to this fact. In medium to fast tempos, eighth notes are typically interpreted using a subdivision of the triplet. At faster speeds, the triplet “flattens” out somewhat closer to an even eighth note feel. At slow tempos, the space between the first and second partial is longer, and the figure is interpreted as a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth, while at extremely slow tempos, the interpretation may be closer to a doubly dotted eighth followed by a thirty-second note.

Also problematic is the difficulty of representing in visual form the variety of musical timbres and other expressive elements one encounters in jazz music. Drummers, for example, employ a variety of sticks, mallets and brushes according to the desired effect. Drum sticks can be made of various woods with different densities and come in numerous sizes and weight with distinct shapes at the playing tip. One can find, among others, round, oval, acorn, or diamond shaped tips each creating a distinct timbre based on the relation of fundamental to overtones generated when striking a cymbal or drum. The wire brush when drawn across the drum head produces a sound similar to that of “white noise.” These factors can cause problems in regards to representing the sound with standard music notation. Vocalists and instrumentalists have similarly developed unique approaches to producing the distinct sounds which they employ as expressive elements in improvisation and which in turn help to create their individual musical

identities. The use of cries, moans, shouts, smears, grunts, growls, vocables, horn mutes, guitar slides, etc. are all put to good effect in the course of performance.

While recognizing these limitations, it should be noted that the standard Western notation system is used widely throughout the jazz tradition and is accepted by most jazz musicians. Its use in ethnomusicological studies of jazz has been well established.<sup>36</sup> However, as jazz musicians are quick to point out, and I am paraphrasing Nettl's words on Chopin, notations need to be interpreted, that is, "one must read the notes with the aural knowledge of how it (jazz) is supposed to sound."<sup>37</sup>

Most jazz transcriptions are done using commercially available recordings as the primary source of data. Since these recordings are widely circulated, a large body of literature has grown around them. In the past twenty years, commercially published jazz transcriptions have come to make up a large portion of the pedagogic materials aimed at scholars, music educators, students, and practicing musicians. Publications such as, *The Real Book*, the *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, Andrew White's *John Coltrane Transcriptions*, and Jamey Abersold's 100-plus volume series of play-along recordings contain transcriptions of important compositions and improvisations by significant musicians found within the jazz tradition.<sup>38</sup> These books and collections have found their way into the scholarly research on jazz and serve as reference materials for comparative

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<sup>36</sup> See Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Chicago: (University of Chicago Press: 1994.); Charles Keil, "Motion and Feeling through Music," in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, by Steven Feld and Charles Keil, 53-76. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.) Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.)

<sup>37</sup> Bruno Nettl, "I Can't Say a Thing Until I've Seen the Score," in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*, (University of Illinois Press, 1983), 65-81.

<sup>38</sup> Jamey Abersold, *A New Approach to Improvisation*, New Albany, Ind.: Jamey Abersold; 1970--2006. Andrew White, *John Coltrane Transcriptions*, Washington, D.C.: Andrew's Music; 1993. *Charlie Parker Omnibook*. New York: Atlantic Music Corporation; 1978. *The Real Book* (information on its publication not available)

data, and as a point of departure for in-depth musical and cultural analysis.<sup>39</sup> In the case of *The Real Book*, the origins of the book and its circulation in jazz education circles has itself become a subject of research.<sup>40</sup>

As a final thought on the problem of reducing jazz performance to paper, pianist, Chick Corea observes; “Miles’ [Davis] solos are really interesting to look at on music paper, because there’s nothing to them. On a Trane [John Coltrane] solo or Charlie Parker solo, you can string the notes out and see all these phrases and harmonic ideas, patterns, all kinds of things. Miles doesn’t use patterns. He doesn’t string notes out. It’s weird. Without the expression, and without the feeling he puts into it, there’s nothing there.”<sup>41</sup>

In the chapters that follow I will explore the musical and cultural aspects of the art of three jazz drummers living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Chapter Two will introduce the three artists under consideration in this study, and provide an overview of their professional careers. Chapter Three provides an orientation to the development of modern jazz drumming and the aesthetic dimension of African American jazz. Chapter Four offers a musical ethnography of jazz in Pittsburgh’s African American community. Chapter Five focuses on the enculturation process of the three musicians under consideration. I will discuss their significant early musical experiences, formal and informal musical training, and other social factors that had an impact on

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<sup>39</sup> See Karen Lee Fants, M.A. *The Blues of Charlie Parker*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University; 1964) and Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.)

<sup>40</sup> This research was being conducted by Peter Oh, a graduate student at Cal Arts in Los Angeles. His theory was that the transcriptions in the book originated as a class exercise for students at the Berklee College in Boston. As such, they were filled with mistakes in rhythm, harmony and melody. Additionally, the book contains a very subjective sampling of the jazz tradition reflecting the tastes of a select few individuals at a particular point in time (music students in Boston circa late-sixties and early seventies.) However, as the book has been widely circulated, the compositions within have come to form the core repertoire for college lab bands as well as numerous ad-hoc jazz ensembles around the nation. Mr. Oh was interested in assessing the impact of this book on the transmission of the jazz tradition as well as tracing its route(s) of circulation through various jazz networks. Mr. Oh passed away in 2003. At this point I’m not sure what has happened to his research.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Robert Wasler, “Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis,” in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, edited by Krin Gabbard, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995.), 180.

their musical development. Chapter Six will focus on the personalization of jazz drumming style. We will discuss the three artists under consideration as both accompanists and soloists. Special attention will be paid to the individual's aesthetic decision-making processes and preferences in jazz drumming. Chapter Seven will provide a summary of the musical and cultural components of jazz drumming as manifest in the work of the three local Pittsburgh artists. Conclusions will be drawn as to the nature of these artists' individual styles in relation to the greater jazz tradition in which they function.



## **2.0 THE DRUMMERS**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief introduction to the three drummers under consideration in this study. Roger Humphries, Ron Tucker, and Joe Harris, all of whom live and practice their art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Humphries and Harris are native sons of the city and both continue to reside in the neighborhoods of their youth; the North Side and Manchester respectively. Mr. Tucker relocated to Pittsburgh from Philadelphia and currently resides in the city's Oakland district.

### **2.1 A SHARED MUSICAL HERITAGE**

While each musician has a unique personal approach to jazz drumming all three share a common musical and cultural background. All three are African Americans who spent their formative years in the era in which racial segregation was, as in the rest of the United States, very much in effect throughout Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Outside of attending integrated public schools most of their early social life took place within the culturally rich environment of the various black neighborhoods in their respective cities. It was in this environment that Harris, Tucker, and Humphries, encouraged by family, friends and neighbors developed and matured as musicians.

All three musicians are practitioners of modern jazz drumming. In its common usage the term modern jazz refers to the related approaches to jazz composition and performance which developed between the 1940s and mid-1960s; and can be seen in the musical continuum known as Be Bop, Hard Bop, and Post-Bop styles. Modern Jazz is characterized by harmonic based improvisation, a propulsive rhythmic quality known as swing, blues feeling, polyrhythmic drumming and increased harmonic and compositional complexity.

For all three artists interest in music and drumming took hold at an early age. Humphries and Tucker also spent time learning trumpet before abandoning that instrument to focus on drums. Harris and Tucker had private lessons in snare drum rudiments. All three musicians played percussion in concert band and orchestra while in school. Here they also received instruction in the elements of music theory and reading notation. However, when it comes to jazz drumming, they consider themselves to be self-taught, their development taking place through performance experience and mentoring within the informal, community based, educational system that complements the African American jazz tradition. Further, all three musicians consider the tag, “self-taught,” despite its negative connotations when directed toward black musicians, not as a down-grading epithet but rather, with full knowledge of the tradition they bear, as a source of pride.

In this regard, Harris, Tucker and Humphries all concur on the importance of coming of musical age in an era when live performance was the primary mode of entertainment. Musicians of their ilk provided accompaniment for all kinds of entertainments; dance acts, floor shows, comedy, and singing as well as instrumental interludes between acts, music for dancing couples or for simply listening.

## Individuality

In this study we recognize that an individual's playing style is formed as much on personal taste and aesthetic sensibility as it is on the established norms of a musical tradition. Jazz musicians, in particular, place a high priority on developing a unique musical identity which serves to set them apart from others who play the same instrument. This unique musical identity is also the result of significant lived experience as in the oft quoted phrase attributed to Charlie Parker, "If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn." And, of course, one individual's lived experience cannot be shared or experienced in the same way as that of another. Therefore, while these three drummers do share a common musical and cultural background there are other factors, some seemingly intangible, which serve to distinguish each musician. What follows here is brief a discussion of the general characteristics which help differentiate these three individuals as drummers.

All three musicians studied the recordings of the leading drummers of the day with Jo Jones, Art Blakey, and Max Roach being of particular influence. They also had opportunities to see and hear these same drummers perform live on tour in clubs and concert halls. Yet, all three musicians cite the fact that they're just as likely to have been influenced by many fine local drummers of whom they had regular access; each of whom contributed in part to their personal "recipe" for drumming.

Both Mr. Harris and Mr. Tucker were born in the twenties and grew up during the Great Depression. In jazz history, this was the era when big bands and swing dancing dominated the public's imagination. As such, Harris and Tucker gravitated toward big band music in their youth. Yet both witnessed the transition from big band swing to small group bebop jazz which began to occur during the war years and continued through the forties to the fifties when the big

bands had, for the most part disappeared.<sup>42</sup> With this came a change in the drum set itself from the big showy sets of the swing era which featured large size drums and various percussion paraphernalia to the compact sets with small drums and few cymbals.

Although less than three years separate Mr. Harris and Mr. Tucker, their approaches to drumming demonstrate differences, which I feel, may be attributed to how their career arc relates to historical trends in jazz. In 1944, at age seventeen, Harris left Pittsburgh to tour with a string of territory bands. Harris had a solid grounding in professional experiences playing shows and in big band settings. A self-identified bebopper, by age twenty he had mastered the bebop drumming style well enough that in 1946 he took over the drum chair left vacant by Kenny Clarke in the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra. Tucker, on the other hand, matured as a musician in the early, to mid-fifties. In his late teens he played in local big bands, including the one led by Jimmy Heath, an ensemble that covered many of the same arrangements originated by Gillespie. Yet, he emerged as a professional during the period in which the small group oriented hard bebop eclipsed big bands and his basic concept is consistent with those players of hard bebop.

Roger Humphries, the youngest of the three drummers, wasn't born until 1944 when bebop was in full bloom. He began playing professionally in the late fifties and by then had felt the influences of the fully formed hard bebop styles of Max Roach and Art Blakey (both of whom were also leading bebop drummers.) Due to changing trends in the music Humphries had limited personal experience with big band drumming as a youth. Listening to recordings provided a substitute for live big bands. However, Humphries was fully immersed in the hard bebop which began to dominate the record stores, juke boxes and bandstands found throughout Pittsburgh's black neighborhoods in the fifties and sixties. Humphries playing is also informed by the time

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<sup>42</sup> For a musician's account of this transition see, Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.)

keeping trends associated with post-bop style of jazz especially the innovations created by Tony Williams. Although Humphries is only a year older, he cites Williams as having an influence on his musical thinking. He first heard Williams, early in his career, while the two toured on the same bill with their respective employers – Horace Silver and Miles Davis.

When considering the drum set, it is important to note that, in actuality, it is a composite instrument made up of drums and cymbals of varying sizes. An individual's taste and sensibilities are reflected in the particular conglomeration he chooses to assemble. This is consistent with the jazz musicians' strive to create a unique musical identity. Additionally, this fact serves to further distinguish the individuals under consideration in this study. Although all three musicians own a number of drum sets, at the time of this research, each drummer consistently used the same basic set up regardless of musical context.

Mr. Harris drum set consists of a 14 x 22" bass drum, 5-1/2 x 14" wooden snare drum, 9x13" mounted tom, 14 x 14" and 16 x 16" floor toms. He uses two 20" cymbals and a pair of 14" hi-hats. This set is manufactured by the Leedy Company and is of 1950s vintage. Humphries set is a more recent model from the early 1990s and is crafted by the Drum Workshop Company. It consists of a 16 x 20" bass drum, 4 x 14" snare, 8 x 10" and 8 x 12" mounted toms and a 14 x 14" floor tom. He uses 14" hi-hats, two 20" cymbals and an 18" cymbal mounted above the toms on the bass drum. Tucker's drum set is comprised of a 14 x 18" bass drum, 5-1/2 x 14" snare drum, 8 x 12" mounted tom, 14 x 14 floor tom and made by the Slingerland Company.

Both Humphries and Harris have been known to alter their basic set up from time to time. However, of the three drummers, Tucker is the one most likely to vary his set up in regards to snare and cymbal selection. While the bass and toms remain consistent, Tucker has several snare

drums of differing size and materials in his collection. He'll change these periodically in order to achieve a different overall balance of sound within his set. For cymbals he typically uses two 20" rides and 14" hi-hats, but he'll often swap out the rides for other sizes in his collection. Or, he'll augment his set up for a particular performance, adding up to three more cymbals of varying size and weight and thereby expanding the tonal palette with which to color the music.

Chapters five and six of this study treat the formative experiences and the individual approach to performance of each musician in detail. We conclude this chapter with a summary account of each drummer's musical career. The material that follows is culled from record liner notes, publicity sources, and jazz encyclopedias or taken from materials provided to me by the individual under discussion.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.2 JOE HARRIS

Joseph Allison Harris was born on December 23, 1926 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He grew up on Pittsburgh's North side in the Manchester neighborhood. Mr. Harris' interest in rhythm and drumming came early in life. He recalls, as a child, beating on the family dining table with knives and spoons. As his musical interest continued, his parents eventually bought him an elemental drum set. After having played various jazz and dance gigs around Pittsburgh his

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<sup>43</sup> Charlie Mack. Liner notes, Introducing Jackie Mclean. Fresh Sound Records, FSR-CD83, 1989  
Liner notes, *Carl Arter: Song From Far Away*. Earwig, LPS 4903, 1984.  
Leonard Feather. *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.)  
Joe Harris. *Autobiographical Sketch of Joe Harris, Drummer*. manuscript, n.d.  
[www.rogerlumphries.com](http://www.rogerlumphries.com), (13 June 1996)

professional career began in earnest in 1944, the year he graduated from high school and joined a tour with Luis “Snookum” Russell’s territory band.

In 1946 he moved to New York City to join Dizzy Gillespie’s big band. Harris stayed with Gillespie on and off through 1948. He was featured with the Gillespie band in the film short, *Jivin’ In Be-Bop* and took part in the famed 1947 Gillespie-Parker concert at Carnegie Hall. The Gillespie rhythm section included Ray Brown, John Lewis, Milt Jackson and the legendary, Chano Pozo from whom Harris learned much about African and Afro-Cuban music. Harris spent ten years in New York where his varied experiences broadened and added depth to his musical career. He was in the house band at the Apollo Theater, played for dancers with the big band at the Savoy Ballroom and was featured in small groups at Birdland. Harris was hired to accompany some of the top jazz stars of the day including, Arnett Cobb, Billy Eckstein, James Moody, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Errol Garner and Charlie Parker. During this time he expanded his knowledge of European Classical music through percussion studies with Alfred Freise and membership in several amateur symphony orchestras.

In 1956, Harris moved to Sweden for a tour with Rolf Erickson and remained there until 1960. Harris’ four years in Sweden included time doing recordings, radio-television, and playing jazz and dance gigs. He also began a private teaching practice, wrote a monthly jazz/drum column for the Swedish magazine, *Orkester Journalen*, and furthered his knowledge of music through studies at the Swedish Conservatory of Music in Stockholm. In 1960 Harris joined the Quincy Jones Orchestra during a European tour of Harold Arlen’s jazz musical, *Free and Easy*.

Harris spent a good part of the sixties traveling. In Berlin, Germany he was staff percussionist on the national radio station program, *Radio Free Berlin*. Here he performed all types of music including dance, folk and popular, jazz and European Classical styles. With

Berlin as his base, Harris continued to play with various groups, including the Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland big band. He returned to Pittsburgh in 1966 where he maintained steady work playing jazz and dance jobs on the local scene. Harris relocated to the Hollywood, Los Angeles area in 1967. He continued to find work in local jazz clubs and festivals. Harris was the house drummer at the Playboy Club and performed in the movie, *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* He developed a teaching practice at the Eubanks School of Music and kept up his interest in percussion by playing in amateur orchestras around the L.A. area.

In 1970, Harris, once again, returned to Germany where he joined the Max Gregor television orchestra in Munich. He also played the Club Domicile in Munich with various groups led by Jimmy Woode. In 1972, after nearly thirty years of travel, Harris moved back to Pittsburgh where he continues to reside today. In the same year he became instructor of jazz history, jazz improvisation and total percussion at the University of Pittsburgh where he taught for over ten years.

Although Harris is most well known as a jazz drummer, he is quite adept as a performer and teacher on a variety of percussion instruments. In addition to the drum set, he plays timpani, vibraphone, marimba, timbale, conga and bongo drums. Harris interests extend to world music traditions. In 1983 he was awarded a six month fellowship to study traditional music in Japan. He has also visited Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, and attended Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, and Trinidad. Musical knowledge acquired during these travels is reflected through performances of his ad-hoc ensemble, *The Global Jazz Revue*. Harris has appeared on numerous recordings over the course of his career both in Europe and the United States. Some of the artists he has recorded with include Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, James Moody, Milt Jackson, Howard McGhee, Teddy Charles, King Pleasure, Clarke-Boland Big Band, Sahib Shihab, Rolf Erickson, and



Quincy Jones. Mr. Harris' contribution to jazz and world culture was given public acknowledgment when he was the honored dedicatee of the 1995 Mellon Jazz Festival in Pittsburgh.

### **2.3 RON TUCKER**

Harold Ronald Tucker was born on February 25, 1929 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His interest in drums was sparked by an uncle, and at age sixteen he began playing at local clubs and dance venues. Mr. Tucker was part of a group of young Philadelphians who embraced the bebop style of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. During 1949-50 he played in the Jimmy Heath Big Band, a group whose membership included John Coltrane and Benny Golson among others. In the early 1950s Tucker spent time living and working, including performances with the likes of Lester Young and Ben Webster, in New York City. During this period he became a member of Jackie McLean's group and in 1955 recorded in a quintet setting with the leader on his debut album, *Introducing Jackie McLean*. Between 1955 and 1969 Tucker was based primarily in Philadelphia. He worked with many of the local jazz and R&B greats. He also worked the resorts along the New Jersey Shore. Tucker was often called on to back up national artists performing in town and this in turn led to opportunities to tour with many of these same artists. Billie Holiday, Clifford Brown, Jimmie Oliver, Lee Morgan, John Coltrane, Benny Golson, Joe Morris, Jimmy Golden, Lou Donaldson, Percy and Jimmy Heath, are just a few of the artists he worked with in and around Philly. He also performed on several concerts at the Academy of Music including appearances with the Gene Ammons-Sonny Stitt Group, Bobby Timmons and McCoy Tyner.

Tucker's first visit to Pittsburgh came in 1957 when the Jackie McLean Quintet played a two week engagement at the Crawford Grill. After several more passes through the city with various groups he relocated to Pittsburgh in 1969 where he has remained since. Eventually, he married and raised his family here in the city. Since his arrival, Tucker has been a fixture on Pittsburgh's jazz scene. Although occasionally the nominal leader, as a sideman, Tucker is recognized for the hard driving swing and sense of color and dynamics he brings to the bandstand. He has performed with many of the established Pittsburgh greats including; Nathan Davis, Carl Arter, Mike Taylor, Jimmy Ponder, Pete Henderson, Spencer Bey, Kenny Fisher Jerry Betters, James Johnson Jr., Harry Cardillo, and Frank Cunimondo as well as a number of younger players such as; Dwayne Dolphin, Dave and Maureen Budway, Ian Gordon, Sandy Dowe, Howard Alexander, and Dan Wasson.

Tucker recorded infrequently throughout his career. He recalls playing on some sessions with Joe Morris' rhythm and blues band of the late forties but it is not clear if the recordings were ever released. He was featured on Jackie McLean's 1955 solo recording, *Introducing Jackie McLean*. His work in Pittsburgh is represented on at least two records from the eighties; Carl Arter's, *Song From far Away* (1984), and Dave and Maureen Budway's, *Jazz ... The Budway* (1989.)

## 2.4 ROGER HUMPHRIES

Roger L. Humphries, the youngest of the three drummers in this study, was born on January 30, 1944 in Pittsburgh's North Side neighborhood where he grew up and, as of this writing, continues to reside. Mr. Humphries started playing drums at age three and, by age ten, was a

regular winner of talent contests and featured on local radio broadcasts. He first began playing professionally around Pittsburgh at age fourteen. After completing high school in 1962 he went on the “chitlin’ circuit” as a member of the Stanley Turrentine-Shirley Scott Trio. In 1964 he joined Horace Silver’s quintet and toured throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. Upon leaving Silver’s group in 1966 he worked a stint with the Ray Charles Orchestra. Between 1962 and 1972 Humphries made his living as a full time jazz musician. His free-lance experience is vast and varied, for Mr. Humphries has played with a proverbial “who’s who” of jazz performers. These include; Nathan Davis, Joe Henderson, Freddie Hubbard, Lionel Hampton, Jack McDuff, Grant Green, Lee Morgan, Johnny Griffin, Herbie Mann, Milt Jackson, Joe Williams, Gene Harris, J. J. Johnson, Joe Williams, Jimmie Witherspoon, George Benson, Slide Hampton, Coleman Hawkins, and Clark Terry among others. Throughout the years Humphries has regularly performed at such legendary Pittsburgh nightspots as the Crawford Grill and the Hurricane Lounge. At age sixteen he fronted his own band at the Carnegie Music Hall. His musical travels have brought him to some of the world’s major jazz venues; Village Gate, Apollo Theater (New York); Pep’s Lounge and the Showboat (Philadelphia); The Penthouse (Seattle); Bohemian Caverns, Coconut Grove, Shelly Manne’s Manhole (LA); The Jazz Workshop (Boston); Ronnie Scott’s (London) and the Newport and Monterey Jazz Festivals. Mr. Humphries gave up touring in 1972 and returned to Pittsburgh to raise his family. With the exception of a few short excursions – most notably, a 1980 European tour with organist, Richard “Groove” Holmes -- he has remained in Pittsburgh ever since.

Mr. Humphries has recorded on numerous occasions throughout his career. Humphries is best known for his work with the Horace Silver group and he appears on the following: *Song For My Father*; *The Cape Verdean Blues*; *The Jody Grind*; *Re-Entry*. He can also be heard on

Nathan Davis' *Makatuka*; Carmell Jones' *Jay Hawk Talk*; Frank Cunimondo's *The Lamp is Low* and Jimmie Ponder's *James Street* among others. Humphries also put out two fine recordings of his own that feature the bands he leads around Pittsburgh -- The R. H. Factor; *This and That* and the Roger Humphries Big Band; *Never Give Up*.

Mr. Humphries maintains an active presence on the Pittsburgh jazz scene through regular performance with his ensembles, The R. H. Factor, and the Roger Humphries Big Band. He is a full-time teacher at the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts, (CAPA) where he teaches jazz drumming and percussion. In addition, he keeps a private drum studio along with part-time instructor duties at several local universities. Mr. Humphries is currently recognized as the "first call" jazz drummer in Pittsburgh and he's frequently called upon to back up visiting jazz artists at different venues throughout the city. Humphries is the recipient of numerous community recognition awards and the 1998 Mellon Jazz Festival was dedicated in his honor.

### **3.0 JAZZ AND THE AFRICAN MUSICAL CONTINUUM**

#### **3.1 AFRICAN ROOTS AND THE AFRICAN MUSICAL CONTINUUM**

While recognizing that jazz is derived from a complex of diverse musical practices, musicians rightly point out that its cultural origins are rooted in the black music tradition. The drummers I interviewed for this study all recognized the African core of their music, and took this premise to be fundamental in understanding their conceptual orientation to the music; an orientation that at its base relies on cultural memory. For example, Mr. Tucker spoke of his grandmother's penchant for "humming African tunes" while visiting the house he grew up in. Thus, by this statement he is placing himself in a lineage that can be traced back to the origins of the music. Roger Humphries spoke directly to the point in the following testimony:

I tell you what Ken, what we talking about, when I hear people speak of jazz, and, like everybody contributed to jazz ... but there are some things that are noted for people's culture and their religion by where they come from ethnically, that is theirs, ... you got to go back and give honestly, and give credit to where it came from. And where it [jazz] came from – its an African thing, you know, its an African thing, it started in the churches that we're talking about, there is all kinds of churches, Catholic church, Episcopalian church, all kinds of churches, but where this music came from, no matter who helped by adding onto it, ... it's a black [thing] ... [which] at the core is African.

Statements such as these, I believe, are intended by the musicians to place the music and its practice within the context of an African cultural and aesthetic framework. By this I mean that much of what takes place in jazz performance, however changed or transformed can be understood in terms of the retention of an African consciousness in the New World.

In North America the earliest distinctly African American music forms are associated with the religious practices of the slaves. These songs have been passed down through generations and are known as Spirituals. According to Maultsby (1977: 75-77), slaves living on mid-sized and large plantations were usually left to run their own religious services. It was in this communal environment, away from white society, that blacks had the freedom to create and develop new musical idioms based on African musical traditions. The early African American spirituals not only expressed the new world experience of Africans but also served as a principle mechanism by which African culture survived in America. In the words of Portia Maultsby, “slaves resisted cultural imprisonment ... by retaining a perspective on the past. They survived an oppressive existence by creating new expressive forms out of African traditions, and they brought relevance to European American customs by reshaping them to conform to African aesthetic ideals.” (Maultsby, 1990: 185)

The question of African retentions in the music of black Americans has been the topic of much scholarly output since the early part of the twentieth century. Williams (1995: 14-17) outlines the main trends of thought which I have summarized below. The question is often discussed in terms that emphasize the difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches to cultural analysis. Comparative musicologists, informed by an evolutionary and classification-oriented approach to culture as a static, fixed condition, and following the lead of Richard Wallascheck, attempted to reconstruct the origins of the early African American religious songs.

Wallascheck based his analysis of black spirituals on transcribed scores as opposed to observing the actual performance event. Of critical concern here with transcriptions is the problem inherent in representing a musical practice in such a way is that it doesn't take into account the variables of performance. Using this framework he erroneously concluded the black spirituals to be inept or distorted imitations of a European American cultural practice. This theory became widespread. Other scholars acknowledged the African origins of black music, but came to view the relationship between African and African American music as being a question of acculturation. Building on the work of Eric Von Hornbostal, they sought to identify elements common to both music traditions. In this case, the existence of African retentions in black American music, identified and listed in quantitative terms, determine the degree of intensity of acculturation in the music. As pointed out by Maulsby (1990: 184), for the slaves, the African traditions brought to the Americas functioned as a "reservoir of usages and values." The value of African music traditions lie in the fact that they provided the basis for the development of new traditions. African music practices remained intact, but in their usage, were re-contextualized to meet the new musical and social circumstances of blacks in the New World. Implicit in this view is an understanding that black music culture is not a static body of perishable materials, but rather on the whole black music traditions are quite flexible with an ability to respond to changes and new contexts without losing their essential African identity. I believe this is the point Floyd (1995: 5) makes when he writes;

... African survivals exist not merely in the sense that African-American music has the same characteristics as its African counterparts, but also that the musical *tendencies*, the mythological beliefs and assumptions, and the interpretive strategies of African Americans are the same as those that underlie the music of the African homeland, that these tendencies and beliefs continue to exist as

African cultural memory, and that they continue to inform the continuity and elaboration of African-American music (Emphasis in original).

Embedded in this statement are two of Floyd's key theoretical concepts both are of use to our discussion; "core culture" and "cultural memory".<sup>44</sup> Borrowing the term "cultural memory" from Jason Berry, Floyd uses it to refer to "nonfactual and nonreferential motivations, actions and beliefs that members of a culture seem, without direct knowledge or deliberate training, to "know" – that feel unequivocally "true" and "right" when encountered, experienced and executed. (Floyd, 1995: 8) Here Floyd is attempting, in part, to account for the problem of meaning in African American music. Cultural memory therefore is a subjective concept, through the act of an unconscious transferal of subjective knowledge it functions as a link that connects the received knowledge of a people with cultural forms. Floyd (1995: 8, 9) argues that in African American music cultural memory is what drives the music, and "black-music making was the translation of the memory into sound and the sound into memory."

In a similar vein, Nketia observes that there is an intangible quality that can be found in African American music. It is part of the psychology behind the music and expresses itself in certain intensities in performance. As a conceptual idea, cultural memory operates at the level of unconsciousness. However, through musical performance, cultural memory becomes "conscious and culturally objective in practice and perception." (Floyd, 1995: 8, 9) Although Floyd can only speculate on the whys and wherefores of the retention of cultural memory and its continuation to present days, its presence, he argues, is none the less recognized by those in the

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<sup>44</sup> For a full discussion of these concepts see, Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States*. (New York: Oxford University, 1996.), 5-10. For an overview on the role of memory in constructing historical narratives see, *History and Memory in African American Culture*. Genieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.)



culture. For Floyd, the value of cultural memory, as a concept, lies in its use as an analytic tool. “Whatever its nature and process, cultural memory, as a reference to vaguely “known” musical and cultural processes and procedures, is a valid and meaningful way of accounting for the subjective, spiritual quality of the musical and aesthetic behaviors of a culture.” (1995: 9)

“Core Culture” a concept related to cultural memory which Floyd uses to refer to “that portion of the black population that has remained closest to its mythic and ritual roots, whose primary cultural values and interests lie *within* that community, and whose concern for racial integration appear to be secondary to its concern for individual and community survival and the perpetuation of African-American cultural and social behaviors and institutions. It is in this population that the cultural memory is strongest and most abiding” (Floyd, 1995: 10), as opposed to people who, to quote culture bearer Tucker, “didn’t grow up in no ghetto.”

Further, according to Nketia, music is more than a sound construct. Beyond its basic elements and structural form; it is also a socially conceived and historically determined phenomenon. It is for this reason we include in our analysis not only the music sound, but “modes of expression and presentation as well as the values that govern the selection and use of musical materials, and music making.” (Nketia, 1977: 87) Moreover, viewing African-American music as a continuum allows us to establish a larger framework within which to account for the conceptual orientation toward jazz performance on the part of both performer and the audience. For as Nketia further observes in his article, *African Roots of Music in the Americas: An African View*:

Since the major role and function of African roots lies in the creative field in both Africa and the Americas, it seems that much more emphasis ought to be given to these so that the examination of the social processes which contribute

to their persistence and stimulate their cultivation in music that serves as vehicles for the expression of identity and social action can be correlated with the creative processes which keep them alive (Nketia, 1977: 83).

### **3.2 BLACK CULTURE AND THE PROBLEM OF ESSENTIALISM**

To say that African traditions, however transformed, retained an essential African identity in the New World is problematic in light of the racist, oppressive, treatment of black people that began with colonialism and continues to the present time. The danger of an essentialist construction of black culture lies in the fact that such constructions fit into the scheme of racists narratives that historically have been used to maintain these same social practices. Nettl (1983:237) cautions us against accepting “racial criteria as factors in determining the musical direction of a particular society.” An example from the jazz field will help to illustrate this point. In numerous writings as well as in the public imagination, the jazz tradition has been constructed as having its musical roots in Africa and European musical traditions. This in itself is not problematic although rather simplistic. However, when taken to its conclusion the African/European construction sets up a dichotomy in which jazz is invariably reduced to a music in which European melody and harmony are combined with African rhythm.<sup>45</sup> This type of analysis also limits the study of African music to its surface features and ignores the deeper meaning to the community of users. This is where the problems arise. In mainstream white society, African people and their New World progeny have continuously been portrayed as primitive, simple minded and somehow less than human. As such, their music is considered a primitive expression of feelings without

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<sup>45</sup> For example, Linda Dahl, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*, (New York: Limelight Editions, 1984), 3.

intellectual thought or content. It is the product of the so-called natural musician. On the other hand, it is understood that mastery of European musical forms requires years of rigorous instrumental training along with the refinement of intellectual and aesthetic considerations. One must learn to appreciate its merits and this is the work of serious-minded, intelligent people.

Recently a friend of mine, an instructor of jazz studies at a local university, related to me the following anecdote.<sup>46</sup> He was in a conversation with a colleague, a music professor whose expertise is in the European classical tradition. They were discussing the topic of aesthetics and performance practice in classical music as being a set of skills which could be taught to anyone willing to put in the time to practice and assimilate the training. His colleague then mentioned the notable performance skills of two symphony musicians who both happen to be African American. My friend pointed out, “that [the two black] men in the symphony were also very excellent jazz players.” At which this professor remarked, “Oh but they get it naturally.” The implication, of course being that the ability to play jazz is somehow a “natural” talent, that is, a biological trait, inherent in people of African descent.

Ted Gioia refers to the characterization of the African American jazzman as that of the so-called natural musician as the primitivist myth.<sup>47</sup> This attitude can be best summed up in the remarks by Swiss conductor Ernst-Alexandre Ansermet upon hearing Sidney Bechet in London in 1919. “What a moving thing it is to meet this very black, fat boy with white teeth and that narrow forehead, who is very glad one likes what he does, but who can say nothing of his art,

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<sup>46</sup> Due to the sensitive nature of this conversation, I choose not to reveal the identity of the participants.

<sup>47</sup> Ted Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

save that he follows his “own way” ... .”<sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> This type of thinking has informed much of the writing on jazz and it continues to be felt today.

In my experience this type of thinking is not unusual. As an instructor of jazz and African American music at the university level I regularly encounter students, faculty, and administrators whose understanding of black music production is informed by these types of stereotypes. I find that I have to continuously remind them that we’re talking about culture and not race.

A further problem associated with the discussion of the so-called African roots of Jazz is that this approach doesn’t account for the continuation of an African consciousness. By this I mean that the African “roots” are often presented as if they are in a fixed condition. They serve as the foundation, but are denied, as Nketia and Floyd have argued, their “musical tendencies”, that is, their ability to persist as a pertinent and useful set of culturally transmitted values which inform the music in its present state. (Floyd, 1995, Nketia, 1977)

Having said that, in order to analyze jazz music culture we need to be able to identify the key characteristics and foundational elements of African American music, in other words its “essence.” The musicians I have interviewed for this study have all stressed to me the link between black music and black culture. Roger Humphries explained his phrasing on the drum set in terms of, “it’s a dialect ... it’s how we talk.” Mr. Tucker, upon my mention of newspaper item advertising a jazz trio made up of white Symphony musicians, responded; “how they gonna play jazz, they didn’t grow up in no ghetto.” Mr. Harris observed that he found non-African American audiences difficult to play for because he doesn’t get the response (audience feedback)

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<sup>48</sup> Ansermet, Ernst-Alexandre. “Bechet and Jazz Visit Europe, 1919” in *Frontiers of Jazz*. Ralph de Toledano, ed., (Oliver Durrell, Inc., 1947), 122

<sup>49</sup> To be fair, I should point out that Ansermet also referred to Bechet as a genius, however it is to Ansermet’s characterization of the quality of his genius (natural) that I am objecting to here.

essential to ensure a good performance. The forgoing examples identify musical and aesthetic characteristics that these musicians recognize as playing significant roles in the production of black music. My point is that while the “essence” of black music is not innate, people do have well-formed ideas about the constituent elements of their music culture and can identify the presence of, or lack thereof, regarding the operation of these elements in the music. Further, these elements, when taken in total, form a web of culturally transmitted musical traditions which have remained relevant to black people, and serve to distinguish African Americans from other groups of people. (Gilroy, 1995: 12; Burnim and Maultsby, 1987: 110-111.)

### **3.3 AFRICAN MUSIC PRINCIPLES FOUND IN JAZZ**

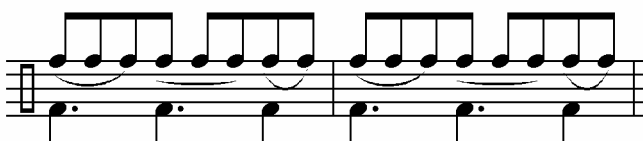
Much of what the art of modern jazz drumming is about lies in the aggregate effect of a multilinear approach to rhythmic organization. An explication of the principles that guide performance of rhythm in jazz drumming can be found in Nketia’s comprehensive discussion of the rhythmic practices used in African music summarized below. The time span is broken up into equal number of pulses that may be further segmented thereby creating a density matrix based on groups of two or three pulses. The key principle is that while the underlying pulse structure may be different, i.e. duple or triple rhythms, the time span remains the same. From this arise rhythms based on the fundamental metrical relationship of 2:3.

These rhythm structures follow the same organization principles that can be found in the multilinear rhythms that are common in African musical practice. Accordingly, a fundamental concept in African music is the recognition of a fixed time span that “acts at once as a measure and a standard phrase length to which rhythmic phrases are related”. (Nketia, 1974: 131.)

A number of commonly understood musical concepts are related to the principles of multilinear rhythmic procedures. According to Nketia, the complexities of African rhythms lie in the conceptualization of a fixed length time span that can be broken into a number of segments or pulses. At the basic level, in African music traditions, an underlying scheme of duple or triple pulses is most typical. Rhythmic density refers to the further division of the basic two or three pulse into higher levels of pulse structure. For example, a duple pulse may be divided further into densities of four, eight and sixteen pulse beats. Likewise an underlying triple pulse can be further divided into densities of six, twelve and twenty-four pulses. Here, the greater the number of segments equates to an increase in pulse density. These divisions of the underlying pulse work to create rhythmic motion. That is, regardless of tempo, “the greater the number of divisions, the faster the rhythmic motion, the fewer the number, the slower the motion.” (Nketia, 1974: 126)

Rhythm patterns are formed based on pulse structures of either divisive rhythms, which relate to the scheme of the regular internal divisions of the time span or additive rhythms, which do not. The additive concept refers to rhythms made up of note values of varying duration that extend beyond the regular divisions found within the time span. These notes may be organized into groups of different length and combined within the time span. For instance, in example one below we find a duple rhythm phrase of eight pulses which is organized as follows:  
3+3+2+3+3+2

**Example 1 Additive Rhythm**



One of the major difficulties encountered when performing these types of rhythms is the ability to maintain the basic pulse or regulative beat while at the same time handling additive and divisive rhythms in phrases of different lengths. In doing so the performer must learn to internalize the basic pulse. Here, the performer's reference is the time span, which, "acts at once as a measure and a standard phrase length to which rhythmic phrases are related." Because of the difficulty of maintaining "subjective metronomic time", African traditions employ the use of a time line that externalizes the basic pulse and acts as a guideline related to the time span<sup>50</sup>. The time line serves to articulate the regulative beat on which rhythmic phrases are structured. The time line is used to sustain rhythmic motion and is considered an accompanying rhythm. As such it is sounded as part of the music and may be quite complex juxtaposing rhythmic patterns of different density levels. (Nketia, 1974: 131-133)

Nketia asserts that the regular use of the time line demonstrates that multilinear rhythmic organization is the norm in African music. Multilinear rhythmic organization follows well-established principles and procedures. Keeping in mind the perspective of the drum set player - one person playing like four; with each rhythmic part, executed on a different limb, reinforcing the basic pulse in a particular way -- one can begin to appreciate the necessary skill and difficulty involved in achieving mastery over this approach to rhythmic organization. Multipart rhythmic structures are combined in such a way as to be graded in density in relation to the role of each

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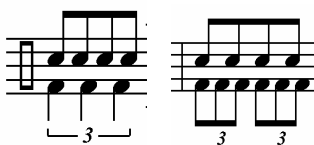
<sup>50</sup> Cf Charles Sykes. "Rhythmic Structure and Timing in African American Popular Music: Toward An Analytical Model" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Society for Ethnomusicology. Chicago Illinois, October 10, 1991. Sykes theorizes rhythm as having two domains; metric and rhythmic. From his description, the metric domain appears to refer to the subjective conceptualization of rhythm and is identified by the following qualities; inaudible, abstract, relatively consistent, predictable, perception is based upon past experience. What Sykes calls the rhythmic domain appears to refer to the realization of rhythm as in a particular performance. This domain is characterized by the following qualities; audible, concrete, variable, unpredictable, perception determined by the context of the individual work.

part in the ensemble. In addition to grading, spacing is another principle of rhythmic organization. By assigning individual parts to start at different but specified points in time, rhythmic lines may be spaced so that their parts interlock. Further, interlocking parts may be arranged so that by their overlapping they form a resultant pattern. An alternative approach is to take two lines made up of the exact same rhythm and displace one in such a way so that by their interlocking an increase in the density of sound is achieved. (Nketia, 1974: 133-134)

The emergence of the resultant pattern, which forms through the overlapping of interlocking parts, is accentuated through the use of instruments of different pitch or timbre. Nketia observes that the resultant pattern is in actuality the realization of a preconceived figure, theme or tune. Therefore it is the resultant pattern that forms the basis for the organization of individual parts. The pattern is conceived as a whole, and the parts are then orchestrated throughout the ensemble.

Nketia identifies cross rhythm and polyrhythm as two distinct rhythmic effects that emerge from the resultant pattern approach to multipart rhythmic structures. Cross rhythms form through the vertical interplay of duple and triple rhythms.

**Example 2 Cross Rhythms**



More complex cross rhythms are formed when rhythmic lines based on divisive and additive rhythms are juxtaposed. (Nketia, 1974: 134)



### Example 3 Complex Cross Rhythms



The performance of polyrhythms is also approached from the resultant pattern expected to emerge from the interplay of rhythmic lines. Here, the principle of spacing is crucial in that individual rhythm patterns must be placed so they relate to one another at specific points in time in order to effect the desired result. (Nketia, 1974: 136-138)

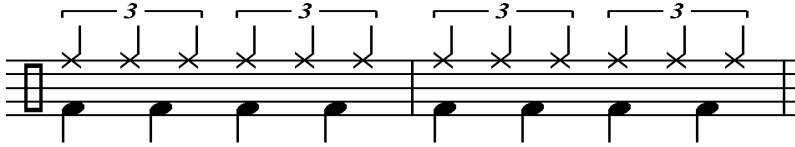
Nketia closes his chapter on rhythm in African music by noting that the utilization of instrument combinations that maximize contrasts in sonority, that is pitch and timbre, “enable cross rhythms to stand out clearly in the form of little “tunes.” Hence, although rhythm is the primary focus in drumming, some attention is paid to pitch level, for the aesthetic appeal of drumming lies in the organization of the rhythmic and melodic elements.” (Nketia, 1974: 137-138)

The purpose of the preceding discussion is to provide a theoretical orientation to the analysis of rhythmic structures found in African music which I would argue also apply to other musical styles in the Diaspora including African American jazz drumming. I encountered these rhythmic principles first hand as a student of jazz and gospel music. When I began studying with Alvin Batiste he gave me a rhythm he called The Original African Rhythm (see example below)<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Rhythm Systems: study sheet, Jazz Improvisation Class, Southern University n.d.

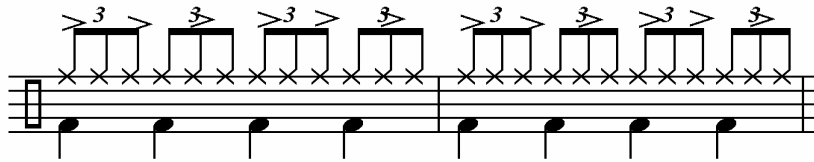
**Example 4 Original African Rhythm as played by Alvin Batiste**



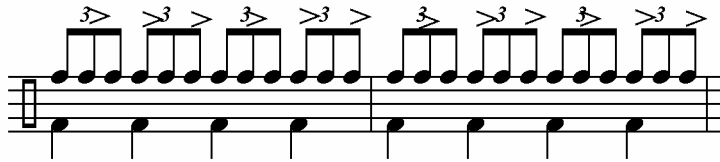
The rhythm consisted of four pulses on the bass drum and six pulses sounded on the bell of the cymbal, notated as quarter-note triplets in 4/4 time. The effect of the vertical interplay between the cymbal and bass drum rhythm in the first example results in what has been described as cross rhythm or polyrhythm. Writers on jazz have identified the presence of cross rhythm and polyrhythm as a defining musical characteristic. (Davis, 1990: 12, Gridley 1991, Gioia 1997, Stearns 1958, Schuller 1968) This rhythmic exercise articulates the fundamental metric relationship essential to jazz rhythmic concept, which musicians refer to as the quality of swing. That is, the 2:3 metric relation, which in this understanding is the ability to experience, simultaneously, a length of musical time broken up into two (or multiples of two) and three (or multiples of three) pulses. This concept, to use the jazz colloquialism, is referred to as *swing* or *swinging*; the later verb usage implies movement.

Upon acquiring facility executing this rhythm, Batiste then introduced to me a number of variations (see below). Here, another density level of pulse is added when each of the quarter note triplets in the above are divided into two pulses. Notice the accent patterns serve to articulate the original 2:3 metric relationship.

**Example 5 Variation 1 of Original African Rhythm**



**Example 6 Variation 2 of Original African Rhythm**



As in the music of Africa, metrical phrases that extend beyond the four beat time span of a single measure are common in jazz as well. Example five demonstrates this principle and is grouped as follows: 2+3+1+2+3+1+2+2

**Example 7 Tipitina Rhythm**



In fact, this is the same rhythmic phrase played by Louis Armstrong's ensemble on the two-bar break preceding the out chorus to "Struttin' With Some Barbeque"<sup>52</sup>. Musicians in New Orleans refer to this particular rhythmic phrase as the "Tipitina" and it forms the basis for much of black

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<sup>52</sup> Louis Armstrong. *Hot Fives and Hot Sevens Volume 2*. JSPCD 313. JSP Records, PO Box, 1584 London N3 3NW England. See also "Runnin' Wild" from See Bunk Johnson. *Bunk's Brass and Dance Band*. AMCD-6. American Music Records, 1206 Decatur St. New Orleans, LA 70116, USA. Here, the "Tipitina" serves as an underlying figure for rhythmic phrasing.

music in New Orleans. I've heard such players as Henry Butler, Troy Davis and Earl Turbington employ the term when referring to this same rhythmic phrase. The Tipitina is another rhythm first introduced to me by Alvin Batiste while I was a student in jazz studies at Southern University. The actual rhythm he showed me was a variation of the ones above. In this case the Tipitina part was executed on the bass drum while the snare and cymbals played the back beat (see example below).

**Example 8 Tipitina Rhythm as played on the drum set by Alvin Batiste**



The following examples are facsimiles of the Rhythm Systems designed by Alvin Batiste and used to teach jazz drumming. Batiste uses the term, TAINKANG to identify numbers one to five and TAINKI TANG for the sixth rhythm on the study sheet. Although, in my understanding, jazz drumming practice doesn't make use of a codified syllabic nomenclature per se, these onomatopoeic devices help aid the student's aural perception of the rhythms. They're also designed to orient the drummer to the fundamental rhythmic principles used in jazz. The student learns to interpret these rhythms related to the internal divisions of the time span. These systems demonstrate how each part of the drum set is incorporated in a set of interlocking rhythms which forms a variation on the basic pattern. In examples one to five below, notated in twelve-eight time, there are four pulses to the measure and each one is further divided into three beats. The "rolling" effect of the triplet subdivision relates to the concept of swing.

**Example 9 TAINKANG Rhythms Nos. 1 and 2**

RHYTHM SYSTEMS

NOS. TAINKANG (1-5)  
TAINKI TANG(6)

The image shows two rhythmic systems, labeled 1 and 2, for three parts: R.C. (Ride Cymbal), S.C. (Hi-hat), and S.D. (Snare Drum). System 1 is on the left, and System 2 is on the right. Above System 1, there is a time signature of 12/8 and a tempo marking of quarter note = 4. Above System 2, there is a circled number 2. The notation is handwritten and includes musical notes and symbols for each part.

In numbers one and two above, the hi-hat (S. C.) plays another level of pulse on the second and fourth beats. Notice the snare drum (S. D.) rhythms on the upbeats; this gives the rhythm a slightly “forward” motion thereby keeping the energy up. One often sees the ride cymbal (R. C.) pattern from the example above notated as in example nine below. Here, it is accompanied by the hi-hat and bass drum executing the pulse.

**Example 10 Basic Ride Cymbal Pattern**

The image shows a musical staff with two lines. The top line has a series of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, representing a ride cymbal pattern. The bottom line has a series of eighth notes with stems pointing down, representing a bass drum pattern. The notation is printed and shows a consistent rhythmic pattern across two measures.

Even when the notation is written in eighth notes the interpretation still relates to the triplet feel. In this case the second eighth note is considered the same as the third partial of the

triplet and therefore the “rolling” or swing feel is effected. This notation is referred to as the basic jazz ride pattern.

Numbers three and four, in example 11 below, demonstrate further variations on the basic rhythm. The snare drum rhythms in number four serve to maintain the rhythmic flow.

**Example 11 TAINKANG RHYTHM Nos. 3 and 4**

Example 11 consists of two variations, 3 and 4, each with three staves: R.C. (Right Conga), S.C. (Snare Conga), and S.D. (Snare Drum). Variation 3 shows a rhythmic pattern with a circled '3' above the first staff. Variation 4 shows a similar pattern with a circled '4' above the first staff. The notation is handwritten and includes various rhythmic symbols and notes.

**Example 12 TAINKANG Rhythm No. 5 and TAINKI TANG (No. 6)**

Example 12 consists of two variations, 5 and 6, each with four staves: R.C. (Right Conga), S.C. (Snare Conga), S.D. (Snare Drum), and B.D. (Bass Drum). Variation 5 shows a rhythmic pattern with a circled '5' above the first staff. Variation 6 shows a similar pattern with a circled '6' above the first staff. The notation is handwritten and includes various rhythmic symbols and notes.

In example 12, the snare drum part in TAINKANG rhythm number five fills-in the complete triplet feel and adds the bass drum playing on all upbeats thereby increasing the density of the individual rhythms employed. Rhythm number six -- TAINKI TANG -- in the example above displays how these concepts work at extremely fast tempos. Here, the “rolling” triplet feel is considered to be “flattened out,” but these are only approximations and it is still necessary for the drummer to interpret these within the overall concept of the piece performed. As we can see from the above, the so-called basic jazz ride rhythm functions more like a template from which numerous variations are generated.

The resultant pattern that emerges from the interlocking rhythmic parts orchestrated throughout an African drum ensemble has its parallel in jazz performance on the drum set. For this holistic approach to creating rhythm is consistent with how many jazz drummers approach the instrument. Of course with the difference that it is one individual who executes all the parts. Elvin Jones, whom I quote at length, is particularly noted for this concept. Here he speaks on the philosophy behind his approach.

*It is one instrument, and I would hasten to say that I take that as the basis for my whole approach to the drums. It is a single musical instrument of several components. Naturally, you've got tom-toms scattered around, and the snare drum is in front of you, and the bass drum is down there, and you have cymbals at different levels. But all in all, just as a piano is one instrument, a drumset is one instrument. ... You can't isolate the different parts of the set any more than you can isolate your left leg from the rest of your body. Your body is one, even though you have two legs, two arms, ten fingers, and all of that. But still, it's one body. All of those parts add up to one human being. It's the same with the instrument. People are never going to approach the drumset correctly if they don't start thinking of it as a single musical instrument. ... This is the way it*

should be approached and studied and listened to, and all of the basic philosophies should be from that premise. If you learn it piecemeal, that's the way you're going to play it. You have to learn it in total (Mattingly 1998: 26-27, emphasis in original)

### **3.3.1 The Heterogenous Sound Ideal**

Grounding his ideas in Nketia's study of rhythm and drumming practices in Africa, Olly Wilson (1992) argues that an aesthetic preference for contrasting musical sonorities is an underlying conceptual approach found in black music-making traditions throughout the Diaspora. These ideas are further developed in his article, "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music."<sup>53</sup> Wilson coined the term "heterogeneous sound ideal" to refer to the desire for a "musical sound texture ... that contains a combination of diverse timbres." The heterogeneous sound ideal manifests in both vocal and instrumental music and is reflected in the mix of instruments used in musical ensembles as well as the use of a wide range of timbres within a single line. According to Wilson, musical ensembles in Africa are organized into at least two functional groups. The "fixed rhythmic group" has a time-keeping or metronomic function and its instruments maintain a fixed rhythmic pulsation (or time-line), varying little throughout the course of performance. The instruments of the "variable rhythmic group" play rhythms that are continuously changing throughout the performance. The structural functional role of these two levels of rhythmic activity is articulated by the use of instruments of contrasting timbre. Wilson finds that the time-line is usually performed on high-pitched instruments with a timbre markedly

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<sup>53</sup> "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African American Music." in *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*. Josephine Wright, and Samuel Floyd, eds., (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 327-338.



distinct from those in the “variable rhythmic group” thus creating a musical texture that helps to delineate the musical structure. When perceived in the aggregate, these two levels of rhythmic activity combine to form a resultant pattern, or in his words, “a mosaic of tone color and pitch.” (Wilson, 1992: 331)

Wilson hypothesizes that among New Orleans blacks, the presence of the heterogeneous sound ideal as functioning in European marching band music was its main attraction. He refers to the ensemble organization in which “cornets and trumpets tended to provide the principal melodic line in a middle register; clarinets and flutes played an embellished obbligato melody at a higher register; and the low brass played countermelodies.” The early jazz musicians participated in this tradition; while at the same time transforming it “to conform more completely to their own conceptual approach.” The results of this transformation can be seen in both performance practice and the instrumental organization of the traditional black New Orleans ensemble in which instruments with distinct timbres are assigned specific musical roles. Here, the rhythm section – piano, banjo, bass, tuba, and drums – form the fixed variable group. The frontline, made up of clarinet, trumpet or cornet, and trombone, form the variable rhythm group. (Wilson, 1992: 336) Through the collective process of polyphonic improvisation, a hallmark of early New Orleans jazz, the “timbral mosaic-like quality of the ensemble” is highlighted. (Davis, 1990: 29, Wilson, 1992: 336)

Wilson’s observations are also relevant to our discussion of jazz drumming. The principle of the heterogeneous sound ideal has its correlate in the functional use of the components that make up the modern jazz drum set. Here the hi-hat and ride cymbal – high-pitched instruments with a timbre distinct from the drums - serve to maintain the time line. While a low pitch instrument, the bass drum reinforces the primary pulse, and the snare and tom

toms, on middle to high pitch, play variable rhythms. Further, I would argue that, based on aural evidence and that in print, just like their progenitors in Africa, early jazz drummers paid some attention to pitch level and the melodic elements found in drumming. According to Baby Dodds;

The drummer should give the music expression, shading and the right accompaniment. It's not just to beat and make a noise. I played differently for each instrument in the [King Oliver] band. With the piano I tried to play as soft as I could with a low press roll; not too soft, of course but just the right volume. I didn't use brushes because they did not give shading to the drum tone. For my brother [Johnny Dodds] I would play the light cymbal on the top. And for Dutry [the trombonist] I would hit the cymbal the flat way, so it would ring, but not too loud. For Joe [Oliver] and Louis [Armstrong] I would hit the cymbal a little harder and make it ring more. (Porter, 1982: 42).

### **3.3.2 The Drum Set In Jazz**

Historically speaking, the drum set, an African American invention, is a relatively new instrument that was first introduced around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in New Orleans jazz ensembles. While drum ensembles found throughout the Caribbean and South America are similar, and in some cases the same in construction to their African counterparts, the drum set, by appearance, has origins in European music traditions. However, it is in the conceptual orientation of the drummer and the use of the instrument that one can clearly see its connection to the African cultural continuum. In the historically determined and socially reinforced music tradition known as jazz, the drum set has been developed to a level of virtuosity found nowhere else in the world. Therefore, the instrument, its use in the jazz ensemble, and its meaning to the people who play it may be best understood within the context of the jazz performance tradition.

The instruments found in jazz were taken from the brass marching bands that had come to dominate much of black musical life in New Orleans. According to Davis (Davis, 1990: 36-37), the emergence of the black New Orleans brass bands was an outgrowth of the French presence in the city. The French military march was the main vehicle for improvisation among the early jazz musicians who typically played improvised variations on march themes. The popularity of the brass bands was, in part, due to their role in parades, funerals, and concerts.

While a full history of the development of the drum set is beyond the scope of this study, a few remarks on organology, the playing technique, and its role in the jazz ensemble are appropriate. The drum set is made up of a composite of membranophones and idiophones. At its most basic configuration, the drum set consists of a ride cymbal, a pair of hi-hat cymbals, and a snare and bass drum. However, unlike other instruments such as a violin or trumpet, with the drum set there is no one thing that can singularly be called *the* drum set. When it comes to the actual size and sound of the drums and cymbals that make up a particular drum set, variation is the norm as there are unlimited possibilities available to the drummer. The choices a drummer makes in selecting the instruments that comprise his particular set have a significant impact on the overall sound. As such, on one level, the instrument itself is as much a conceptual thing—an expression of an individual's aesthetic sensibilities—as it is a physical thing.

Having originally been incorporated from the Turkish Janizary bands around 1542 - cymbals, along with wooden bass drums and snare drums, have been in regular use in European military bands since 1770. The New Orleans brass marching band utilized a minimum of two drummers. One drummer played the bass drum while at the same time striking a cymbal that was mounted on the side of the bass; the other drummer played the snare drum. Drum batteries utilizing multiple bass and snare drum players were not uncommon. Eventually, either as a

matter of economics or limited space or both, when the bands played indoors or for smaller affairs, the multi-player drum ensemble was replaced by a single drummer in stationary position, who, with the inventive use of a foot pedal attached to the bass drum and setting the other drums in its proximity, was able to play all the drum parts by himself. With the advent of Vaudeville and the silent movie industry (circa 1910-1920) the need to create a variety of sound effects led to the further expansion of the drum set to include Chinese tom toms and the curved edge, Chinese cymbal. In addition, a number of “traps” that is; assorted percussion instruments such as the cowbell, woodblock and sandpaper blocks, were added to the set. (Davis, 1990: 18-23, 37. Peters, 1975: 24, 28, 33-41, 79, 204-209. Porter, 1982: 42-43.)

Early jazz drum set performers played in what became known as the “rudimental style”. Drum rudiments<sup>54</sup> refer to a series of short rhythmic hand patterns used to execute the various “drum calls” which originated as a device to communicate the maneuvering of troop formations in military operations. These same rudiments were carried over into the military brass band tradition and used as the basis for musical accompaniment on the drums. Drummers during the early jazz era typically used repetitive snare patterns made up of combinations of press rolls and open flams while emphasizing the second and fourth beats of each measure. Porter identifies these repetitive rhythms as being called “ride” patterns, and they were crucial so that “a more consistent forward-momentum could be created when the music called for it.” The bass drum was usually played on the first and third or all four beats. The side-mounted cymbal was often

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<sup>54</sup> In 1933 the National Association of Rudimental Drummers (N.A.R.D.) codified these hand patterns into four basic groups; rolls, paradiddles, flams, ruffs, combined for a total of 26 rudiments. These became known as the 26 American Rudiments, which distinguished them from other patterns found in the Swiss, Dutch and Scottish military bands. In recent years the Percussive Arts Society (P. A. S.) has absorbed some of these other rudiments and now defines 42 Rudiments as being essential for any percussionist repertoire.

used to accent on beats two and four during loud ensemble passages (DeMichael: 1961: 22-26, Porter, 1982: 42-43.)

Porter cites technical improvements in equipment as a contributing factor in the development of jazz drumming styles as jazz drummers incorporated new mechanical innovations into their playing. Following the invention of the bass foot pedal, he sees the hi-hat or sock cymbal as the most important innovation. The hi-hat is made up of a pair of small cymbals, positioned on a stand with the bottom cymbal inverted. The top cymbal is attached to a rod that extends from a foot pedal at the base of the stand through both cymbals. By depressing the foot pedal the cymbals are closed together creating a tight, “chick” sound. Originally called “low-boys”, hi-hats stood about a foot off the ground when they were first introduced in the mid-twenties. Later the hi-hat stand height was increased to where the cymbals could be played with hand-held sticks. These became known as “high-boys” or “high-hats” and today are commonly referred to as hi-hats. Playing the top cymbal with the stick and using the foot pedal to control the open and close of the cymbals, the drummer could achieve a variety of sounds depending on how tight or loose he held the cymbals together (Porter, 1982: 42-43, 70-71).

Interestingly enough, considering the locale of this study, according to Nathan Davis, both Kenny Clarke and Art Blakey state that Ethel Minor invented the hi-hat in Pittsburgh. Ms. Minor is said to have attached an “aluminum top” to her foot and used it to strike a second top positioned on the floor (Davis, 1990: 18). Elsewhere Clarke elaborates;

It was something new at the time and I’m pretty sure the idea came from Pittsburgh originally because all the drummers around home used to make their own sock cymbals with a spring-loaded strap attached to the left foot and the end of the spring screwed into the cymbals. It was called a sock cymbal

because it came up to the level of a pair of long socks – just below the knee. When the drum companies started manufacturing sock cymbals, they called them hi-hats and made them much higher (Opinion cited in Hennessey, 1994: 18).

During the thirties, following the lead of Jonathon “Papa” Jo Jones, jazz drummers began to incorporate the hi-hats as the main time keeping component of the drum set. Playing a four-beat ride pattern on the top cymbal while opening and closing the foot pedal to create a “chick” sound on beats two and four led to an overall lighter sound and feeling of propulsion compared to the more heavy, regimented martial sound of the bass and snare (Davis, 1990: 101. Porter, 1982: 42-43).

Allowing for variation in individual preferences, the basic approach to playing the drum set<sup>55</sup> is as follows: The player while sitting on the drum stool uses all four limbs to execute various rhythms across the set. The right hand plays the ride cymbal. The right foot operates the bass pedal while the left foot operates the hi-hat pedal. The left hand plays the snare and tom toms. Two basic methods of gripping the stick may be employed. In the match grip, both sticks are held about between the thumb and forefinger, while the remaining fingers are used to stabilize the stick in hand. In the traditional grip, the left hand is turned upside with the stick held between the crotch of the thumb and forefinger. This grip is a remnant from the military heritage where the snare drum was carried by a sling that placed the playing surface at an angle away from the drummer. The right hand stick is held as in the match grip.

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<sup>55</sup> This describes the playing approach as performed by a right-handed drummer. For a left-handed drummer the process would be reversed. However, I have seen a number of left-handed drummers play on the right-handed set up. Or reverse the hand positions while keeping the bass and hi-hat set up for right-handed player. In one case I saw the opposite of this approach.

### 3.3.3 Kenny Clarke and the Development of Modern Jazz Drumming

Modern jazz drumming is distinguished from earlier jazz drumming styles by a shift in timbral orientation toward a lighter drum set sound through the utilization of the “top” or ride cymbal to maintain the beat and a propensity for polyrhythmic phrasing put in effect by a technique known as coordinated independence. This approach came into prominence during the 1940s with the advent of Bebop. The origin of modern jazz drumming is most closely tied with the work of Kenny Clarke who is seen as the main innovator of this concept. Clarke’s contribution to jazz drumming is threefold and may be understood in terms of sound and technique as well as conceptual orientation. As explained by Nathan Davis:

The name Bebop, according to drummer Max Roach, came from the sounds musicians heard in the music as they played. As an example of this, take Kenny Clarke’s nickname, “Klook-a-mop.” Most of the time I spent in Paris was as a member of Kenny Clarke’s quintet. Each night I found myself listening to the various sounds “within” the music. If you listen to the sound between Kenny’s sock cymbal and ride cymbal, the “klook-a-mop” becomes loud and clear. (Davis 1990: 116).

According to Mike Hennessey, Clarke relates that he began re-thinking of the role of the jazz drummer after his brother Frank, himself a bassist, first played him a Duke Ellington recording which featured a bass solo by the great Jimmy Blanton. “But when Duke Ellington introduced the bass fiddle into his band, it became the instrument of tempo, and this induced the drummer to play more lightly. Or, at any rate it should have done.” (Hennessey, 1994: 14)

Here, when Clarke says the drummer should “play more lightly”, the reference, I think, is to lighter timbre and texture, rather than simply a softer volume. Clarke’s experiments with independent coordinated rhythms followed shortly upon his first hearing of Blanton.

... And long before we hit New York, Frank and I had spent a lot of time experimenting with new ways of integrating the bass and drums and making them more complimentary to one another. Frank had bought a record of a Duke Ellington session featuring Jimmy Blanton and we listened to it over and over and agreed that drumming had to change to accommodate the new bass style (Hennessey, 1994: 21).

Prior to the emergence of instrumentalists like Jimmy Blanton and Walter Page with Count Basie, the double bass’ main role in the large jazz ensemble was to reinforce the rhythmic pulse of the bass drum.<sup>56</sup> Blanton introduced the concept of playing melodic lines which outline the basic harmonic structure of a composition. In addition, he played all four beats evenly thereby changing the time feel from the two-beat (with its association with the military march) to the four-beat rhythmic phrases. In its new role as the “instrument of tempo” the bass meshed closely with the other instruments in the rhythm section helping to create an overall smoother sounding ensemble. Clarke’s sensitivity to the new bass conception allowed him to hear an opening in the sonic space in which he could then fit his own rhythmic ideas. Clarke essentially changed the conceptual orientation of the drummer. By incorporating his coordinated independence drumming style he freed up the role of drummer from simply keeping time, to that of a true accompanist in dialogue with the soloist. As he explains his basic approach:

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<sup>56</sup> Opinion cited. Personal conversation (22 February 2005) with bassist, Dr. Michael Taylor whose dissertation, “James Blanton, Raymond Brown, and Charles Mingus: A Study of the Development of Double Bass in Modern Jazz” discusses the innovative work of Blanton, along with Ray Brown and Charles Mingus.



... I therefore thought it preferable to maintain the tempo, firmly but lightly, with the right hand on the cymbal. The left hand on the snare (or on one of the tom toms) and the right foot on the bass-drum pedal work in close coordination, providing accents and syncopations which keep ‘relaunching’ the sections or the soloists. The hi-hat is used for making the after beat. When you play tempo on the cymbal, all is clear. This gives space to the soloist – more freedom to improvise. He can move on this tempo, stimulated by my accents on the snare and bass drum (Hennessey 1994: 186).

In using the cymbal to maintain the time line, or repetitive ride pattern typically expressed in four and eight bar phrases, Clarke set up a continuous sizzling cymbal sound. This timbral-rhythmic continuity is balanced by the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4 and a steady bass drum underneath. Accents played on the snare and tom toms stand out in relief against the dynamically flat time line. Further, Clarke introduced the idea of using the bass drum as an independent voice in addition to its keeping an underlying pulse. This technique of placing accents with the bass drum became known as “dropping bombs.” Additionally, Clarke paid special attention to the form of the arrangement and would emphasize structural elements of the various sections; what I’ve heard some drummers refer to as “indexing the form.”

That Clarke really considered the main function of the drummer is in the role as accompanist is evident in the following:

For foremost in every drummer’s mind should be his functioning role: to listen and apply a steady, swinging tempo and beat, and then, with well-chosen consideration, his timely punctuations. A drummer must use his wits as well as his wrists. Fills should be motivated and related to what is happening in the arrangement and statement – not thrown in haphazardly. Too, they should be

executed in good taste, with colour and punctuation, and with concern for what precedes and follows the fill (Hennessey 1994: 187).

Clarke's statement, deliberate and serious in intent, demonstrates an intellectual approach to drumming and is a far cry from the popular image of the jazz drummer as a primitive savage mindlessly beating on a drum. However, his insistence on establishing a "swinging beat" demonstrates a basic premise in jazz; that aesthetic statement is a result of one's total involvement in the music – body, mind, and soul.

Clarke's influence may have played a role in streamlining the rather large, showy drum set of the Swing era; with its array of "traps" to the basic four piece kit that was in common use by the late forties and early fifties. At any rate Clarke was known to utilize a minimal set, often sans tom toms, consisting of a snare drum, bass drum, hi hat and one ride cymbal. Clarke's musical innovations were readily assimilated by his contemporaries, most notably Max Roach, Roy Haynes, and Art Blakey.

Returning to the idea of "dropping bombs" for a moment, Clarke has often been cited as having forgone playing the steady four beat on the bass drum in favor of using it only to place accents. This is simply not the case, but the notion is somehow widespread and many ill-informed writers, drum teachers, and band directors have helped to perpetuate this myth. Elsewhere the same idea; that is, stopping the use of the bass drum in its time keeping function has been attributed to Max Roach. The confusion surrounding the musical function of the bass drum in the modern drum set merits further attention in light of the theoretical problems found in jazz historiography discussed earlier in this study. The following comments by Nathan Davis and Max Roach illustrate this point. Davis, as a regular member of the Kenny Clarke Quintet,

had opportunity for continuous listening observation of Clarke and to question him about his musical innovations.

At this point, I would like to clarify Kenny Clarke's concept of modern drumming. Clarke is said to have revolutionized modern drumming by changing the main emphasis of keeping time from the hi-hat drum (sic) to the large round cymbal. While doing this, he also further developed the concept of dropping "bombs." He would play strong accents on the bass drum with his foot pedals that were designed to emphasize the beat. During my tenure with the Kenny Clarke quintet ... I asked Clarke about his use of the ride cymbal and "dropping bombs." He said that he did play strong accents on certain beats to give the other musicians an idea of where the tempo was. Contrary to many reports, he didn't stop using the foot pedal altogether. Clarke was quite concerned that younger musicians had taken his gesture of emphasizing the beat with the foot pedal as a sign that they only had to use the foot pedal when emphasizing the beat. Many drummers think that this kind of drumming without a consistent use of the foot gives a bottomless sound to the rhythm section. According to Clarke, the best method is to use the foot pedal all the time while being conscientious not to cover up the bass line (Davis 1990: 124-125).

Max Roach is considered by many to be Kenny Clarke's musical successor in that he took Clarke's drumming ideas and, most likely filtered through Dizzy Gillespie's rhythmic conception, developed them into a virtuosic technical facility. In an interview with Rick Mattingly for *Modern Drummer* magazine, Roach talked about his work on Miles Davis' 1949 recording, *The Complete Birth of the Cool*. Responding to Mattingly's assertion that this recording was responsible for influencing drummers to stop playing the bass drum as a regular time keeping element and only use it for occasional accents. Roach said:

That is not what was going on. ... We played the bass drum, but the engineers would cover it up<sup>57</sup> because it would cause distortion due to the technology at the time. There were never any mics near our feet, they would have one mic' above the drum set, and that was all. ... It was funny to me that when I would hear a recording, I didn't hear the bass drum, because in those days the bass drum was always prevalent. You could not get a job unless the bandleader could hear that 4/4 on the bass drum. I remember standing in front of Chick Webb's drumset. His bass drum was so strong and constant I could hear it in my stomach: BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM constantly. Young drummers would stand there and say, 'Wow! Can you *feel* that?' Then on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, we learned how to play the bass drum softly. It was always there underneath the bass fiddle. But you never heard it on the recordings. ... I've heard people say that, historically, I introduced the technique of *not* playing the bass drum and concentrating on the ride cymbal, which was not the case (emphasis in original. Mattingly 1998: 58).

The above discussion of the bass drum illustrates in a concrete way the necessity of the methodology employed in this study. It speaks to the problem of distortion inherent in the use of recording technology as the primary medium for the dissemination of the jazz tradition. Reliance on recordings as an "authoritative source" is not sufficient to grasp a full understanding of the workings of the tradition. It also demonstrates the usefulness of oral testimony offered by skilled musicians in contributing to and clarifying our understanding of historical cultural practices.

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<sup>57</sup> Here, Roach refers to the practice of muffling the heads of the bass drum with blankets or towels to minimize the amount of sound vibrations produced in order to accommodate the recording process.

Following the innovations of Clarke and the dissemination of his ideas through the playing of his contemporaries and musical progeny, the role of the drum set in jazz continued to develop in the years beyond the direct influence of Bebop. Post-bop drummers expanded the concepts of the drummer as accompanist in dialogue with the soloist and as framer of the arrangement. Post-bop drumming is characterized by a more interactive approach than bop and the use of the full drum set in establishing the time line and creating musical flow. In the post-bop concept, the drummer often initiates the music direction of a performance through bold and strong musical statements played across the entire kit. Responding to new directions in jazz performance drummers expanded beyond the even four and eight bar phrases of bop often creating asymmetrical musical phrases of various lengths. They expanded the sonic palette of the drum set by incorporating a wider variety of cymbals and as well the number and sizes of individual drums.

#### 4.0 ETHNOGRAPHY JAZZ IN PITTSBURGH

Pittsburgh has long been active as a jazz center going back to the early 1920s. In Pittsburgh, as in other parts of the country, the years between the nineteen thirties and the mid-sixties were a particularly vibrant period of time for jazz. When one stops to consider the list of musicians associated with the city even in just the period between the first and second world wars alone, one can't help but be impressed. As historian Laurence Glasco (1997: 411-412) observes, "Jazz notables, born, reared, or nurtured in the Pittsburgh area between the wars include Lena Horne, Billy Strayhorn, Kenny Clarke, Art Blakey, Earl "Fatha" Hines, Roy Eldrige, and Leroy Brown, in addition to such notable female musicians as Mary Lou Williams. Louise Mann, and Maxine Sullivan." Yet, despite the number of well-known and historically significant musicians associated with the city, a comprehensive study of Pittsburgh's jazz history has yet to be produced. And while jazz has been and continues to be an integral part of black cultural life in the city, there have been dramatic changes in Pittsburgh's jazz culture over the past few decades all of which have contributed to an overall waning of jazz activity. However, although the contemporary scene may have lost some of its vibrancy compared to "back in the day," at its core the jazz tradition still remains strong within the black community.

That jazz performance was and continues to be a significant aspect of black social life is evident from the attention it receives in local black newspapers and other media. The *Pittsburgh Courier* regularly reports on jazz (as well as other black music forms) as part of its society pages

and entertainment columns as does the *Renaissance News*. In addition, as of this writing there are a few biographical works<sup>58</sup> on jazz figures which include some discussion of musical life in Pittsburgh. Several local musicians I've run across while conducting fieldwork are working on autobiographical accounts and have shared information on their musical experiences with me. As mentioned above a number of unpublished interviews with Pittsburgh jazz musicians are included in the AAJPSP Jazz Oral History Project located at the University of Pittsburgh. Another source of information can be found in the interviews with Pittsburgh raised musicians, conducted years after their youth, and published when they had received some national recognition. All of these musicians honed their jazz skills in the Pittsburgh environs, many remained here, and some continue to perform in the city today. Unfortunately, for the most part source materials for a complete documentation of Pittsburgh's jazz scene, past and present remain scant. My objective in the following is to piece together, through a critical examination of the various archival and secondary sources, a picture of the jazz culture in the black community of Pittsburgh, the point being not to provide a history of jazz in Pittsburgh, that objective being well beyond the scope of this study, but rather to examine the social processes which contribute to the persistence of, and stimulate the cultivation of Pittsburgh's jazz music and musicians.

Although Pittsburgh's Hill District became the cultural nexus for jazz, sports, and politics, blacks were dispersed in neighborhoods and small communities throughout the region. As for the music in black neighborhoods, jazz could be heard in numerous venues including nightclubs, theaters, restaurants, outdoor amphitheaters, picnic spots, and social halls. Pianist, Earl Hines, one of the earliest well known musicians who came out of Pittsburgh first achieved

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<sup>58</sup> Dance (1977), Hajdu (1997), Hennessey (1994), Kernodle (2004)

national recognition through a series of performances he recorded in 1928 with Louis Armstrong in Chicago. Hines was born in 1905 in Duquense, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. Hines had studied classical piano with a German teacher named Von Holz, but found he was attracted to jazz early in life even before he knew what it was. “I still had what you might call a classical type of feeling, and it wasn’t until I started going to theatres with my parents and relatives that I began to realize these numbers had *soul* in them, and I tried to get as much feeling out of them as I could.” (Dance, 1977: 15 emphasis added)

Hines began his jazz career playing in the clubs along Wylie Avenue in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. He recalled the active music scene he found in the District when he began working there with Lois Deppe in 1920 at age fifteen. Deppe had met Hines while the youngster was exploring life in the streets of the District. Recognizing the young musician’s talent Deppe then approached Hine’s father and aunt to secure permission to hire him as the pianist in his *Symphonian Serenaders*. With Hines in tow Deppe’s band landed a contract at the Leader House for an engagement that lasted for two years. (Dance, 1977: 16.) It wasn’t unusual for jazz musicians to begin their careers at a young age and long-term engagements such as this were important in affording young musicians the time to develop their musical skills. All the while their talents being nurtured under the guidance of more experienced players, which in essence is the educational system leading to professionalized players. One pianist, Jim Fellman took an interest in the young Hines and knowing that Hines made little money, offered to show him tips on technique and harmony in exchange for a token of chewing tobacco or a few bottles of beer. I believe this kind of generous giving away of knowledge is indicative of a belief held by these jazz musicians that they have an obligation to keep the music alive by passing it down to the next generation. (Dance, 1977: 18)



Hines recalls that music seemed to be everywhere when he lived in the Hill. And it was literally in the streets. For example, this being the days before microphones and amplifiers, he recalls how vocalists performing in venues throughout the Hill District would sing using a megaphone held through an open window thereby advertising their ensemble's presence inside the club. Hines himself contributed to the atmosphere. In his room in the boarding house where he lived on Wylie Avenue Hines kept a baby grand piano. Often times he would sit and play it early in the morning after working all night in the clubs. He recalls that his playing was responsible for impromptu communal gatherings when his Hill District neighbors would stop in the street to listen on their way through their daily activities. (Dance, 1977: 18-19)

Wylie Avenue, a main thoroughfare in the District was a gathering place for musicians as well and hanging out on the Avenue provided opportunities for work in casual pick-up groups.<sup>59</sup> Hines recalls, "Whoever wanted to hire a man would come up the Avenue and say, "Is there a drummer here?" or "Is there a piano player here?" or whatever he wanted. You made your own price and charged whatever you thought you were worth. That's why it paid to be dressed up, because you never knew when somebody was going to call. There were two regular big bands and a couple of others that carried seven or eight pieces. The general public knew that all the other musicians would be hanging around on Wylie Street. [sic]" (Dance, 1977, p. 22)

Hines statement here indicates that in addition to the long term engagements that musicians of his era enjoyed there also appears to have been numerous occasions when gigs arose on short notice. This notion is interesting and brings up further questions regarding performance practice. For example, on the occasion of pick-up gigs did musicians read from

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<sup>59</sup> Chuck Austin (personal conversation 5 October 2005) believes that Hines is most likely referring to musicians gathering in front of the Local-471 Musicians Club which was originally located on Wylie Avenue in the Lower Hill.

arrangements or did they perform from a common repertoire shared among Pittsburgh jazz players? Without further data one can only speculate on the peculiarities of the situation.

Pianist, composer, and arranger, Mary Lou Williams is another of Pittsburgh's well known early jazz musicians. In an interview published in 1954 in the British music magazine, *Melody Maker* she discussed some of her early experiences coming up in Pittsburgh's black community. Williams grew up in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh during the 1920s and began performing for local parties, dances, and church sponsored events while still in elementary school. Her family encouraged her talents and supported her musical development. Early on she learned by ear having studied the family's collection of blues and jazz recordings. Music was part of the fabric of a young person's social life. As Williams recalls, "I must have been ten or eleven when I was taken to the Saturday afternoon dances at the Acadia Ballroom where [Lois] Deppe was playing. These dances ran from noon until 4 p.m., and shortly before break-up time the biggest fight would invariably commence. Half the kids in Pittsburgh could be seen running from the hall, grabbing the backs of street-cars to get away." (Williams, 1954: 2)

Like other African American musicians of her generation Williams' was as well fluent in non-black traditions including European Classical music having received instruction in school. Her performing abilities were widely known throughout the community and beyond. While still a young girl she regularly received requests to perform at society parties held by Pittsburgh's white political, business and wealthy elite, most notably the Mellon family. She recalls being delivered to these affairs in chauffer driven cars and being paid a considerable sum for her services. Her repertoire at these events consisted of mainstream popular songs and light classical pieces. At the same time she began to explore the nightlife offered throughout the city's various black neighborhoods. At first she accompanied her stepfather on his rounds through the

entertainment districts along Frankstown Avenue, the main thoroughfare between the East Liberty and Homewood sections of the city. Here she would on occasion play piano entertaining men whose main focus was on low-stakes card games or shooting pool. Later she would explore the musical wonders of the city in the company of older local and visiting musicians. She recalls the vibrant and abundant nightlife awaiting a young musician in Pittsburgh's black neighborhoods. (Williams, 1954: 1-4.)

A particular type of Saturday night function provided an outlet for her to perform blues and boogie-woogie tunes for "shuffling couples dancing on a spot." These affairs, in which attendees paid a small admission fee, were held at someone's house to raise money for rent or other bills. Known as "house-rent parties or chitterlin' struts" these parties were common in black neighborhoods during Williams' youth. Williams provides us with a clue as to the musical aesthetic preference of the people who frequented these affairs. She recalls her attempts to perform popular songs or something from the light classical repertoire were met with the complaint, "Why don't you play some music?" Apparently, while this type fare may have held sway in the white society circles, it was of little use to the black people of working class backgrounds who, in the words of Tammy Kernodle (2005), were accustomed to "the "down home" sustenance of black vernacular forms." (Williams, 1954: 1-4.)

Another source of inspiration for Williams could be found in the local theaters which provided weekly shows that brought the top black entertainers of the day to Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh was on the western leg of the T.O.B.A.<sup>60</sup> circuit of black entertainment oriented theaters in cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit. Blues singers such as Ma Rainey and

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<sup>60</sup>T.O.B.A., an acronym for Theater Owners' Booking Association.

Lucille Hegiman would routinely travel the circuit accompanied by the leading jazz musicians of the day.

Williams got to know a number of these musicians including Todd Rhodes, the pianist with *McKinney's Cotton Pickers*. "Todd became a friend and advisor to me, used to take me out jamming, and on one date let me sit in with the band. Some nights we jammed all the way from East Liberty down to Wylie Avenue, then a notorious section of town, which was held in dread by so-called decent people. We always wound up in the Subway on Wylie, a hole in the ground to which the cream of the crop came to enjoy the finest in the way of entertainment. For me it was paradise." (Williams, 1954: 4)

Here, Williams is describing the mentoring system found within the jazz community. As "friend and advisor" Rhodes took on the responsibility to see that she got the necessary performing experience to develop her talent. From her account this included informal jam sessions as well as the occasional chance to sit-in on professional presentations. Williams gives us an indication of the differing views toward jazz entertainment held in the black community as well in the mainstream. For Williams, her vision of "paradise" is a "whole in the ground" filled with great musicians and wonderful sounds, obviously her interest is in the music only; contrast this vision with the viewpoint of the "decent people" who held this part of town as a dreaded zone of pathology to be avoided at all cost.

The area that Williams is describing here was known as the Lower Hill. According to Rob Ruck this area was considered by many to be the city's "tenderloin or vice section, because it tolerated interracial social activity at a number of Prohibition-era night spots." (1993: 138) Situated just above downtown Pittsburgh, most of the entire area was demolished in the 1950s as part of an urban renewal project.

From Hines' and Williams' accounts it appears that black jazz musicians enjoyed a certain amount of prosperity during those days, if not due to the high priced wages they commanded, then for the sheer amount of available work. Kenny Clarke observed that during the twenties and early thirties black people had more control over the business side of their music as well. That is, the publishing companies, theater and dance halls, as well as booking agencies. He also commented on the drawing power of black musicians when he was a young drummer coming on the Pittsburgh scene. "There were no special stars in those days, just black musicians." (Taylor, 1993: 195) Nathan Davis confirms that the services of black entertainers and dance bands were much in demand in Pittsburgh. This included work at all-white functions. He finds that because "blacks were relegated to the role of servant, and that musicians ... were considered subservient ... in part accounts for why black musicians were able to get so much work [at white society affairs] during the 1920s." However, as jazz music became more widely accepted among white society via the re-interpretations of bands like Paul Whiteman's and Benny Goodman's, work for black bands dissipated. (Davis, 1992: 6)

The Crawford Grill was opened in the Lower Hill at 1401 Wylie Avenue in 1931 by black businessman and entrepreneur, Gus Greenlee. Greenlee was also the owner of the black baseball team the Pittsburgh Crawfords<sup>61</sup> and had numerous other concerns around the city. This establishment became known as Crawford Grill No.1 to distinguish it from the two other Crawford Grills later opened by Greenlee elsewhere on the Hill and on the Northside. Glasco reports that the original Grill "quickly attracted an interracial crowd that came to hear black musicians." (Glasco, 1997: 411-412) Ruck describes it as "the Hill's classiest night spot and a Mecca for jazz aficionados. The Grill was the setting for countless jam sessions, with musicians

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<sup>61</sup> See Ruck, 1993 for more on Greenlee and black sport in Pittsburgh.

who had finished their gigs elsewhere dropping by to play until dawn.” And, by all accounts the Crawford Grill was a major gathering place. Ruck notes, “An evening’s crowd included both blacks and whites, and black customers were usually fairly representative of a cross-section of the city’s black population. Visiting Negro League ballplayers, members of black Pittsburgh’s elite, and workmen unwinding after a shift could be found at adjoining tables, if not actually drinking together.” (1993:139) Additionally, the Crawford Grill was the site of the now famous first meeting between young Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington in 1938.

While the Crawford Grill may be the most well known historic jazz club in Pittsburgh, it certainly wasn’t the only one. In fact, in the period between the first and second World Wars it appeared that the entire Hill District was trucking to the sounds of African American musical invention. Glasco writes that on the main thoroughfares like Centre Avenue, and Wylie Avenue as well as on side streets in the Hill both blacks and whites were converging on “night spots serving up jazz” played by black musicians. The greatest jazz musicians of the day were featured at places like, “The Collins Inn, the Humming Bird, the Leader House, upstairs over the Crawford Grill, as well as Derby Dan’s, the Harlem Bar, the Musicians Club, the Sawdust Trail, the Ritz, the Fullerton Inn, the Paradise Inn, and the Bailey Hotel.” Smaller clubs provided the scene for countless jam sessions. All this activity combined to make Pittsburgh a jazz center which produced some of the major figures in jazz history. (Glasco, 1997: 411-412.)

Several of the musicians I know who are working today got their start in Pittsburgh’s black jazz world beginning in the late thirties or early forties and progressing through successive decades up to the present have continued to remain active on the scene. Chuck Austin is the founding president of the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, (AAJPSP) an organization dedicated to documenting the history of AFM Local 471 which was the branch

of the American Federation of Musicians that served the black musicians in Pittsburgh. According to Mr. Austin, virtually all the musical work in Pittsburgh's black community came through Local 471. In addition to the gigs in the jazz clubs, this included theater shows, concert bands, marching bands, private affairs, among other opportunities. AFM Local 60 was the branch that served white musicians. In 1965 the two then-segregated branches merged to create AFM Local 60-471. Numerous musicians<sup>62</sup> I spoke with considered the merger as contributing to the erosion of working conditions as well as the loss of work opportunities for black musicians in the city.

Mr. Austin spoke<sup>63</sup> with me at length about the abundance of jazz clubs throughout the city during the forties, fifties and sixties. According to Austin, in those years the city had three main entertainment districts, North Side, East Liberty and the Hill District. He identified the following clubs and venues as important jazz spots in terms of establishing a continuum for work opportunities that in effect contributed to the development of musicians and the music. North Side establishments included, the Hi Hat Club on Liverpool Avenue, Chappie's on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Liberty Lounge on Federal Street, the Brighton Tea Room, The American Legion on Jefferson Street, and in the seventies, the Manteca Club at Buena Vista and Jacksonia Street. According to Austin, East Liberty thrived as a music center in the years following the Second World War through the early 1960s. Frankstown Avenue, the main thoroughfare between East Liberty and the now predominantly black neighborhood of Homewood, boasted several clubs including the Pirates Inn, the Lucky Bar, and the York Club. Other places include the El Cabana on Larimer Avenue, and the original Cabins on Station Street. In addition, the American Legion Hall held weekly dances and occasional concerts featuring jazz bands. Hill District venues from

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<sup>62</sup> Field notes

<sup>63</sup> Personal conversation, 16 February 2000.

this era included, Litman's, next to the Granada Theater on Centre Avenue, and The Roosevelt Theater, which booked the top national black acts of the day. The second Crawford Grill located on Wylie Avenue. The Hurricane Lounge became well known during the fifties and sixties for booking organs trios. The list goes on.

Many of the people I encountered during my fieldwork took great concern that I understood how meaningful the jazz scene was to their lives. To them jazz wasn't just about the music, it was an attitude toward the world, a way of being which cut across while at the same time connected all facets of life. Often times, especially in the company of senior citizens, our conversations came round to naming and identifying where particular clubs were located and the years when they were in operation. Although most of these places no longer exist they live on in the memories of the musicians and the people who frequented them. And, to call these place names in litany is to invoke the spirit of the vibrant community which brought them to life.

Gleaning through the interviews conducted under the auspices of the AAJPSP we uncover more details of the musical life in Pittsburgh's recent past. Like their counterparts in other cities, Pittsburgh's modern jazz musicians prided themselves on professionalism. Bandleaders such as Len Gloster, Joe Westray, Thay Whiteley, Donald Woods, and Will Hitchcock demanded discipline and expected their musicians to carry themselves with professional decorum both on and off the bandstand. These were big bands averaging sixteen pieces in size. Musicians were on the bandstand, in place, on time, and with their charts ready on the music stand. Saxophonist, George Thompson recalls that most bandmen wore suits on the gig, and some wore matching uniforms<sup>64</sup>, and even changed their cloths during intermission to

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<sup>64</sup> Dress codes were apparently the norm as well for patrons at many of the finer establishments in the Hill. The *Pittsburgh Courier* announced that Bermuda style shorts were acceptable men's wear during the hot summer months.



maintain a fresh appearance. Reflecting on his career as a musician he acknowledges the tenuous link between economics and jazz performance. He recalls, “When the economics were good here in Pittsburgh, and the black community worked, the mills were going and they made good money, especially on the Hill, and all the other places, you had thirty different places you could play -- black places that you could play! Now economics are horrible, most of the black places are closed.” (AAJPSP Oral History Interview, George Thompson 3 December 1997)

Pianist, Walt Harper, has been a fixture on the Pittsburgh jazz scene since the early forties. Harper first came into local prominence playing in the band of saxophonist Bradley Blueitt. He later went on to form his own band which became quite popular in its own right. Harper was a mainstay at the Crawford Grill and other top night spots in the area for decades. According to Harper, the Hill was “exploding” with jazz during the late fifties and sixties and as many white people as black people could be found in attendance. Echoing Nathan Davis’ findings about black entertainers during the 1920s, Harper’s remarks hint at the underlying racial tensions that appear to have existed “we were always subject to be subservient to them [whites] and therefore they could go anywhere with their attitude.” In addition to being a successful bandleader, he also operated two successful nightclubs in the Pittsburgh area. Walt Harper’s The Attic, which he ran from 1969 to 1976, was located in Pittsburgh’s down town Market Square. Another venue, called Harper’s, also located downtown in the Oxford Building, was in operation from 1982 to 1988. Reflecting on the economics of running a nightclub, Harper estimated that ninety-five percent of his income at both clubs came from white patronage. According to him, “blacks [alone] didn’t have enough money to support it.” (AAJPSP Oral History Interview, Walt Harper: 21 July 1997)

Jerry Elliot, who at one time played trombone in Lester Young's band, was also an arranger and later worked as a pianist in many prominent local bands. Elliot recalls the fine jazz ensembles that existed throughout Pittsburgh in the forties. According to Elliot, while some bands were more popular with the general public, musicians tended to recognize individual bands for the difficulty of their musical arrangements. Thus a hierarchy was created each with varying levels of musicianship and bands were identified as "A", "B" and "C" accordingly. The lower end bands often included youngsters who were just beginning to move out into the world of professional players. These bands provided opportunities for musicians to learn through experience, while at the same time getting paid real wages. As Mr. Elliot explains, "A cat coming up could graduate, as good as he got ... he could go from the [C] band up to the top - if he was good enough." During the World War Two era numerous musicians were lost from the professional ranks due to the draft. This in itself was considered newsworthy. The Pittsburgh Courier, for example, reported; "Our musicians were hit hard this week when examining physicians' okehed Leroy Brown, Fred Averytt, and Jack Spruce for military service."<sup>65</sup> Young players moved up the ranks to fill the void. Youngsters were encouraged to join the musician's union with their initiation fees and dues being sponsored by established local bandleaders. (AAJPSP Oral History Interview, Jerry Elliot 25 July 1997)

Horace Turner, a multi-instrumentalist who started out as a trumpeter told me of how when he was young some of the older professional musicians would question his sincerity toward the music. "Do you practice? How are you *ever* going to get as good as me? You'll never do it. Don't even try." Of course then some of the very same musicians would be the ones recommending him for gigs as he grew older. This type of "old school" negative reinforcement

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<sup>65</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 December 1943, p. 12.

was not uncommon and it meant to challenge the young player to face his limitations and overcome them, or give up playing. After all, in the end it is the individual musician who has to come up with the musical goods. Nobody can play your part but you. These early “lessons” may have been a factor in why over the course of his career Mr. Turner has become quite accomplished on organ, piano, guitar, and drums as well as vocals.<sup>66</sup>

While young musicians did receive support from the adults around them, they also enjoyed the encouragement given from their peers. Young musicians would get together after school and play in rehearsal bands scattered across city neighborhoods. Playing an instrument was a source of personal pride and allowed a youngster to form a unique self-identity - that of musician. Pianist, Alice Brooks remembers how as a teenager in the forties she “used to open the living room window so the sound would go out. And all the kids would come and stand around and listen. We looked forward to that, you know ... and they listened.” (AAJPSP Oral History Interview, Alice Brooks 24 June 1997)

Saxophonist, Hosea Taylor points out that as a teenager it was his identity as a musician which allowed him to move about freely, unmolested, through the neighborhoods of rival teens.

“By the time the word got out that I was from the East [End], it was a well known fact that my presence in the Hill was strictly in the name of music and nothing else. With my Hill District friends, I walked thru back streets, narrow alley ways and visited all kinds of speakeasys and places I didn’t know existed, let alone expect to actually be there. The magical soulful feeling of the Hill began to take over my very being and soon began to reflect thru my music, causing me to further understand what and who I was, to better understand what I was playing and why I was playing it. ...” (Taylor, *Jazz in the Pitts.* nd. p 49)

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<sup>66</sup> Field notes

Walking the back streets near the Crawford Grill afforded trumpeter, Pete Henderson and his pianist friend, Fritz Jones (Ahmad Jamal) – both too young for admission - the opportunity to hear the sounds of the jazz being played inside. Henderson also recalled the many “music appreciation days” he participated in as his friends would gather to listen to and analyze the latest recordings by their favorite jazz stars; a practice that he continued throughout his professional life. (AAJPSP Oral History Interview, Pete Henderson 18 March 1998)

In his observations on Pittsburgh’s black street culture of the forties, Rob Ruck notes “musicians performing on street corners on the Hill, an informally organized outdoor dance hall with a -phonograph and jitterbugging on Shetland Street in East Liberty, and nightly congregations along Wylie and Frankstown Avenues.” (Ruck, 1993: 15)

The Musician’s Club and The Crawford Grill No.2 occupy a special place in Pittsburgh’s African American community. Both retain significant meaning for the jazz musicians who frequented them. The Musician’s Club was formed as the social club of the American Federation of Musician’s Local 471 the branch of the AFM that served Pittsburgh’s black musicians. As with other segments of society the musician’s union functioned under a racially segregated policy until 1965 when, due to the forces of integration, the two separate unions merged into a single organization. The white union was AFM Local 60. According to Chuck Austin, president of the AAJPSP, while there may have been an informal kind of social venue associated with the black musician’s union as far back as the early ‘20s, the Musician’s Club, the one people are still familiar with today, was chartered in 1942. The original Club was located on Wylie Avenue in the heart of the Hill District’s jazz and nightlife scene. However, the club relocated several times during its years of operation. The first move came in 1951 when the lower Hill District was torn down for the city’s large-scale urban renewal project. The removal

of most of the Lower Hill consequently had a devastating effect on much of the District's jazz life. The Musician's Club was reopened on Centre Avenue (in the Hill) for a brief time before moving over to the city's East End. First, as a separate room adjacent to Jonnie Brown's nightclub at the corner of Frankstown Avenue and Enterprise Street in East Liberty, later it moved to the Lincoln-Larimer intersection above bandleader Joe Westray's Ebony Lounge.<sup>67</sup> Dr. Nelson Harrison recalls the Club being located at the Frankstown Avenue and Enterprise intersection when he first joined the union in 1956. He believes the move to Lincoln-Larimer took place in 1963.<sup>68</sup> In any event, as a condition of the merger of the AFM Local 60 and 471, the Musician's Club was disbanded in 1965. The resulting organization, Pittsburgh Musician Union Local 60-471, absorbed the membership of 471 while abandoning the building that housed their offices and social club along with disbanding their officers and governing board.<sup>69</sup>

While reading through the interviews compiled for the AAJPSP Oral History of Local 471, as well as in conversations with numerous Pittsburgh jazz elders, I was struck by the feeling of camaraderie expressed by the musicians. It is also apparent that many of these musicians share long-term social and musical relationships that in some cases, as of this writing, go back fifty or more years. And, in regards to the AAJPSP interviews, while it seemed to me that many of the musicians downplayed, or even ignored the interviewer's attempt to elicit details of the daily business goings on surrounding the union's activities, when the discussion came around to the Musician's Club, the talk became more animated. A strong sense of community emerges from their words. The Pittsburgh Musician's Club was in essence a union held night club, where

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<sup>67</sup> Chuck Austin "Card-Carrying Embers," In *Pittsburgh City Paper* August 8-15, 2001. p. 24

<sup>68</sup> Personal conversation 20 June 2005. Joe Harris (no relation to Joseph Alison Harris) cited in the AAJPSP interview of August, 7 1998 remembers attending rehearsals at the Frankstown/Enterprise location after returning from the Service in 1954.

<sup>69</sup> Austin in "Card-Carrying Embers"

musicians, both local and national players, would gather before and after their workaday gigs. The union also hired from within the membership to provide the music for the Club's evening entertainment which was opened to the general public. According to most, in terms of structure and decor the building left much to be desired. However, I find it interesting to note that while there seems to be a general agreement of this assessment amongst the musicians associated with the union, considering that the Club was relocated several times during its years of operation, no one seems to identify exactly which building they are referring to – Wylie Avenue, Centre Avenue, or the East End locations! The point being, I think, that in regard to Pittsburgh's African American jazz musicians, the importance of the Musician's Club has less to do with the physical properties and location of the building and more to do with the activities that took place there. Warren Watson observes, "It wasn't a fancy place. That's not what was important. What was important was the exchange of ideas – everyone had ideas, musically, and otherwise. One of the main things was the exchange of ideas."<sup>70</sup> Musicians developed playing networks through their interaction at the Club. Local musicians got the opportunity to play with the leading stars of the day and the stars got to play with the Pittsburgh players. This later point was stressed to me by several musicians I spoke with throughout my fieldwork. Pittsburgh players were proud of what they had developed here despite being distanced from the major jazz centers such as New York or Chicago. Traveling "name" players had better tread lightly when interacting with Pittsburgh's jazzmen or be prepared to face the consequences. As Hosea Taylor puts it, "Watch out in Pittsburgh: A guy might jump off a garbage truck and play you off the stage." Nelson Harrison concurs, "You had better check who you're talking to – you don't walk up in someone's face in Pittsburgh. They may not be famous but they may have forgotten more than

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<sup>70</sup> Warren Watson "Card-Carrying Embers," In *Pittsburgh City Paper*. August 8-15, 2001 p. 20)

you'll ever know.”<sup>71</sup> Through these exchanges national bandleaders were made aware of talented Pittsburgh jazz musicians and would call upon them when recruiting new players for their musical organizations. In addition to being a hang out for visiting musicians, actors, artists, writers, entertainers and everyday people, the Club functioned as a “university” for players both young and old. Dr. Nelson Harrison recalls, “All the music came from there – anybody who was anybody had to come through [the Club] in order to be somebody. ... You went there to learn – it was very important to get on top of things. If someone wrote a new tune, you learned it [at the Musician’s Club]. Musically everyone knew who was playing, where and with whom, and how good you were playing and all that. Again, even if someone from out of town came through with a new tune, it went around like wildfire. You’d go [to the Club] to hear it, jump on, and start playing it!”<sup>72</sup>

The Crawford Grill No. 2 opened at 2141 Wylie Avenue during the last week of December, 1943. A simple announcement included in the original Grill’s standard weekly ad in the *Pittsburgh Courier* stated, “And for the convenience of those living in the Upper Hill District. Now open the Crawford Grill No. 2.” It was in continuous operation for sixty years until closing in December, 2003.

When I arrived on the scene in early nineties there was quite a bit of jazz activity in Pittsburgh. This included many long term relationships between many of the older players, as well as the inter-generational nature of the scene. Young players growing into the scene, jamming, sitting-in, being given encouragement when they are weak as players, -- hearing vocal affirmations and expressions of love and experiencing the generous spirit of the general audience, in black nightclubs. This is in contrast to the mainstream establishments, where non-

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<sup>71</sup> Taylor and Harrison, “Card-Carrying Embers” p. 20)

<sup>72</sup> Harrison, “Card-Carrying Embers” p. 20

African Americans were the majority in attendance and who gave little encouragement, if the youngsters were allowed to play at all.

#### 4.1 THE QUESTION OF A PITTSBURGH JAZZ STYLE

Is there a recognizable Pittsburgh jazz style? What are its musical traits and characteristics? These questions became the focus of some attention throughout my fieldwork in Pittsburgh's jazz community. Finding a satisfactory answer in strictly musicological terms proved to be more than difficult and it is this author's opinion that it just may be that there are no clearly defined, quantifiable musical traits that can be said to make up the basis of something we could call *the* Pittsburgh style. In fact, several of the musicians I spoke with indicated this to be the case. As noted at the outset of this chapter studies of jazz in Pittsburgh remain scant and in turning to the available literature it appears the question of a regional style has drawn little attention from scholars as well from the more general kind of jazz writers. Bob Blumenthal observed that, unlike Pittsburgh, certain regions get a reputation for developing musicians on a given instrument, such as Texas for tenor saxophonists or St. Louis for trumpeters. He also notes that in those geographical areas that became known as music centers, for example, New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, or Detroit, he finds that the bulk of their significant players were produced in an "amazingly compressed period" of time, leading him to speculate that "perhaps Pittsburgh's players were spread over too much jazz history" to gain recognition as a single stylistic school of playing.<sup>73</sup> Citing their backgrounds in Classical music training as an

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<sup>73</sup> Bob Blumenthal, notes to *Kenny Clarke Meets the Detroit Jazzmen*. Savoy Jazz: SV-0243, CD 1994.



identifying trait, William Howland Kenny (2005: 164) suggests in a recent study that Earl Hines, Louise Mann, Mary Lou Williams, Billy Strayhorn, Errol Garner, and Ahmad Jamal represent the “black Pittsburgh drive toward technically sophisticated jazz piano styling before World War II.” He postulates that the work of these players when considered collectively, constitute a Pittsburgh ‘School’ or piano style. Unfortunately, Mr. Kenny doesn’t elaborate on what these musicians did with their technique that would allow him to link them stylistically.

When talking with numerous musicians, community members, and local aficionados on the subject of a Pittsburgh jazz style most were at a loss to provide a definitive answer. The responses to my inquiry ranged widely and ran the gamut from identifying musical traits to aspects of performance practice to references linking the music with other African American cultural modes and black life within Pittsburgh. For example, some people mentioned a characteristic blues sound; others cited the shuffle rhythm; still others, when referring to the playing of Pittsburgh jazz musicians, described it in terms of expending energy, and several used the word ‘swinging’ to describe not so much a style, but as they pointed out, an attitude toward playing. An attitude that is difficult to express in words. Hosea Taylor responded to the question of style by saying that Pittsburgh is a city of sounds and that musicians play the sounds they know from their own experience. For instance, he feels Stanley Turrentine played, among other things, “the sound of ham hocks and black eyed peas, the sound of picking chicken [feathers], the sound of walking the Hill District from one end to the other in the freezing cold while carrying his saxophone all the way.”

One thing is clear from the above comments, while it may be difficult to ascertain the elements of the Pittsburgh style based on musical traits, there are certain qualities that Pittsburgh

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jazz people have come to expect to be present in their approach to jazz performance and composition. Trombonist, Nelson Harrison identifies the following qualities as being crucial to jazz in Pittsburgh; Swing; Slick (sophistication); Bluesy; Innovative (composition). These qualities may be understood as a form of received wisdom that Pittsburgh jazz people tend to reference when discussing jazz. As such, these four qualities are a useful way to organize what the people said about the music. Harrison explains that ‘Slick’ means that Pittsburgh musicians are expected to create a unique musical identity which reflects a “sophisticated approach to thinking in music.” This can be achieved, for example, by creating your own melodic inventions when dealing with the chord progressions of a specific tune within the shared repertoire. That musicians recognize each other’s uniqueness is expressed along the lines of: “I never would have thought to play (hear) those changes in that way. That was slick!” Mr. Pete Henderson, on several occasions, called my attention to the drumming style of the late “Piggy” Lawsen, who I’m told employed a minimal drum set (bass, snare, cymbal, and hi hat) when performing. It was said that Lawsen could play with as much effect using an elemental set of drums as other drummers who had added several cymbals and tom toms to the basic set-up. According to Henderson, Lawsen’s playing was so unique (Slick) that he could recognize when Lawsen was performing in a particular club simply by the sound of his drums spilling out into the street, well before he entered the establishment to see who was actually playing in the band. Recognizing each other’s uniqueness then becomes part of the enjoyment of the music. The quality which Harrison calls ‘Bluesy’ comes across in many ways both in terms of music and of feeling. Recall Mary Lou Williams’s statement concerning the popularity of the blues at the house rent parties where she performed in her youth. Hosea Taylor observes that “the blues were everywhere and everybody loved to hear the blues” when he was coming on the scene in the mid-nineteen forties.

He recalls that when he first began playing for dances and other pick-up gigs his knowledge of form and harmony was limited. Not being familiar with the more advanced harmonies of the AABA song form or ‘rhythm changes,’ he often played the melody of popular tunes such as ‘Body and Soul’ over the basic blues chords and continued to solo on the blues changes. His point to me being that nobody seemed to mind the discrepancy and it certainly didn’t keep anybody from getting up and enjoying the dance. Drummer David Lee remarked in the AAJPSP interview of his early professional experience, “and it was a start on that good old shuffle.”<sup>74</sup> The shuffle rhythm, of course, is considered the basic rhythmic accompaniment for the blues. These four qualities are not incompatible and in fact their presence can be seen to overlap in the work of individual musicians. Consider Louise Mann. According to one writer, Mann was known as “a pianist who could play anything from boogie-woogie to Chopin.” Further, she had an “excellent musical background” and was considered a “fine technician.” Although she wasn’t a composer in the strict sense, “her musical revisions were characterized by real musicianship.” The later comment, I believe, refers to the quality Harrison calls ‘Slick.’ However, when it came to singing, Mann’s sophisticated tendencies were brought to bear on a bluesy vocal manner leaving the same writer to remark, “Louise was the definite blues type, husky, powerful.”<sup>75</sup> Harrison links ‘Innovation’ with musical composition, especially those which extend beyond the popular song form or twelve-bar blues commonly used in jazz. This quality is exemplified in the compositions of Mary Lou Williams and Billy Strayhorn. However, it can also be seen in Earl Hines’ innovative approach to piano playing which became known as the ‘trumpet style’ as well as the ‘coordinated independence’ approach to drumming developed by Kenny Clarke. Clarke’s

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<sup>74</sup> AAJPSP Oral History Interview, David Lee 6 March 1997.

<sup>75</sup> *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*. Laurence Glasco ed., (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 329.

innovative approach became the basis of modern jazz drumming, the topic of this present study. The quality of ‘Swing’ has more to do with an attitude that comes across in performing jazz rather than musical technical considerations. Pete Henderson responded to the AAJPSP interviewer’s question regarding the ‘Pittsburgh sound’ with the following: “Do you hear the Pittsburgh cats play? They swing!”<sup>76</sup> Some people attempted to explain ‘Swing’ as playing with fire, or playing with energy, however, most agreed a full articulation of the concept can only be hinted at with words, but nevertheless, when present in the music, it is recognized aurally and felt on the level of emotion and spirit. Saxophonist, Kenny Fisher described it as the feeling of intensity that is generated during those moments when everyone in the band is playing together with like minds. This unified affect also helps to connect them with the audience who join in with the musicians in engendering a collective ethos, and celebrating their musical culture.<sup>77</sup> He then concluded, “Swinging, you know – *soulful!*”

Anyone familiar with an introductory text on jazz history would recognize in the above discussion the hallmarks of what is known as the Hard Bop Movement. Jazz scholars generally put the decade between 1955 and 1965 as the era in which hard bop jazz emerged as a distinct idiom. (Davis, 1990: 147-155; Floyd Jr., 1996: 180-182; Gioia, 1997: 313-335; Rosenthal, 1992; Stewart, 1998: 162-164.) David Rosenthal (1992: 62-63) writes that hard bop jazz was most popular and economically viable in the black community up through the late 1960s. He cites the record buying habits of black audiences along with their patronage at bars and nightclubs featuring hard bop to support his contention. Rosenthal also contends that in the years 1945 to 1965 jazz attracted the most talented of young black musicians throughout the country. This, of course, would include Pittsburgh. Interview and archival materials collected for this study tend

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<sup>76</sup> AAJPSP interview, Pete Henderson 8 March 1998.

<sup>77</sup> cf. Monson, 1991.

to support this claim. The majority of musicians and jazz aficionados I spoke with were either just entering the scene as teenagers or beginning to establish their professional reputations during this time frame. All attest to the popularity of hard bop, either with live bands or on the jukebox, in the corner bars and clubs throughout Pittsburgh's black neighborhoods. However, I should point out that many of the musicians I spoke with resisted being categorized as strictly hard bop players, and several resisted the idea of being labeled as anything other than being simply themselves. This latter point, seemingly, can itself be seen as characteristic of the Pittsburgh jazz musicians that I spoke with.

Artists such as Lou Donaldson, Brother Jack McDuff, Shirley Scott, Charles Earland, Jimmy Smith, Art Blakey, Max Roach, Horace Silver, and Miles Davis – all chief exponents of hard bop -- were regulars at places like the Crawford Grill and the Midway Lounge. The Hurricane Lounge gained a reputation for featuring the Tenor-and-Organ combos that were ubiquitous during the late fifties and sixties. Several Pittsburgh musicians became well known after being 'picked-up' to play in the bands of these same artists. Tommy and Stanley Turrentine, Bobby Boswell, George Benson, Roger Humphries, Jimmy Ponder, and Eric Johnson all were first introduced to the national scene in this manner. In addition, many fine local bands such as The Jazz Iconoclasts, The Beethoven BeBops, Jerry and Wendell Byrd Trio, Pete Henderson Group, Gene Ludwig Trio, Mike Taylor's Territory Band, Horace Turner Trio, and Roger Humphries' R. H. Factor along with numerous individuals and free-lance groups followed the hard bop model; if not for their entire repertoire, then in part. Ludwig, Turner, and Humphries continue to be among those who regularly appear on the Pittsburgh scene today. During my fieldwork I observed that compositions such as; Gene Ammons' *Red Top*, Jimmy Forest's *Night Train*, Erskine Hawkins' *After Hours* (which featured Avery Parrish on piano),

Clifford Brown's *Daahoud*, Horace Silver's *Song For My Father* and *The Preacher*, Jimmy Smith's *The Sermon*, and Stanley Turrentine's *Sugar* among others, are frequently performed to enthusiastic response uniting performers and audience through active participation marked by vocal affirmations, heightened emotional and spiritual consciousness, physical movement ala finger popping, hand clapping, bodily sway, and even dancing. In fact, much of the repertoire of the hard bop groups remains popular with Pittsburgh audiences today, most notably those tunes associated with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, The Cannonball Adderley Sextet, The Horace Silver Quintet, and Miles Davis Sextet.

Nathan Davis (1990: 147, 155) writes that hard bop signaled a return to the roots of jazz: gospel and blues. As such, hard bop "restored some of the original colloquialism" to jazz; its musicians having "returned to the musical concepts of the Afro-American church." The idiom has been described as combination of blues, gospel, spirituals, bebop, and R&B. Stewart (1998: 164-165) finds it was this idiomatic emphasis on "conspicuous black vernacular influences" which lead, in part, to the commercial success of hard bop. Floyd (1996) states that in hard bop one could find the values of the ring shout, which itself represents the integration of dance, drum, and song; those being "considered central to the black cultural experience." Borrowing Sterling Stuckey's hypothesis that "the ring shout was the main context in which [transplanted] Africans recognized values common to them," Floyd argues that the ring shout maintained, "the values of ancestor worship and contact and of communication and teaching through storytelling and trickster expressions and various other symbolic devices" (6, 181). He further argues;

The ring shout fused the sacred and secular, music and dance; it continued the African and African-derived tendencies to eschew distinctions between religion and everyday life, between one performance medium and another. From the

ring emerged the shuffling, angular, off-beat, additive, repetitive, intensive, unflagging rhythms of shout and jubilee spirituals, ragtime, and R&B; the less vigorous but equally insistent and characteristic rhythms of “sorrow songs” and blues; and all the musical genres derived from these and other early forms. All were shaped and defined by black dance, within and without the ring. Movements that mirror the rhythms of all the African-American music genres can be seen in the ring and in dances such as the breakdown, buck dance, and buzzard lope of early slave culture, through those of the Virginia essence and the slow drag of the late nineteenth century, to the line dances of more recent days (6).

Thus, for Floyd, Stuckey’s hypothesis provides a “conceptual frame in which all African-American musical analysis and interpretation can take place.” Consequently, hard bop served to reaffirm the values of the ring thereby helping “to preserve the elements that we have come to know as the characterizing and foundational elements of African-American music” (6-7). Floyd writes that the innovators of hard bop succeeded in creating “a style that used simpler melodies and harmonies than be bop, funkier and more complex rhythms, new formal constructions, and gospel-oriented phrasings, all of which brought a new vitality to jazz” (181). It was this new vitality in the music, what I would call the revitalization of the life affirming qualities of jazz, with its emphasis on the black cultural experience that was part of its appeal, and in effect, allowed the music to remain meaningful to the black community in Pittsburgh (and elsewhere.) For hard bop, as Nathan Davis puts it, “the sound was hard, swinging, and very much alive” (147).

Hard bop is alternately known as “soul jazz.” According to Floyd (1996: 203), the term “soul” was introduced by jazz musicians who used it as a way to both explain and publicize their approach to jazz which purposefully emphasized black vernacular music forms, and in doing so

brought to the foreground a consciousness which effected an affirmation of the African and African American cultural experience in North America. Hard bop or soul jazz's distinctive sense of "aliveness," that is, its "vital force" is reflected in musician's comments about the music. Pittsburgh drummer, Art Blakey declared, "The instrument that is closest to the human soul is the drum, because if your heart don't beat you are dead; if you don't walk in rhythm you can't walk; you have to chew your food in rhythm. Everything is in time."<sup>78</sup> This sense of "vital force" works to unite people, that is, musicians and culturally aware members of the audience with whom the music resonates. Pittsburgher, Stanley Turrentine found the purpose of soul jazz was "to help people relax and enjoy."<sup>79</sup> Horace Silver remarked, "I like to play in soulful joints. I like places where people let their hair down and get with the music. ... They get right in the music with you."<sup>80</sup> Art Blakey explained the reciprocal, unifying relationship between performer and audience in a similar vein. "You know what's happening when we are on the bandstand? The people are looking at us, and we are having fun. What are we having fun about? We're looking at them. They're pouring themselves into the music; they're getting carried away. They look at us having a ball, and we're looking at them having a ball."<sup>81</sup> Of course the notion of "having a ball" implies more than simply the pursuit of a good time. It also means giving one's self over, or the laying down of one's burdens to the power of black music. For as Nathan Davis (1992: 148) observes about hard bop; "The spirituality of oppression became the main theme of musical expression." By purposefully emphasizing the cultural and sonic roots of jazz through the modality of performance, hard bop serves to build community through shared common lived experiences via the metaphor of music. Maultsby (1990: 183-188)

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<sup>78</sup> Herb Nolan, "New Message From Art Blakey" In *Downbeat* November, 1979 p. 21

<sup>79</sup> Turrentine quoted in Rosenthal 1992: 117.

<sup>80</sup> "Horace Silver: The Rumors and The Facts" 7/7/1960 *Downbeat* Archive, 25 June 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Nolan, *Downbeat* November, 1979 p. 22



identifies the fundamental role that black music has served as both a vehicle for the expression of African American identity and as a means of cultural survival. Likewise, in the words of Nketia (1974: 22), in this context the performance of music “assumes a multiple role in relation to the community: it provides at once an opportunity for sharing in creative experience, for participating in music as a form of community experience, and for using music as an avenue for the expression of group sentiments.”

In reading through the available literature and archival materials we find that several Pittsburgh musicians echoed these scholar’s findings in statements regarding music and their life in the city. Consider the following discussion in which Pittsburgh jazz musicians address in a concrete way the notions expressed by Davis, Maultsby, and Nketia.

The following passage is taken from a 1971 interview that Art Taylor conducted with drummer Art Blakey.

Would you tell me about Pittsburgh and its relationship to your development as a musician?

Ain’t that a bitch? Pittsburgh ain’t shit, man!

Tell me about it. You grew up there.

But where you were born doesn’t have anything to do with your development as a musician!

Didn’t you develop yourself as a musician there?

No. I started playing music there. I developed as a musician by playing on the road. That’s where you develop yourself. I really developed as a drummer in New York, not in Pittsburgh. That city never contributed anything to me but chaos.

Tell me about yourself as a kid coming up and going to school in Pittsburgh.

I didn’t go to school that long. I didn’t have much time.

Well, tell me anything about Pittsburgh!

It's a dirty, greasy town and that's where I was born. I worked at the Carnegie Steel Mill, and that's one of the things I would like to forget in my life. I started playing music to get out of the coal mine and steel mill. I just had to do it, because I didn't dig working in the coal mine, or the steel mill and I had to do something to get out, like playing music. I would leave music at six in the morning and be at the steel mill by eight. I would work all day, then go to the club at eleven in the evening and work. Finally I left Pittsburgh (Taylor, 1993: 239).

Blakey's statement provides us with food for thought concerning the role and meaning of music in relation to Pittsburgh's black community. I should point out that as of this writing Art Blakey is considered by many in the community to be one of Pittsburgh's favorite musical sons and his contribution to jazz here and elsewhere is well recognized. Several of Blakey's extended family members continue to reside in Pittsburgh, or return on a regular basis. Therefore, in regards to the above interview, perhaps Blakey's reluctance to acknowledge a connection to the city or its impact on his musical development is tied to the conditions he experienced while living here. Notice Blakey's phrase in regards to life in Pittsburgh, "That city never contributed anything to me but *chaos* (emphasis mine)." It could be argued that in this instance chaos refers to the economic and discriminatory burdens placed upon members of Pittsburgh's black community. Consider Blakey's comment on working at the Carnegie Steel Mill - "that's one of the things I would like to forget in my life." Here, I don't think he's objecting so much to the idea of working in a steel mill per se, but rather to the social conditions under which he labored and of the nature of the work itself. In Pittsburgh's steel industry black workers were typically given the worst jobs, and in any event were always the last hired, and in the case of a layoff, the first fired. (Glasco, 2004: 414.) Living under such harsh conditions certainly adds an element of chaos to the daily struggle for survival.

Blakey's experience in the mills, by his account, would have occurred in the mid-nineteen thirties. He was born in 1919. In the interview cited above he mentions that he was a father at age 15 and had to work in the mills to support his family. (Taylor, 1993: 239) Henderson Thomas, a jazz guitarist and vocalist who supported himself by working at the US Steel Duquense Works, has direct knowledge of the hardships facing black workers and their families seeking a better life in the Pittsburgh region. Mr. Thomas, along with his parents, emigrated from South Carolina in the nineteen thirties. He recalls how at first his family lived in tents in what were known as "squatter's" camps upon arrival from the South. According to Thomas, at this time, blacks who could find work in the steel industry, were given jobs in the by-products department or worked as laborers in the coke plants. These type of jobs, colloquially referred to as "man-killing jobs" were hard and dangerous work, yet offered little opportunity for advancement. (Glasco, 2004: 414.)

Although Thomas' entry into mill work took place well after Blakey's experience, it appears that the social conditions under which black workers had to endure hadn't changed much at all. Mr. Thomas' telling of how he struggled to get assigned work as a crane operator is not only poignant for its emotional content, it also illustrates the difficulties blacks faced in terms of discrimination as well as their depth of conviction in overcoming those obstacles. When Thomas' requests for the pre-requisite training necessary to operate the cranes used to unload railroad cars of raw materials were continually denied, he took matters into his own hands. Thomas describes how everyday he went to work an hour early just to watch and study how the crane operation was done.<sup>82</sup> During this time he'd regularly see new faces, those of whites,

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<sup>82</sup> Note here that Thomas' methodology of learning the practice of crane operation through direct observation, but without formal training, is similar to the methods employed by the drummers under consideration in this study as they learned the art of jazz drumming. See Chapter Three for further discussion. I should also point out that in his

being given opportunities to train while he looked on from the outside. This continued for two years. “I never gave up.” Finally, the white foreman gave him a chance – without the benefit of any training. Although Thomas felt the foreman figured he was setting him up for failure, Thomas took his opportunity knowing full well it may have been the only chance he would ever get. In Thomas’s words, “[I] get on the general crane, no training, and for two to three weeks, [all I’m doing is] eatin’, sleepin’ crane. [I was] as good as anybody, seriously, I was determined and I did it.”<sup>83</sup>

While Thomas was able to make a living working under such conditions he also spent many hours singing and playing jazz guitar in Pittsburgh venues as well as the small bars and taverns located in the black neighborhoods of the mill and mining towns scattered throughout the region. I’ve had the opportunity to work with him on several occasions in recent years and can recall one gig where we were playing in one such neighborhood establishment when Thomas reached into his “trick bag” and launched into an impromptu sequence of short, syncopated, bluesy guitar riffs that terminated with an abrupt rhythmic turn giving over to the underlying motor pulse long musical spaces which, to the obvious delight of everyone in attendance, many of whom surrounded the bandstand, were impregnated with enthusiastic responses of whoops, yeas, shouts, and vocal affirmations along with hand waves and claps, and other bodily movements akin to dance by various members of the assembly, all while the rest of the band picked up on and stretched each riff to maximum effect before moving on to the next, this formed the basis for most of our entire set. Afterwards, in response to my comment on the audience response, Thomas told me this wasn’t unique, in fact, he said that under the right

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approach Thomas displays not only his determination to succeed, but a quality beyond that. That is his *self-expectation* that he will overcome the obstacles placed before him by the white foreman. However, it is also important to recognize that his success doesn’t necessarily diminish the pain of his experience.

<sup>83</sup> Henderson Thomas, *Struggles in Steel*.

circumstances, that is, if the band was playing something with a funky down home feel that people could relate to, it was common practice for audiences to come together in union with the musicians in such a manner, at least back in the days when the mills were running and people were working hard and had money to spend and jazz musicians could play six nights a week if they so desired.

Pittsburgh drummer, Curtis Young, a contemporary of Art Blakey who was active as a player beginning in the thirties discussed the role of music in the life of these workers and the community at large with the interviewer from the AAJPSP oral history project. Here he talks about the meaning of playing music, which went well beyond simply a secondary source for income for those jazz musicians like himself and others who worked in the mills and such in order to make a living.

The pay wasn't all that -- in the black clubs -- but you could burn off a lot of the days frustrations. And a lot of us made the circuit on the Hill and East Liberty and Homewood and all to do just that. It also renewed our sense of self-confidence and self-worth after discriminatory treatment all day in the mines and steel mills and all. ... At least in the black clubs we got some respect and some recognition.<sup>84</sup>

Albert Murray has written extensively on aesthetics and the existential nature of the art of jazz. Here he defines what he understands as the objective of art:

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<sup>84</sup> Curtis Young, *The Roots of the African American Musicians Union Local 471*. (nd.), 18.

The basic or ultimate objective of art is to provide mankind with what Kenneth Burke calls basic “equipment for living,” and that comes in the form of metaphors. The adequate metaphor is the most basic equipment for living. Without an adequate metaphor, you’re insane. You don’t have any story, you’re a ball of chaos—and chaos is the enemy.

Elsewhere Murray writes:

Art is the ultimate extension, elaboration, and refinement of the rituals that reenact the primary survival techniques (and hence reinforce the basic orientation toward experience) of a given people in a given time, place, and circumstance much the same as holiday commemorations are meant to do.

It is the process of extension, elaboration, and refinement that creates the work of art. It is the *playful* process of extension, elaboration, and refinement that gives rise to the options out of which comes the elegance that is the essence of artistic statement. Such playfulness can give an aesthetic dimension to the most pragmatic of actions (Murray, 1996: 13, emphasis in original).

This dynamic quality is recognized as well by Stewart (1971: 84-85) who argues that the key to understanding the aesthetic orientation of black art forms lies in the approach that artists take in the expression of their ideas. In this sense the emphasis is not on what is created, the “art product”, but rather on the creative act itself. This approach privileges process over product and according to Stewart is a defining characteristic of what he calls the “black aesthetic.” Jazz music places emphasis on spontaneous composition or improvisation and thus is particularly suited within such a paradigm. In Stewart’s way of thinking the concern of the black aesthetic is to accompany reality, to move with it, or as Murray finds, to provide “the basic orientation toward experience.” According to Stewart, “in the inner workings of our music has been the

ideal paradigm of our understanding of the creative process as movement with existence. ... In the sense that music has no property as physical matter ... it comes as close as we know to being in existence.” (1971:84-85.)

The concept of music-making as playful process has been thoroughly discussed by Nketia in regards to African music traditions. Keeping in mind the multiple role of music in relation to the community, from Nketia we find that when conceived of as play, music “is capable of raising levels of consciousness because of the manner it stimulates active participation, integrates different modes of communication and brings into harness the social and the musical, the behavioral and the sensual, the ethical and the aesthetic within a single frame. It is the play mode that makes music, however simple, exciting and meaningful to performers and their audiences. ...”<sup>85</sup>

Murray’s concern with art as “equipment for living” along with Stewarts notion of music as “movement with existence” and Nketia’s explication of the play concept in African music ties in with Dona Richards’ discussion of the role of music in African American culture. Here, music (and other shared cultural modes) serves to “create an ordered existence” out of the chaos of life (this being the result of the slave experience and continued life under oppressive conditions for people of African descent) and thus works to engender a collective ethos which, Richard’s (1996: 208-209) argues, is unique to African American peoples and functions as a dimension of their spirituality. All of which I think applies to our discussion as well. Recall Blakey’s statement from the Taylor interview, “I would leave music ...” as if to say, ‘I would leave an ordered existence created by black people,’ only to return to music (ordered existence) after

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<sup>85</sup> Kwabena Nketia, *Play Concept in African Music*, (nd.), 28

working all day (and experiencing the chaos of discriminatory treatment.) in the mill. Note too, Hosea Taylor's description of how he felt as a teenager walking the streets of the Hill District (the cultural nexus of Pittsburgh's black community) and Murray's statement, "Art provides mankind with definitions of itself, its circumstances, its situation, its condition, and also its possibilities. ... It is what music is about—which after all is nothing if not a soundtrack to which we choreograph our daily activities." (O'Meally, 1998: 570) Now consider Taylor's remarks; "The magical soulful feeling of the Hill began to take over my very being and soon began to reflect thru my music, causing me to further understand what and who I was, to better understand what I was playing and why I was playing it." The parallels with Murray's definition are strikingly similar! One cannot help but notice the similarity between Murray's understandings of art and the statements of the Pittsburgh jazz musicians.

Burnim and Maultsby (1987: 111) argue that although social context and historical determinacy serve to distinguish black vernacular genres such as gospel and blues, they are at the same time, for African American people, unified into a conceptual whole by a similarly held and shared world view. Here, when I use the term *vernacular*, I'm thinking about black music performance much in the same way as Lubiano writes about black speech practice; "African-American vernacular is an attitude toward language, a language dynamic, and a technique of language use."<sup>86</sup> Within this unified framework, this attitude toward music, there exists the idea that music is capable of effecting transformation, or as Burnim (1989: 53) puts it, "the process of becoming something different from what was before." In his discussion of musical interaction in ritual events Nketia (1989: 112) finds that the key to effecting transformation is action. Music which invites personal involvement in the music-making process through participation and

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<sup>86</sup> Wahneemah Lubiano quoted in Katherine Clay Bassard, *Spiritual Interrogations: Culture, Gender, and Community in Early African American Women's Writing*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 17.



interaction, music which intensifies the emotional affect this being achieved through the integration of culturally coded sounds, movements, and visual cues, has potential to lead to altered states of being within individuals.

The hard bop emphasis on soulfulness through the idiomatic coding of gospel and blues calls to mind the spiritual and ritualistic dimension associated with black music performance. Art Blakey acknowledges this dimension as well the mutuality of sacred and secular black music traditions, and to be specific, jazz, in the following:

When I was a kid, I went to church mainly to relieve myself of problems and hardships. We did it by singing and clapping our hands. We called this way of relieving trouble having the spirit hit you. I get that same feeling, even more powerfully, when I'm playing jazz. In jazz, you get the message when you hear the music. And when we're on the stand, and we see people in the audience who aren't patting their feet and who aren't nodding their heads to our music, we know we're doing something wrong. Because when we do get our message across, those heads and feet do move. (DownBeat, 1956)

The participatory nature of jazz performance, that is, the idea of people “pouring themselves into the music,” and “getting carried away” with it as Blakey attests, or the notion that the people “get right in the music with you” as Silver remarked is not unlike Nathan Davis’ (1992: 56-57) observation of the black worship service in which the high level of participatory intensity achieved during the sermon sequence and the “idea of becoming totally submerged in the Spirit was part of the ceremony” the objective of which was to lead to, albeit temporarily, “a transplanted state of existence.”

The fact that Pittsburgh jazz musicians recognize the potential for their music to lead individuals to a transformed state of existence is evident in the language they use when talking

about jazz. The use of phrases such as ‘swing you into bad health,’ ‘swing you into next week,’ and ‘swing you out over the bandstand,’ when discussing a particular musician or band’s performing abilities, or to define the intent of jazz performance in relation to the audience in terms of ‘to wash away the dust of everyday life,’ or to identify one’s experience of performing as ‘my sanctuary,’ or ‘my cocoon,’ all speak to the notion of transformation.

Chuck Austin’s interrogative statement concerning the scenes he witnessed at the Musician’s Club is indicative of this notion.

So when you experience that high level of creativity and mastery as a musician young or old, that living breathing energy coming from guys ... and musicians from your favorite records, you are going to play much better than you otherwise would. It’s difficult to fully describe the environment at the Club: This place was the site of some of the most profound interaction between many of the greatest musicians. There were nights where bands or jam sessions were swinging so hard people passed out – how do you describe that?<sup>87</sup>

In her study of gospel music performance Burnim found that inspired performances such as Austin describes, those in which performers exceed their normal level of technical and creative abilities, or those in which people are moved to a trance-like state (passed out), are understood as indicators that a spiritual transformation has taken place. In this sense, during the course of an evening’s performance the jazzman functions much like the secular counterpart to the African American preacher within the context of the black worship service. Both may be seen as agents (artists), using the medium of sound, by which individuals are transformed through active participation into the collective group. In Richard’s view it is this feeling of

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<sup>87</sup> Chuck Austin, “Card-Carrying Embers,” In *Pittsburgh City Paper* August 8-15, 2001. p. 19. Note too that communicative interaction also takes place between the musicians and members of the audience.

oneness, a shared emotional bond, which creates a common spirit, which itself defines the spiritual nature of all black music as well as that of African American people. (1996: 208)

## **5.0 ENCULTURATION AND LEARNING THE JAZZ DRUMMING TRADITION**

In black communities across the United States jazz music was, and continues to be an integral part of social life. As such, a young person is brought into a culturally constructed sonic world at an early age, almost from birth. For a young person inclined toward music this kind of environment can have a profound and lasting impact. In our case, while the reasons for choosing a particular instrument to play may be for the most part, the result of personal aesthetics, the musicians in this study do share common socio-cultural experiences in acquiring their knowledge of jazz drumming.

How does one become a jazz drummer? What factors determine the success of an individual? How does community play a role in the development of individual musicians? The answers to these questions and more lie in the cultural approach to musical analysis. In this chapter I will document the circumstances and contexts through which the three musicians learned and practiced their art. I will discuss their significant early musical experiences and follow their musical development through the point at which they established full-fledged professional careers. While I recognize the fact that musicianship continues to grow over the course of one's career, I'm interested in their formative years because it is during these years when the enculturation process takes place. It is understood that while African American music allows for a high degree of individuality in musical performance, music itself, remains a cultural practice with shared normative procedures. My aim here is to provide a narrative, from the

viewpoint of these three musicians, of the twin process of the development of an individual artistic sensibility and learning to work that sensibility within the parameters of a culturally defined musical system. Much of what follows is taken directly from the interviews I conducted with the principal musicians under consideration. Their words are rich in ethnographic detail as well as vivid imagery and provide insight into learning jazz within a community setting.

From this present study we find that the attraction to jazz music and drums in particular, appears at an early age. This attraction may be manifest in various behaviors. For example, a young child may unconsciously demonstrate a predilection for the drums by “beating the knife and fork on the dinner table” or “beating on the pots and pans” or “tapping my pencil on the school desk” or imitating the physical movements of the drummer moving about an imaginary drum set while “moving my arms and wrist in the air.” In fact, this type of behavior is often interpreted by family members as a sign that the child was meant to play the instrument.<sup>88</sup> The proximity to an actual drum set, whether in the immediate family or through close social ties also seems to be influential in choosing to play the instrument. Or, the reasons for choosing to play the instrument may simply be unexplainable.

It can be seen that with older children and young adults learning music is in part a result of socialization with musicians of their peer group. Non-musicians can also play a role in acquiring the requisite knowledge of jazz drumming, especially in the area of aesthetics. Community members with a special love for the music may provide the young player with informal feedback and encourage them to continue developing their performance skills. As the individual musician gains in performance acumen opportunities to play in professional and semi-professional ensembles provide “on the job” training. Here the point is that the musical

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<sup>88</sup> Field notes: Several people I spoke with during my fieldwork explained that they knew their child, (brother, sister, cousin, nephew, niece, etc.) was destined to be a musician based on this type of observable behavior.

experience in itself can provide a valuable object lesson which the young musician must sort out and take from the experience to add to their knowledge base.

For these drummers, instruction in the development of instrumental technique was limited to private lessons on the snare drum taken while in their youth. However, in spite of formal snare drum lessons, all three drummers were essentially self-taught when it comes to drum set performance. This factor leads to the understanding that much of what is learned of jazz drumming performance style is not taught, but rather the individual, through observation of sounds and playing technique, as well as self-analysis of experience, in a process of continual reflection arrives at a point of understanding by which they are able to perform satisfactory idiomatic musical statements that resonate within culturally aware individuals. In other words of the vernacular, they become “players”.

## **5.1 JOE HARRIS**

A self-described “fanatic about drums” from an early age, Harris felt he was “destined to be a drummer.” Much of Harris’ early life was spent soaking up the musical sounds in the home and neighborhood environs. He was intrigued by the sound of percussion and found himself gravitating toward the drum set in particular. His parents supported his interest in music and drumming.

I was fortunate that my parents saw something in me ... after years of beatin’ the knife and fork on the table. So, one Christmas Santa brought me the drums. ... I guess they thought I was asleep, but they was carrying it downstairs. You know,

put it under the tree, but I could hear the cymbals hit up against one another. I couldn't wait to get up, man, you know! [I] couldn't wait for the sun to come up!

As Harris remembers it, he received the drum set when he was thirteen years old. It was a basic drum kit and came replete with the small cymbals in fashion at the time. Looking back from the perspective of almost fifty years, Harris recalls his thoughts upon seeing an old photograph of his first drum set. "How did I play? ... What did I do?" One thing is for sure - young Harris wasted no time. He began to go about the business of becoming a jazz drummer under his own initiative by practicing and playing along to recordings of the popular big bands of the day. His parents continued to encourage and support their son in his musical endeavors. "And then they saw I was practicing and everything. Then they decided to get me private lessons." His parents arranged for him to take drum instruction with Mr. Bill Hammond, a well respected drummer and teacher. Hammond owned and operated a music store in Downtown Pittsburgh. Young Harris was thrilled.

Bill Hammond was known throughout the Pittsburgh region as being both a great teacher and great rudimental drummer. Hammond was one of the original signers of the National Association of Rudimental Drummers, N.A.R.D. This organization was formed during the American Legion National Convention of 1932. The objective of N.A.R.D. was to standardize a system of drumming. The organization selected a group of rudiments by which all corps and drummers were to be judged. Membership in N.A.R.D. was achieved by demonstrating one's command over these 26 basic rudiments. The only way one can gain membership is by literally playing your way into the organization.<sup>89</sup> William Ludwig identifies Hammond as being the

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<sup>89</sup> "The 'National Association of Rudimental Drummers.'" Reproduced on Internet site, June 17, 2004. users3.evl.net/~beckham/nardorg.html)

snare drummer for the Pittsburgh Symphony and an “expert rudimental instructor for all types of drummers – dance, theater, grand opera and symphony.”<sup>90</sup> William Ludwig, founder and president of the Ludwig Drum Manufacturing Company, himself a member of N.A.R.D. observed that, “drum teachers fall into two categories – one that first wants a lot of students and keep them coming back and the other that wants to and insists on building drummers.”<sup>91</sup> By all accounts Bill Hammond belonged in the second category.<sup>92</sup>

Harris’ private drum tutoring cost \$1.50 per lesson - a considerable sum during the Depression. Money was tight in the Harris household, but his parents were willing to make the financial sacrifice in order to see that young Joe got the proper training. As time went by, Joe came to truly appreciate his parent’s financial sacrifices. To put it in perspective, Harris recalls how his parents used to buy three-quarter tons of heating coal to last the winter. The coal was delivered by truck and for an extra twenty-five cents the driver would put a chute on the truck and run the coal right into the cellar window. Money being tight, his parents would decline the extra expense and young Joe was sent out with a shovel to complete the chore.

Harris offers another example of the cost consciousness found in his household. In those days chickens were sold fresh killed at the market. The customer had the choice to buy a chicken with or without plumage. He explains how his mother would bring the bird home and plucked the feathers her self; all this additional work to prepare a meal because the butcher charged an extra nickel to remove the feathers before sale. Comparing the extent to which his parents went in order to save, even just a few extra cents, against the cost of his drum lessons,

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<sup>90</sup> “The ‘National Association of Rudimental Drummers.’”

<sup>91</sup> IBID

<sup>92</sup> Jack Diani (personal conversation Fall 2002), a professional drummer and teacher in the Pittsburgh region as well as a former student of Hammond agreed with Ludwig’s assessment. John Beck, Percussion Director at the Eastman School of Music, is also in agreement with this assessment. Harold Lee (personal conversation Fall 2001)



Harris surmises, “What I’m saying is ... a dollar-fifty, in those days ... that must have been *heavy!*”<sup>93</sup>

Joe began weekly lessons which consisted of instruction in the rudiments of snare drumming and reading drum notation. Harris applied himself well to the task of learning the rudimental system. He also loved learning everything there was to know about the instrument. Hammond’s music store was located on Penn Avenue at Seventh Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh. The store was situated across from the Stanley Theater. He spent considerable amounts of time soaking up the lively atmosphere at the store. Visiting musicians, in town working at the numerous theaters, or the plush showrooms of Pittsburgh’s downtown hotels, came in the store to buy musical supplies and instrumental accessories, and Harris had occasion to meet them. Joe would often stay around the store after his lessons investigating the manufacturing details of the various name brand drum sets of the day. Other times he watched while the professional drummers would stretch a piece of calf hide by attaching it to a wooden hoop. Then place the hoop over the drum cylinder before securing the hoop to the drum with clamps, finally, tuning the drum until it resonated in glorious vibrating sound.

However, his interest in drumming wasn’t just an idle pastime for the young musician. Joe took his music studies seriously. He practiced long and hard, and under Hammond’s tutelage, was on his way to mastering the 26 American Rudiments. Joe’s hard work did not go unnoticed by Hammond. Harris recalls,

After about a year, I was the king! Hammond used to show me off ... [he’d have me] play for the other students ... The ‘Downfall of Paris’ or ‘The Three Camps.’

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<sup>93</sup> IBID

Here Harris is referring to the snare drum solos based on the traditional rudiments as defined by the N.A.R.D. drumming organization. Many of these solos were first published by the Cleveland based drummer Charlie Wilcoxon in his collection, *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos for the Advanced Drummer*<sup>94</sup>. This collection is currently in much use today and is available through the Ludwig Drum Company.

Harris' hard work paid off in other ways as well. Hammond, seeing his dedication and deep interest in all aspects of drums and percussion, offered Harris a job at the music store. This was a great opportunity because it allowed the young musician to be responsible for the cost of his own musical education and introduced him to the life of professional musicians. The importance of this event in Harris' young life cannot be underestimated. As he puts it,

Music entered my life seriously in 1940 when I was fourteen years old. Mr. Bill Hammond, a well known teacher and music store owner, offered me a job in exchange for private percussion lessons. The job involved cleaning up the store and running errands after school on weekdays and all day on Saturdays. My pay was one drum lesson per week, street car fare, and fifty cents lunch money on Saturdays. During this time, I met many famous musicians, notable drummers, who played for big name bands at the Stanley Theater. These experiences became my foundation for my career in music.

Harris credits Hammond for providing him with the technical foundation that enabled him, in part, to achieve a successful career as a drummer. What kinds of things did he learn?

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<sup>94</sup> Chas. A Wilcoxon. Cleveland, Ohio. The version of the book collection that I own was published in 1941. The "Down Fall of Paris" is rewritten as "The New Downfall" Mr. Harris showed me some of his original study materials, here these solos appear to be off-prints from the original text. Harris used these solos to demonstrate the difference in interpretation of swing versus straight eighth note feel when performing the 7-stroke roll with the triplet and sixteenth note subdivision.

Joe's training under Hammond was focused strictly on the development of proper hand technique and rudimental drumming. For example,

I got into the habit of starting my roll – the mamma-daddy – with my left hand and even to this day, most of the time I start a roll it will be with the left hand. ... My teacher, he noticed that. So, after some months he said, 'Concentrate! Start it sometimes with the right.' ... "I was fortunate. He had a hell of a technique. Oh, he had the forearm! A rudimental drummer, he had the forearm. ... That's why I think my hands were always good – because he instilled that [in me.]

Much of his time as a student of Hammond's was spent playing exercises on the practice pad. The practice pad is a device containing a section of gum rubber, about 3 inches in diameter that is attached to a small wooden frame. Often times the frame is mounted on a stand and played in similar fashion to a snare drum. The idea behind the use of a pad is to develop the muscles of the wrist and fingers in the execution of drum strokes, and the feel of lifting the stick off the drum head by utilizing the natural bounce of the rubber pad. However, the pad responds differently than an actual drum. First, in addition to being soft in volume compared to an actual drum, the pad does not resonate like a drum will and therefore, the sound of individual drum strokes will be precise and clear. Any technical deficiencies which inhibit the production of an acceptable drum sound are audibly noticeable when using the pad. Second, in terms of feel, the pad responds differently than a drum. It has more give, here the idea is that one has to work harder to produce a sound and to keep control of the sticks, especially when playing at fast tempos. Again the use of the pad to gauge technical deficiencies is of primary importance. So the practice pad, rather than being a surrogate for a drum is more correctly understood as a pedagogical device, its use being to develop and reinforce proper technique before transferring

those techniques to the playing of musical passages on an actual drum. In addition to the pad, Harris employed the use of a metronome in his studies with Hammond. The metronome as commonly understood provides a gauge to measure the development of control at various tempos as well as aids in awareness of any fluctuations in time on the part of the player.

Hammond was known as a stickler for snare drum technique. His practice routines were intense and not every student was up for the task. Pittsburgh drummer, Harold Lee, a contemporary of Harris told me that he was also a student of Hammond but quit after a time because he found the practice required to keep up was too demanding. Mr. Lee told me he was interested in drums more for personal enjoyment, or a sideline job rather than looking at it as a career.<sup>95</sup> However, Joe Harris proved to be an outstanding pupil and this fact was not lost on his peers including Mr. Lee. He says,

Joe was one of Hammond's star pupils and he was insisting on doing it right and Joe was the only guy who did it right. ... Hammond drilled him like a marine private.<sup>96</sup>

Hammond not only taught Harris the discipline of snare drumming; he also instilled a sense of pride in professionalism in the young drummer. Harris recalls an experience that illustrates this professional attitude. In this case, by following Hammond's advice, he distinguished himself from other drummers in his age group. The incident took place when Joe was nominated for a position in the All City Orchestra. Students from throughout the Pittsburgh School District were invited to participate in rehearsals and a concert program. The rehearsal

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<sup>95</sup> Harold Lee (personal conversation, Fall 2001)

<sup>96</sup> Harold Lee, AAJPSP Interview, 31 July 1997

took place at Schenley High School in the Oakland District across town from where Joe went to school. Before he attended the rehearsal Hammond told him, “ ‘After you get your snare drum set up and tuned, play just a few 7-stroke rolls to warm up, then sit and wait.’” As Joe puts it, “‘Why [did he say that]? ‘Cause all the other kids they’re gonna be running around like a chicken with their head cut off! Do you know how that paid off?’” Harris explains the significance of Hammond’s advice to him. During this same period he was playing in a combo with a group of young musicians that included Ray Brown and Walt Harper. Harper and Brown were both students at Schenley and when asked to provide the music for a student dance, decided to hold the rehearsal at their high school. When Joe showed up to rehearse with them he was accosted by the school’s Principal who said to him:

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‘What are you doing here? You don’t go here.’ So right away, here’s Ray Brown and them started in, ‘well he’s with us.’ The Principal said, ‘I know he didn’t go here because I noticed him at rehearsal the other day.’ He said I stood out because I was just standing there like this [demonstrates his position holding the sticks relaxed and ready to perform]. He said everybody else was moving and running around. He said by me being motionless – I stood out! You see?

Harris learned the value of carrying oneself with a professional decorum. The school’s Principal allowed him to remain in the building and make the rehearsal with the fledgling jazz musicians.

So, my teacher *knew* what he was talking about! I was fortunate in that respect. He was interested in me ... he was a white dude and everything. ... .

I believe that this kind of interaction and positive experience allowed Harris to have confidence and trust in the training he was receiving from Hammond. Reinforced Joe's confidence to take to heart what he was learning.

So far we've touched on Mr. Harris' training in the basics of music reading and rudimental drumming. Following the standard practice of the time the instruction he received from Bill Hammond focused on snare technique. The question follows - when, where, and how did he learn to play the drum set? Harris provides the answer for us.

My teacher, he was a good cat, but he was a rudimental drummer, he didn't play the set. So that makes me think I must have taught myself the set. What I mean by 'taught myself'; I'd go to the shows, watch all the drummers, you know, two shows a day. When Basie and them would come to play a dance, I'd be right there on the bandstand, you know ... be watchin' Papa Jo play. He was something man! This cat was something! "See Poppa Jo, he wore ballet slippers when he played. ...*Couldn't no one play his drums.* That was the worst thing you ever wanted to do was sit behind them drums 'cause he used timpani heads on the bass drum. That was in the days before plastic, this was the real ... he used the unborn (calf) – the clear heads. He had this big bass drum, the pedal, but what it was, you couldn't control (the heads) ... because he was the *tone master*. He played with the tone and the touch! See that was Jo Jones, in them days man, because he had that big bass drum, and when that band was hittin' [sings: zook-da] that bass drum would, you know shake the whole hall, or wherever they was – it wasn't loud, but it was just *so heavy*. He was elegant, man! So I was glad I got him as one of my mentors.

Harris' explanation of how he taught himself the jazz drumming performance style is worth considering in detail. Although he says he would "watch all the drummers", it was not a

matter of simply watching. From his explanation we find that in actuality his approach incorporated three cognitive categories; the visual, aural, and tactile. His statement on the “tone and touch” of Jo Jones bass drum performance demonstrates Harris’s ability to assess the relationship between sound and the physical production of that sound. Here the ability to sense the tactile element is intuited through observation of the physical motion required to produce the sound. The young Harris, by placing himself in a choice location (“I’d be right there on the bandstand.”) to observe this technique first hand demonstrates his thoughtful discernment of key elements of jazz drumming. This auto-didactic approach to learning appears to be a common characteristic shared by the drummers under consideration in this study. In this case the burden of determining what it is that is necessary to learn is placed on the student doing the learning. In addition, in regards to Jo Jones, Harris use of the term mentor is not, I think, to be taken literally in that he had personal instruction from Jones, but rather that he keyed in on the artistic approach of Jo Jones as a model for emulation.

Harris provides another example of the kinds of things he picked up from watching the musicians perform. He remembered the first time he saw George Russell, then a member of Benny Carter’s big band. The group was playing at Pittsburgh’s Roosevelt Theater. Russell, in a move unusual for its time, incorporated two large ride cymbals as part of his drum kit. The larger ride cymbals didn’t become commonplace until the late forties and early fifties. Harris remembers being impressed with this not simply because he had never seen it done before, but because it opened up his conception to the possibilities of the instrumental configuration for his own drum set.

It's important not to underestimate Joe's determined nature, still as strong today as when he was a young man. Harris distinguishes that personal motivation and self-determination is more important to one's development than any one teacher can be.

You're supposed to do it yourself. You figured it out for yourself. The individual develops his own technique for practicing. Most people, they seem to think they have to have to have a teacher simply because the teacher forces them to practice. Because they see the teacher once a week ... so, all week they have this thought, 'Well I gotta practice today 'cause I gotta see the teacher and he'll know that I haven't [practiced]'... But, see, I don't need that, I motivate my own self. ... I was motivated by myself. Remember I was playing the drums *before I had* a teacher. So, I was already motivated because I was a fanatic about drums at an early age. ...I was beatin' on the table with my hands and spoons, things like that ... different people are motivated.

Highly motivated, young Harris also drew inspiration from the world around him. Inspiration came from many sources and it wasn't always the result of positive experiences. Harris played in the percussion section of the concert band and symphony orchestras while in Junior High and High School. He recalls an event that occurred in his young life which impacted his already strong motivation to become a master percussionist.

Something happened to me in Eighth Grade. I changed schools. They had made a new district line so I had to go to another school. I was in the eighth grade and the teacher said, 'No, you can't get in the "A" Orchestra until you're in the ninth grade, but a white guy [another eighth grader,] he transferred to the school right after I did and he wasn't nowhere near as good as me – I could read stuff then, you know, real good. But she put him in "A" Orchestra and from that moment on



I said, 'Man, I'm going home and add another half-hour to my two hour practice session! They ain't gonna get away with this!' ... See, so that motivated me ... even at that young age I dug what was happening.

Elsewhere he speaks of the same incident.

[I] couldn't get into the "A" Orchestra. I was told only seniors get into it, but then another Eighth Grader (a white student) got into the "A" Orchestra ... racism! [I was determined] I'm gonna show these whites I can play their stuff!

Opportunities to hear live music were abundant throughout black Pittsburgh during the time when Joe was coming into his teenage years.

In school, in the 1930s and 40s, there was no mention of jazz in elementary school. I got Black Culture at home. It's different today. Young (black) musicians don't have the background. They don't go to church, or hear the Blues.

What is important here is to understand that his self-directed, focused study of jazz performance was grounded in the larger cultural context of black life in the city. Among local musicians who provided inspiration Harris cites drummer, Curtis Young who was active in the W.P.A. bands working in Pittsburgh's West End in the late Thirties, as an early influence on his playing.

As his interest in music grew, along with his technical skills, Harris joined the ranks with other teenage musicians throughout the city. For these aspiring jazz musicians learning was a group effort and experience was their best teacher. As he recalls it, Harris' first experience playing with a live band came when he was fourteen. The band which included Alan Saunders

was made up of kids slightly older than himself, seventeen or eighteen years old. While the age difference may not seem too acute; from the perspective of a fourteen year old, the age difference was significant. Harris looked up to the older kids and respected them as experienced players. Joe was invited to rehearse with Saunders and the group. He was familiar with the repertoire - swing tunes and popular songs - having been playing along with records on his own for some time. However, he wasn't prepared for the shock he encountered when given the responsibility of handling the drums for the first time in a live situation. To his surprise, Harris found he couldn't keep steady time. As he explains,

When I got with my first band here in Pittsburgh I couldn't keep no time. Because I had just been home playing with records. And I was great playing along with records, but that didn't help me in the sense that as a drummer you have to learn how to keep tempo. The tempo was going up and down.

He realized that by playing along with records he had only learned to follow the drummer, but not to establish and maintain the time within himself. In addition to developing a steady sense of time; playing with other musicians expanded Harris' understanding of the jazz drumming style. Apparently, when he first began to play with this group he didn't have a full grasp of the stylistic concept. Harris relates that the more experienced older boys 'preached' to him, "Joe Jones' ... 'Joe Jones.'" Here, the reference to the famous drummer from the Count Basie Orchestra was the musicians' way of explaining to Harris the rhythmic sound concept they were looking for - the "Swish." In other words, as Harris understood it, to play the time with the stick on the top hi hat cymbal while opening and closing the foot pedal. The effect of which is to

generate a light, buoyant time feel which propels the music forward, a technique closely associated with Jonathon ‘Papa’ Joe Jones. From this experience Harris says,

I became *conscious* ... [I] started buying Basie records ... go home and listen to them.

For the self-aware musician this kind of experience is beneficial. It helps to “fine tune” one’s listening skills. Afterwards when the musician returns to listening to model recordings, he has a stronger sense of what to listen for. The process becomes one of refinement of one’s sensibility about the music and in this case the role of the drummer. Put another way, the more you listen, the more you find to listen for. The fact that the other musicians invoked the name of Jo Jones is also important to note. For, the iconic use of a word or short phrase to convey a complex musical concept is not uncommon in jazz culture.

However, after listening to the recordings and grasping the concept there was one more problem Joe had to solve – at that time he didn’t own a hi hat! The drum set his parents had bought him didn’t come with one. With a little experimentation Joe found that by holding his left stick underneath his cymbal and allowing it to vibrate or “sizzle” while playing the top of the cymbal with the right hand stick he could approximate the sound Jo Jones achieved by using two cymbals and the foot pedal. Without having the full drum equipment he was still able to “create the sound.” This example demonstrates the importance of sound quality over technical or mechanical concerns and speaks to the way in which creativity is brought to bear in finding individual solutions to musical problems.

Although, generally speaking, they were not considered full fledged professionals, young teens and even pre-teens were often called upon to provide musical entertainment at social events

throughout the black community. A read of the social columns in the Pittsburgh Courier provides evidence that quite an array of social gatherings were held in any given week during Harris' teenage years. These include school dances and musical productions, birthday parties, church socials, and events sponsored by civic and youth oriented agencies. For example, it is well known that Billy Strayhorn began to write musical accompaniment for school sponsored stage shows while still a teenager during his student years at Westinghouse High. Additionally, The Centre Avenue YMCA reserved a special night for teenagers to hang out and dance to the jukebox or occasional live entertainment. The Ammon Recreation Center on Webster Avenue held a prom every Saturday night which featured a Jitterbug contest.<sup>97</sup>

One particular evening event at the Kay Club on Wylie Avenue proved to be a fateful occurrence for the young drummer. Here Joe met the bassist Ray Brown. Later, Brown would be instrumental in Joe's invitation to audition for the drum chair in the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra. However, at this moment, Harris was simply thrilled to find another musician his own age who also felt the same way about jazz, especially the new music known as bebop. Brown was part of a small cadre of young musicians which also included pianist, Walt Harper and his brother the saxophonist, Nate Harper, and bassist, Marcus Kelly, who attended Schenley High School in Pittsburgh's Oakland District. Other of Harris' contemporaries active during this period include, trumpeter and multi-instrumentalist, Horace Turner, alto saxophonist, Hosea Taylor, drummer, Harold Lee, and trumpeter, Calvin Folks. All were striving to be professional jazz musicians.

As word of Harris' drumming skills began to circulate he got calls to work with older, professional musicians. He recalls being hired to play in the big band led by Tommy Turrentine

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<sup>97</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, October, November, and December, 1943.

Sr. While the elder Turrentine's musical reputation is well-known to the elders of Pittsburgh's jazz community, his national recognition is far outweighed by that of his two famous musician sons, trumpeter, Tommy and saxophonist, Stanley Turrentine.

In 1942, at the age of 16, Harris joined the musicians union AFM Local-471 in Pittsburgh. At this time, as throughout the country, the musicians union was segregated along racial lines. Camaraderie However, this was a fertile period in Pittsburgh jazz history. There were many groups working around the city and the black musicians union Local AFM 471 was a focal point for much musical activity. "We hired ourselves to play on Friday and Saturday." The Musicians Club was also the site of numerous exchanges between local players and out-of-town touring musicians who would find their way to the club after playing an engagement elsewhere in the city.

As America entered into the World War Two years the rise of steel and related industries during the late thirties and forties increased the region's economy and many people saw an increase in their disposable income. A number of the musicians interviewed for the AAJPSP Oral History Project described the opportunities that existed for jazz musicians to ply their craft up and down the "steel valley" of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Musician Kenny Fisher told me that it wasn't uncommon for a bandleader to approach a club owner on a Wednesday and be working the club the next day and through the weekend.<sup>98</sup> However, besides the increased economy there were existing social factors which impacted gig opportunities. Harris notes that, "segregation was prominent, and it forced blacks to have their own things. Steel mill towns had their own clubs for blacks." He recalls working in out-lying towns such as Rankin, Monesson, and Clariton. Black clubs hired Pittsburgh bands to play for dances and other entertainment

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<sup>98</sup> Field notes

events. Working in this environment provided the young Harris with valuable experience. Often these groups were quartets comprised of piano, drums, tenor saxophone, and trumpet. As Harris explains,

It's better to have another horn than a bass. The leader would say 'Make a shout!' I'd get in and emphasize it (the riff) a little.

In essence these were small groups trying to match the sounds of a big band.

Pittsburgh's Hill District has been described as a cultural Mecca for blacks in western Pennsylvania. The variety and sheer number of entertainment venues certainly contributed to this reputation. Harris found work in numerous of these establishments in the early days of his musical development. Once such establishment, the Celebrity Club, located at 2103 Centre Avenue in the Hill, which advertised it self as "Pittsburgh's leading nightclub" and prided itself on an "effort to make Pittsburgh floor-show conscious" booked the top national acts of the day.<sup>99</sup> For example their Pittsburgh Courier ad from November 6, 1943 announced a presentation of the *St. Louis Blues Revue* which featured, "Flink Moore – Comic Extraordinaire; Mary Alexander – Shake Dancer; Mabel Hunter – Comedienne and Blues Singer; Tarzan – The Torpedo Exotic Dancer"; plus four unidentified "Celebrity Cuties." Shows began at 11 pm and 12:45 am.<sup>100</sup> A reviewer of another show characterized Maizie the dancer as "funny in a shake routine" and made note that "Princess Minnola, billed as a native African dancer, hit the floor and shook the place into submission with a series of gyrations to the tune of 'Black and Tan Fantasy'."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, October, 23 1943, p.19.

<sup>100</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*. November, 6 1943 p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 27, 1943 p. 20

Harris' early professional experience includes providing accompaniment for such floor-shows. In between shows the bands would play popular music for dancing. Harris cites these kinds of experiences during his formative years as being invaluable to his success as a drummer.

What I think was very important in my career, when I started this was in the days before television, so basically everything you saw was live except, naturally you'd see things in the movies but, basically there were many live dances around, there were many theaters where you could go see live shows. What is now the Benedum Center used to be the Stanley Theater where they used to have the live shows every week. Four shows a day. Six days a week. I mean the big bands, the famous Basie, Duke, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Lunceford, Cab Calloway. I've seen them all there. So these things ... I'm saying that you could go and observe live music being played because the emphasis was on live music. Records were all right but, basically you just used records at home. Some bars might have had a juke box that played them but, basically when you went out, you wanted to go and see live entertainment. So I'm growing up in this atmosphere ... So I'm getting this technique of playing shows. Because when we went on a job – when I got good enough that I could go on a job – let's say, maybe it was a four piece band and there were at least two other entertainers there. It might be a young lady who was a shake dancer in conjunction with some guy who was an emcee – he told jokes and sang – or there might be some guy that tap danced and sang and told jokes. So, therefore, I'm getting this experience of playing for them ... so then, this helped me later when I moved to New York. Then I'm working the Apollo Theater there, playing for these variety type shows.

Pursuing this line of thought I asked Harris if he could demonstrate some of the beats or musical ideas he picked up through these experiences - for instance the shake dance rhythm. His

response helps illuminate the way in which an individual's artistic sensibility is given room to develop through the performance experience.

It's no different than what you would play, but it's what she would be doing. You know she was shaking and maybe you would do some type of a roll or when she would shake her hips from side to side on a specific beat. Then you might hit the bass drum and the cymbal, or rim shot, or things like that. You know – you'd make up your own idea, I mean your own technique of what you would emphasize of what she was doing. Another thing – if a guy is tap dancing ... three or four choruses ... then he might say 'take it out now' or 'let's go home.' So that means if I'm playing soft while he's been tap dancing ... when he says 'let's go home' that means I'm gonna play louder. Because he's gonna be doing his jumps and splits and things like that. So, if you're helping him, or her go over by emphasizing what they're doing. These are just things like that. *'What do you think?'* ... *'How would you do this?'* ... *'How would you emphasize what they're doing?'* So, then through the years of playing ... after years of playing I know that music is gonna fall into only so many categories.

Harris identifies several key concepts in this passage. Harris' role as an accompanist is not limited to simply keeping a beat. He's expected to interact with the performer, and to engage the audience as well by intensifying the performance where appropriate. Although his conception of what to play may be tempered by what works for that entertainer, notice he receives very little in the way of specifics of exactly what to play. Over time and upon contemplation he arrives at a particular performance sensibility.

Harris began to play drums at age thirteen. I talked to him about when he began to develop his own style and who were his influences.



Well I guess that goes with playing from the very beginning, after you develop a little technique or something like that, and basically when I started, and I had this little drum set, I was more or less teaching myself, so I guess the drum soloing and experimentation started from the very beginning. And, I don't know if there are that many drum solos that you are acquainted with. I know there was a highly skilled solo - Chick Webb's solo on "Liza" – and then probably the most popular drum solo was Gene Krupa's solo on "Sing, Sing, Sing" with Benny Goodman. But, technically Chick Webb's technique with his solo was so much over the Gene Krupa solo ... if you're interested in rhythmic ... . Cozy Cole's (solo) "Topsy" was a very commercial type drum solo. They played this every time (Cole and Krupa), these solos were repeated every time they played, *it* wasn't an improvised creative solo like Chick Webb's solo on "Liza."

In 1944, after graduating from high school, Harris took what was supposed to be a short trip to Chicago for the Elks Club National Convention. Although not a regular member of the band Harris was playing with the Northside Elks Marching Band from Pittsburgh. He was asked to participate in the parade as substitute for one of the drummers unable to make the trip. For his efforts Harris was to receive roundtrip train fare to Chicago plus food and lodging. It turned out to be a great deal. It was on this trip that Joe heard the Billy Eckstine Big Band live in person for the first time.<sup>102</sup> Harris recalls his excitement upon arriving in Chicago's South Side and seeing the Eckstine band announced on the marquee of the Regal Theater: "Lord lookeyah here!" The band at this time featured the Pittsburgh drummer, Art Blakey. Joe had met Blakey, possibly when he worked at Hammond's music store, in the early forties when the elder drummer had returned to his hometown for a three month hiatus. Art introduced Joe to Eckstine as "a bad young dude from home." To which "B", as Eckstine was fondly known, queried the young

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<sup>102</sup> Eckstine's band became known as the "Be Bop Incubator" as many of its young members went on to become the musical leaders of the bebop era.

Harris, “What’s happening in that funky Pittsburgh?” Having established his Pittsburgh connections, Harris spent much of the duration of the Eckstine engagement hanging out backstage absorbing the sights and sounds of the music firsthand. In fact, the cultural life in Chicago’s Southside was so absorbing that Harris ended up foregoing the return trip with the Elks band. Instead he took a job in a meat packing plant and stayed in town for three weeks before returning to Pittsburgh.

The experience in Chicago, especially the opportunity to witness Art Blakey’s dynamic performance style firsthand had a big impact on the young drummer’s developing musical concept. As he explains it:

Because when I came back, I was playing in a big band here in Pittsburgh, the trombone player said, ‘Damn Joe! You went to Chicago, you came back with some new stuff.’ Cause I was playing like Art Blakey, or trying to play like Art Blakey – his style. The trombone player heard it right away.

When asked if he took lessons with Blakey, Harris responded,

Watch, look, and listen is how you learn ... everybody held the sticks a little different ... you didn’t ask ... you watch. In the Black Culture you didn’t take formal lessons – *you watch*.” As formal lessons in jazz drumming technique were not part of the learning equation for a young jazz musician in the forties, this type of direct observation is invaluable. What kinds of ideas did Harris observe in Blakey’s playing? “It wasn’t his technique it was first like a little type of rhythm that he used. And the way he was playing with the snare drum and the bass drum. He had a little push [sings] that’s all. That’s one of the things.

Harris was also impressed with the way Blakey's musical ideas seemed to flow effortlessly from inside his head.

Players like Art Blakey just play what they hear. He would have a thought and be able to produce it on drums right away. How does one get this talent? I don't know. Maybe God doesn't play fair when he hands out talents.<sup>103</sup>

It was perhaps fortuitous that Joe heard Blakey while the later was with Eckstine and not one of the other big bands of the day. Eckstine's was one of the first big bands to play the new musical conception of bebop and Blakey was encouraged to "stretch out" and develop his musical concept on the drums. According to musicologist, Scott DeVeaux (1997: 349), "Even the drummer, Art Blakey, felt free to contribute to the creative enterprise." As Blakey's explains,

It was like a small combo.... You don't go to Duke's band and play Art Blakey, you go into Duke's band and play Duke Ellington. You go to Count Basie's band, you play Count Basie. You don't go try to stick your influence in there. The only way I had a chance to stick my influence is in Billy Eckstine's band, because it was that type of thing. It was like a combo. But [for] the rest of the bands, you're the time keeper. (DeVeaux, 1997: 349)

Harris wasn't the only one impressed with Art Blakey's drumming at that time. Hosea Taylor, a contemporary of Joe's provides, in his indubitable manner, a vivid narrative of his first

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<sup>103</sup> Bob Karlovitz "Bang Those Drums: Mellon Jazz Festival Honors a Musician Who Has Kept The Beat." *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, June 4, 1995.

hearing of Art Blakey. The Eckstine band was performing at the Aragon Ballroom in downtown Pittsburgh. Taylor writes,

For the first time in my young life I heard a drummer keep time with his cymbals and snare drum and not for the most part with his bass drum. Up until that time it was the opposite with the bass drum being used to keep time and the cymbals and snare drum used for accents and flavoring. Once again I feel the need to mention the revolutionary new, black and nineteen forty four factor. I could imagine some of the older conservative percussionists cringing at the mere thought of ever having to change over to this new and different about-face technique. The drummer of course was ... Art Blakey. ... He used his bass drum for flavoring, and his cymbals and snare drum for the purpose of keeping time. What was especially exciting was the manner in which he used his percussory paraphernalia to drop goose-pimpling rhythmic bombs in between the cracks of the ensemble, and to accent the brass section while syncopating. In other words, or in the jazz musician's vernacular, he was kickin' ass.<sup>104</sup>

According to Mr. Taylor's account this event took place in 1944, yet, he doesn't give the exact date. However, I believe it's possible that he saw the Eckstine band perform in Pittsburgh roughly the same week that Harris saw the group in Chicago. Taylor writes that following their Saturday night performance he overheard Eckstine tell one of the band members their next stop was the "Regal Theatre in Chicago."<sup>105</sup>

It was around this time that young Joe decided on a career in music. His parents had supported him in his musical endeavors throughout his young life and given his success up to that point, it seemed to him like a good idea. "They encouraged me the whole way until" he

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<sup>104</sup> Hosea Taylor, *Jazz in the Pitts.* nd. p.28

<sup>105</sup> IBID p.29

announced he was going to pursue music as a full time occupation. His announcement was met with a “crying scene at home” by his family and relatives. Music was a considered at best a precarious occupation. But Harris didn’t consider teaching as an option.

Nowadays you think of music as the teachers, well, when I went to school I never did have a black teacher, all my twelve years of schooling. ... I never had a black teacher.” What other opportunities were there for young blacks in the 1940s? “Go into the steel mills, or the coke ovens out there in Clariton ... get a job running the elevators in the department store.” If this was the case, why, then would his relatives be so upset when those were the other options? “I don’t think they looked at it as another option. This is what you do ... these are the opportunities there. You take a job like that. Music was only a sideline job.

At age 17 Joe embarked on a professional career which would bring him halfway around the world and take almost thirty years before he returned to Pittsburgh to live. As Harris tells it, “I left here in ’44 ...Gone!” Ray Brown had helped him get a gig with Snookum Russell’s band. Russell’s group falls into a category known as a territory band. These type bands crossed the country touring on club or theater circuits set up along different geographic regions, hence the term, territory bands. Upon graduating high school in June of 1944 Harris joined Russell’s band in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

According to Mr. Lee, those early impressions of respect for Joe Harris’ drumming skills remains with him, even today, years after he himself had stopped playing on a regular basis.<sup>106</sup> Just what kind of impression Harris made on him is illustrated in the following anecdote. Lee relates a story from his early days traveling on the road with a band. During the bands

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<sup>106</sup> Harold Lee, AAJPSP Oral History Interview, 31 July 1997.

engagement in Indianapolis he worked opposite the drummer Max Roach. Lee recalls, “he was kicking so many sounds I said ‘I’m getting out of here.’” The next stop on the band’s tour brought them to Knoxville, Tennessee. According to Lee:

And Joe Harris was down there kicking ass and I couldn’t stand him. We was running out from one devil into another devil, so I grabbed my gear and went home.”<sup>107</sup>

Harris left Snookum Russell and eventually ended up in California by 1945. As he recalls it, one day his friend, Ray Brown called him with the news that there may be an opening for the drum chair in the Dizzy Gillespie’s Orchestra in the near future. Brown then suggested he move back east, to be close to New York, and wait.

Eventually the call from New York came. Although he hadn’t had “a lot of big time experience;” when Harris got the call to come to New York to audition with the Gillespie band he was confident in his abilities. “I felt I was prepared – years of listening to other drummers, seasoning with Snookum Russell, experience doing shows. Elsewhere he expresses a more ambivalent assessment of his preparedness. “Not a lot of experience, not seasoned, but I knew a lot of stuff!” In any case, Harris took the train into New York. For his audition he played the second set with Gillespie’s band, and went back to Pittsburgh. He got a call three weeks later, “Band coming through Pittsburgh, pick you up at noon.” That was it, no rehearsal ... no music for the drums.” Harris looked on the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet part as he sight read one of the most difficult arrangements in the band’s book –“Things to Come.” Harris joined the band in 1946. In addition to playing Gillespie’s repertoire the band also provided musical accompaniment for

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid

other acts performing on the same bill. In respect to other drummers of the day, although Harris was quite advanced, especially for someone of his age, considering he was merely 19 years old when he joined Gillespie, there were aspects of his drumming he felt lacking. “[There were] a few things to change in my style.” In particular he found that in order to play the extreme tempos and address the subtle rhythmic nature of bebop he need to control the bass drum more effectively. “I was playing the bass drum too loud. [I] needed to learn to ‘feather’ it.” (Perkins) ‘Feathering’ refers to the technique of lightly striking the beater against the bass head in such a manner that little sound is actually produced. The idea is that the drum vibrations should be ‘felt, but not heard.’ This technique requires a great amount of physical control on the part of the drummer and takes significant time and practice to develop.

Harris eventually left Gillespie and began to work around New York in various settings.

I had the tools to do a lot of things drum wise. I worked with Billy Taylor at the Café Society in the Village, at Birdland, worked the Apollo Theater, featuring show drumming, at the Savoy Ballroom with the Big Band, and in the Broadway musical, Three For One” (Perkins) “When I went to New York City I was somewhat of a phenomenon because I could play the music, I could read, and I knew different rhythms, so I worked all the time.

While in New York, Harris furthered his practical knowledge of European symphonic music through membership in several community orchestras. He also continued his practice of observation. For example, he recalls being in regular attendance - “down front, third row” - at Radio City Music Hall in order to study the drumming techniques of the great Billy Gladstone who worked in the orchestra pit. And, according to Leonard Feather, he studied timpani and

xylophone with Alfred Freise,<sup>108</sup> All of which provided continued opportunities for the study of non-jazz music.

## 5.2 RON TUCKER

Mr. Tucker first came through Pittsburgh in the mid-fifties while touring with alto saxophonist Jackie McLean's band. He has made the city his place of residence since 1969. Here, he is known to most by the name Ron Tucker. Mr. Tucker's formative years were spent in Philadelphia where he lived in the city's Germantown section. Mr. Tucker's father worked as a mechanic and his mother worked outside of the home as well. Mr. Tucker recalls that as a youngster he was impressed with his father's work ethic. He took particular note of how his father continuously read and studied to keep up with new developments in the auto mechanic trade. This fact had an influence on Ron's musical life as he maintains an active life-long interest in new developments in the field of jazz drumming as well as things mechanical. This principle becomes manifest in Mr. Tucker's playing by way of his concern for precision in executing drum sounds including the attention paid to details of tuning, and instrument maintenance.

As a jazz player, Mr. Tucker grew up in and began playing in Philadelphia's rich cultural environment. He came of musical age during the mid-forties and early fifties, a period in which Philadelphia's African American community enjoyed a particularly vibrant and fertile music and

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<sup>108</sup> Leonard Feather, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*. (New York: Oxford University Press: 1999)



arts scene. Mr. Tucker is a contemporary of John Coltrane, Jimmy Heath, and Benny Golson<sup>109</sup> and he grew up playing with them, along with others in shared musical networks. However, his early musical experiences were centered on his home and family life. When asked when he first became aware of his love for music Tucker responds, “Music’s always been there.” He recalls, early on, going with his family to his aunt’s house for parties on the weekends. “Party start on Friday night and wouldn’t shut down ‘till early Saturday morning. ... All the houses had a piano.” His aunt would “rent” a piano player for the evening; mostly blues and stride players who provided entertainment in exchange for food, drinks and generous tips. Although sent to bed at an early hour young Tucker found that the sound of the music fascinated him so much he couldn’t sleep. He’d sneak out to the second-floor hallway and listen to the pianist playing downstairs. How does he explain this early fascination? “I know certain things you are born with.”

Tucker’s first exposure to the instrument which became his ultimate choice for self-expression also came from within the family home. His uncle Donald Tucker was a drummer who worked around the Philadelphia area. Ron recalls the nights when he would stay up waiting for his uncle to return from an evening’s work. If lucky, he might be given the privilege to help his uncle carry the drums into the house. At age eight it was all he could do to contain his excitement. Maybe, he would hope, his uncle just might take the drums out of their cases to wipe them clean before retiring them until the next gig. Or, he may even take some time to retune the heads before putting them away. And, on these occasions, as Tucker recalls, to catch a glimpse of the shining instruments reflecting the warm glow of the illumination lamp, or

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<sup>109</sup> Mr. Golson (personal conversation, March 2001) told me they all were struggling to learn music together while playing in the rehearsal band sessions held in the Heath’s family home. Mr. Golson recalled the playing of Mr. Tucker whom he fondly referred to as “Red”.

hearing the sounds while his uncle tapped on the heads tuning the snare and toms was “like being in Heaven!”

Other sounds around the house also grabbed his ear’s attention.

When I was young, coming up ... Radio, back there was our way of TV. Certain nights you had live big bands broadcasting ... Basie, Duke, Tommy Dorsey. [You had] programs that played small groups – Teddy Wilson Trio, Art Tatum, and Sidney Bechet.

Tucker spent so much time listening that eventually he could identify whose band was playing on the radio within the first few opening bars of music.

Outside of the immediate home all kinds of wonderful sounds could be heard simply by walking down the street.

People in the neighborhood had Victrolas, you heard Bessie Smith chirpin’ them blues, people be sittin’ around in their living room listenin’ at them blues. They were blues drunk, you know. ... You’d hear it in the Summer time. See you don’t have that today.

Growing up during the Depression Era Tucker recalls listening to blind musicians playing in the street for tips. Oftentimes families would hold house parties in an effort to raise money for the rent. For example, Mr. Tucker tells of one family whose financial hardships left them with no money to buy heating coal. They would rent a single car garage for an evening where, as he recalls, what seemed like as many as fifty people would pay a small admission to squeeze into the tight space. What was it that, along with the drink and sandwiches, attracted them inside?

The chance to see the family patriarch, a Mr. Joe Woodfield providing swinging entertainment on a homemade set of drums comprised of cooking pots with the lids for cymbals.

I was so amazed. ... That's what he did, made himself a set. Pots and pans and had different sounds on them.

All this going on while Ron, too young to be allowed inside, observes the entire scene from his perch on the roof of the neighboring garage.

Artists, professionals, the working class, along with people from all walks of life were crowded into his neighborhood. Mr. Tucker recalls with pride their vocations - one a Lieutenant with the local police, one a baseball player, another, one of the first black referees in the fight game – as his neighbors provided excellent role models for a young person to emulate. As for musicians, Tucker recalls his uncle Donald, and a fellow called “Stick Jones” along with other “slick, hip, fast-steppin’ dudes” who could be found around his neighborhood. And, after he'd been playing for a while, his announcement to his family that he'd like to pursue a career in music was met with strenuous objections. He recollects that being a musician was looked upon as a “side job” by the people in his family. He recalls that his mother, in particular, was against it, having witnessed the underside from his uncle's experience she knew that the life of a working musician was at best unstable and that having to deal with unscrupulous managers, club owners, bandleaders, promoters and the like, as well as traveling on the road, and the more sordid aspects of the entertainment world could be downright dangerous for a young black musician.

As Tucker grew older his interest in music led him to formal study. However, his first instrument was the trumpet. Although now he says that deep inside he always considered him

self a drummer - “always played around with them” – at the time, his decision to play trumpet was influenced mainly by his peers. As he recalls, it seemed that every kid in the neighborhood had a trumpet. “I was curious about a trumpet, other kids got them. I told my mother, ‘I want a trumpet.’” He began taking trumpet lessons at age 13 and continued until a few months before his 15 birthday. He studied with a neighborhood teacher by the name of Prof. Harrison. Tucker describes him as a distinguished, mannered gentleman and an excellent musician who was trained in the European Classical repertoire. Young Ron practiced the fundamentals of trumpet playing including studies out of the Arban Method<sup>110</sup>, and was making progress until problems with his throat caused him to discontinue playing. Although his time with Prof. Harrison was short, Tucker says he came away from the experience with a sense of discipline regarding his music studies. His experience with Harrison impacted him on another level as well. It was through his interaction with Prof. Harrison that Ron first became aware of the segregated world of Classical music (and the then segregated musician’s union as well.) As was the custom of the day, black musicians, regardless of their conservatory training, were routinely denied access to full-time Symphony positions. However, as Tucker understood it, in some instances a black musician could be hired as a substitute for a white musician provided he had a name reputation along with the right connections. Of course by now in his young life Tucker was familiar with racial prejudice, but to witness a man he considered an artist being denied opportunity merely on the basis of race brought home the magnitude of the reality of institutionalized racism in American society.

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<sup>110</sup> S. B. Arban, *Arban’s Complete Celebrated Method for the Cornet*. Originally published in 1894 this book is well known among trumpet players and is considered the “trumpet bible” by those practicing in the field. Catalano (2000, p.190 FN 6) notes an updated version, *Arban’s Complete Conservatory Method for Trumpet*, edited by Edwin Frank and Walter M. Smith with annotations by Claude Gordon (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1982).

To help pay for music lessons Tucker found work doing various “side jobs”. He sold newspapers, shined shoes, or put out trash for people. He would pull his wagon up and down Germantown Avenue combing the street for empty wooden crates. Later, he’d chop them up and sell them as fire wood. “I hustled [worked hard] when I was a kid.”

Due to a medical condition, Ron, at his teacher’s suggestion along with his mother’s approval stopped taking trumpet lessons and eventually focused his attention on “percussions.” As he recalls, “I wasn’t disappointed to quit the trumpet.” For now he was able to pursue his true interest in music – the drums. In contrast to his formal study of the trumpet, his early forays into jazz drumming were conducted as a group activity strictly in the company of his peers.

Fellows around the neighborhood that played instruments, we used to go from house to house and jam, so, we started playing together and jamming ... didn’t none of us know anything about music - really – at that time. So, I guess like anything else it gets good to you ... we used to jam a few days around the neighborhood, piano ... C-melody sax, and no bass, just piano, C-melody [sax] and drums. We used to practice and play together. Next thing I know I was buying records, and listening to records ... learning different things ... how certain beats in percussions go, mostly [listening to] big bands.

As Tucker entered this period of self-directed drum studies the regular rehearsals and jam sessions which took place in the forgiving atmosphere and company of his friends provided him an outlet to experiment with ideas and techniques discovered from playing along to records.

I used to play (along with records) in the basement. Yeah, I learned some stuff, lotta stuff off records before I thought about going out playing. There’s always gotta be something that inspires you. ... I listened to all of them. I didn’t want to

copy after none of them. I listened to all of them to learn ideas. Yes, I took ideas. Ain't no drummer out here today ... he done took some ideas.

Indeed, he did listen to most of the well-known drummers of the day. Their numbers too numerous to cite in a single recitation, Tucker names as examples, Gene Krupa, Dave Tough, Cozy Cole, Papa Jo [Jones], Jimmy Crawford, and Sid Catlett.<sup>111</sup> He had occasions to hear many of these same drummers play in person as most of the famous big bands appeared at the various venues throughout Philadelphia. However, Mr. Tucker feels that being able to regularly observe the many fine local “Philly” drummers was equal, if not more important, to his growth as a player. His point is worth considering for a moment. Especially since these were the first professional musicians with whom he interacted and from whom he initially received mentorship. Porter (1998: 35) reports on the inter-generational nature of Philadelphia’s thriving jazz community in the forties. The older generation players were swing musicians. Tucker recalls locally renowned musicians such as Jimmy Gorham, along with band leaders, Mel Melvin and Jimmy Adams, “playing ‘round Philly.” As for drummers, in addition to his uncle Donald Tucker, Ron recalls:

You had some good drummers ‘round home, ... they might have played in the “old school”, you know they didn’t play as hip<sup>112</sup>, but dudes like Coatesville Harris, Gilbert Stanton, Butch Ballard – very good drummers.

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<sup>111</sup> Mr. Tucker spoke to me about his early listening experiences on several occasions. He also includes Kaiser Marshall, J.C. Heard, Shadow Wilson, and Tiny Kahn in the list of the many drummers he heard. The point he makes being that, at that time, there were a multitude of drummers whose work, via recordings, live performance and other media, was readily available for study.

<sup>112</sup> Here, Ron is referring to the coordinated independence approach to drumming that came in with Kenny Clarke and the emergence of bebop.

Tucker observes that these older musicians made themselves available as mentors and freely gave away their knowledge and encouragement. And, as he became a regular, playing on the Philadelphia scene he often sought them out.

Well, man, I watched a lot of dudes that had the experience ... that was around, dudes like, Coatsville [Harris], Butch “Buck” Toots, and my uncle Donald, and Gilbert Stanton, those dudes was a mother fucker!” These were older musicians. “Yeah, they [had] been out playing with big bands, Louis Armstrong big band, bands like Jimmy Adams. We had a little dude around Philly named Chick, little ole brother, small like Chick Webb. ... I remember when I first started going out playing. I used to go down to the Strand Ballroom and listen to Mel Melvin and them in rehearsal, Jimmy Adams and all them bands, rehearsing man.

Did he play at their rehearsals?

No, listen to them and see how the drummers were doing their stuff. ... And I said, ‘Man, these guys are a mother fucker. I wonder whether I’ll be able to be like that someday.’ I used to be talking to them. They called me “young blood.” They say, ‘Well young blood you got to stay with at it. Practice! Play! He’d say, ‘A lotta things will start coming gradually. It all ain’t gonna come overnight. It just takes time and patience.’ The main thing is development. Developing yourself and you’ll learn all the different shortcuts.

As his interest in drumming grew, his natural inquisitiveness to know more about the instrument led him to seek out a suitable teacher. He found one living right across the street. Tucker began taking lessons with a Mr. Lenwood “Lindy” Ewell, an avocational jazz drummer

who played at night and on weekends with shows and in big bands<sup>113</sup>, while, according to Tucker, he made his living working for the Government in the Records Department of the Signal Corps. Ewell instructed Tucker in the basics of stick control and may have exposed him, by way of recordings, to some of the leading jazz drummers of the day. From what I've been able to ascertain, the lessons were conducted along the lines of a friendly exchange of information from an interested adult, as opposed to the more disciplined approach of his former trumpet teacher. At any rate, Tucker willingly soaked up whatever musical wisdom Yule had to offer. "And I studied off him 'till he couldn't learn me no more."

Tucker mentions that he followed his lessons with Mr. Yule with studies at the Granoff School of Music. The School figured in the lives of a number of Philadelphia's young modern jazz aspirants interested in acquiring a solid background in the fundamentals of music. Its student roster included John Coltrane and Percy Heath who attended Granoff during this period. The School was founded by Isadore Granoff in 1918. Granoff, a trained violinist, offered a training program akin to a traditional European classical conservatory. The Granoff School was considered to be one of the largest schools of its kind on the East Coast. According to Porter, Granoff believed that during its peak years of operation the school was third largest in the country, following Julliard and the Curtis Institute. Students who successfully passed through the four year curriculum were graduated and awarded a certificate of completion. Mr. Tucker recalls he studied percussion, including the basics of reading notes and rhythms with a Mr. Watson. He is not clear on how long he attended Granoff. In fact, it's not clear how long most of these jazz musicians were in attendance and how far they advanced although Porter estimates

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<sup>113</sup> An advert from Fellsher's Butler Café has him playing in a group called "The 4 Harmonics." Lem Newmus (Ten. Sax), Nate Lowman (bass), and John Berry (piano) are also in the band. *The Philadelphia Afro-American*, 4 December 1948, p.12.



that Coltrane entered in fall of 1946 and continued his studies through the early fifties and eventually completed the program with time off for long-term professional engagements including periods of travel. (Catalano, 2000: 36, Porter, 1998: 50)

For a young African American musician interested in playing jazz the Philadelphia scene of the forties and fifties had a few things going for it. First, there was an astonishing number of high caliber musicians living and practicing their art in the city. Second, the close proximity to New York kept a steady flow of national jazz stars passing through the multitude of venues to be found throughout Philly. Mr. Tucker recalls with excitement the Philadelphia jazz nightlife of his youth. “Oh there were a lot of good local bands around Philly then!” And the places to play were numerous. There were private charter clubs, a number of Elks clubs and other fraternal and social organizations as well as USO centers, all which engaged various sized jazz ensembles for dancing and other entertainments at get-togethers such as birthday parties, anniversaries, and “smokers.” Tucker recollects playing USO shows with Mel Melvin’s band alongside John Coltrane and the trumpeter Johnny Coles; providing entertainment for troops involved in the war effort.

Nightclubs such as the Ridge Point Café, Eddie’s Musical Bar, Emerson’s, Downbeat Club, Watt’s Zanzibar, 421 Club, and Joe Pitt’s Musical Bar offered up jazz on a nightly basis. Watt’s Zanzibar, for example, offered continuous music nightly featuring a “house” band led by local jazz luminaries alternating sets with national jazz stars. A scan through the Philadelphia Afro-American’s entertainment sections published between 1946 and 1949 reveals that afternoon jam sessions were abundant. Typically they were held on Saturdays between 3:00 or 4:00 and 7:00 PM; however one can find announcements for “Jamsessionals” on Monday or Thursday and other afternoons as well. The jam session serves an important function in the jazz community.

They provided an outlet for established musicians to experiment and try out new ideas without the limitation of commercial constraints. Also, musicians are given a platform to “display their credentials” to potential bandleaders looking for new players to hire. And the jam session provides an educational experience for neophyte musicians coming on the scene. In Philadelphia young musicians were encouraged to sit-in with the “house” rhythm section. Often the “star” performers would be in attendance, and maybe even play along with the neophytes. As Tucker recalls, even if they didn’t play with them, the jazz “stars” of the day were approachable and welcomed the young musicians who sought their counsel.

Tucker recalls the abundance of work that could be found in the venues along Columbia Avenue and elsewhere in Philly’s entertainment districts. The opportunity for regular performance is understood as a crucial factor in his continued development as a drummer.

I was just starting out at that time, and that was – what would you say, ‘The Good Old Days!’ That’s when Philly was Philly! There’s so many good jazz clubs, we’d work! Well, Pennsylvania, then, had what you called Blue Laws. Clubs wasn’t open on Sundays. But, we used to work in charter clubs<sup>114</sup>. We’d leave the club ... Saturday night all the clubs closed at midnight. Then we’d go to the charter club. Get there about one o’clock and play until four-thirty in the morning. Then on Sundays we’d have to double back and play a matinee. Sunday afternoon we’d take off from four to seven, and go back, maybe eight-thirty and play until one in the morning. So, we was working. Sometimes [we’d play] two matinees a week, on Mondays and Saturdays [in addition to the Sunday matinee.] In the club, okay, five days a week, okay, that’s seven days there, two matinees, then we go to the club and work Saturday night. That’s eight. Then work a matinee. That’s nine. Then work that night. That’s ten days we’re

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<sup>114</sup> Charter Clubs were private clubs designed to get around the blue laws. They did not have to conform to codes in effect for public venues.

working. All around home, that's how it was going on, man. So many clubs, always was work!<sup>115</sup>

The importance of the bar scene during this time cannot be over estimated for in the bar is where art and commerce intersect. From our present day perspective, bars that present live music – of any kind – are few. And nowadays jazz music may be presented in concert halls, museums, and outdoor festivals, to name a few, just as readily as in a bar or night club. This is not to say that jazz wasn't presented in concert halls and the like in previous times. The point I'm trying to make is that at one time the bars were central to the culture of jazz life. As one Philadelphian observed,

Bars as we knew it are a thing of the past. ... Bars were a desired component of life in this community. ... Who went into the bars? ... The Bar is the essential center for the artist and the major support of jazz in the black community came from people whose style of life includes taverns.<sup>116</sup>

The people who supported the music were very much involved with what was happening on stage. They knew the music. Offering shouts of affirmation at a particularly pleasing turn of phrase or musical statement. Of the people who came to his gigs Jimmy Oliver observed "everybody could sing the songs of jazz."<sup>117</sup> Tucker describes the ambiance of the jazz clubs he frequented as a young player.

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. Charlie Rice's description of Philadelphia's jazz scene in the forties cited in Porter, 1998: 36

<sup>116</sup> I haven't been able to identify the speaker of this quote which I'm paraphrasing here. The source is a radio show broadcast on the World Wide Web in 2003. I only heard a small portion of the program and I'm unable to determine any of the production details. The program was on the life and work of John Coltrane.

<sup>117</sup> IBID

Good music, and the professionalism [of the musicians] ... Some people don't realize that they like it. ... Jazz is very progressive, very educational music ... music is a powerful thing, five dudes up in front of you, and play different things ... their personality will show.

Dr. Vernel Lillie, a dramaturgist and founder of Kuntu Repertory Theater once commented to me that the image of bars and nightclubs as dingy, decrepit places filled with low life people is a more recent perception of the public imagination. Recognizing this as contrary to her own experiences and that of others of her generation was a key factor in formulating her conception of “Billie Holiday at the Crawford Grill” a play which draws on the rarefied atmosphere of the nightclub to make an artistic statement about jazz life in the black community.<sup>118</sup>

Jazz was undergoing major changes during the forties due to a number of related social and musical factors.<sup>119</sup> Although he grew up listening to the great swing bands – both black and white – the changes in the music were already apparent by the time Ron Tucker first came on the Philly scene in the late forties. This was a time of transition and the young musicians were heeding the call of the new music known as bebop. While Tucker valued the instruction he received from his uncle and other older musicians; “I learned what to do with a big band.” He observes, “It was all right, but I was thinking another way – modern jazz. You can't look back, but gotta look ahead.” Like other young musicians during that period, Tucker explains that he

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<sup>118</sup> Personal conversation, Spring 2004.

<sup>119</sup> These factors are numerous and the details should be familiar to both jazz scholars and aficionados alike. A full discussion of the circumstances which precipitate the changing trends of jazz in the forties is beyond the scope of this study. The reader may wish to consult, Baraka (1963), Davis (1990), DeVeaux (1988), Floyd (1996), and Gitler (1985), for more on these events.

“was caught up in the revolution of music in my generation.” Benny Golson, a contemporary of Ron’s in Philadelphia, expounds on the situation facing musicians of his generation.

Yeah, but I watched music change, you know? And I watched us change. We had to recast our thinking. Right in the middle of trying to learn to play our instruments and another kind of music, prior to Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, we were still trying to learn something. The old, established – the traditional – thing was ours. But then we got something new put in front of us. ... Then we had to recast our thinking. We didn’t understand at all what bebop was about. We knew the other stuff because we grew up hearing it all the time. But then we had to make a transition. ... Things started to happen in jazz, and we just wanted to be a part of it. We were effervescent inside. ... .<sup>120</sup>

As part of the younger generation of Philadelphia musicians, Tucker recalls playing in the Jimmy Heath Big Band sometime during 1949 and possibly up to 1950. According to Porter, (1998: 59), Heath’s band “became a fixture of the city’s jazz scene” during the late forties. This was an important band for several reasons. Heath and the musicians in his band distinguished themselves from the previous generation of Philadelphia’s jazzmen by virtue of the repertoire they chose to address. Whereas the established players performed in the swing style, Heath’s band followed the musical example expounded by Gillespie, Parker, Monk, Clarke and Powell, among others of the so-called bebop revolution. Heath formed his big band at the end of 1946 and kept it in operation until 1949 when he joined Dizzy Gillespie’s big band. The band rehearsed in the living room of the Heath’s family home where they caught the attention of

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<sup>120</sup> Benny Golson, and Jim Merod, “Forward Motion: An Interview with Benny Golson,” *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. ed. Robert O’Meally, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 36-37.

neighbors who would listen through the window. As such, the band provided a learning laboratory for its members to familiarize themselves with the newest innovations in jazz composition and improvisation.

Tucker recollects there being “maybe six big bands ... good bands” working Philadelphia at that time, including both all black and all white groups. However, the Heath band was a racially integrated group of young musicians who were influenced by bebop, or what Tucker calls the modern conception. The Heath band personnel changed over time with musicians coming in and out of the group. Of the musicians in the band during his tenure, in addition to Heath and Golson, Tucker recalls, “a little dude named, “Saxe” -- he played tenor.” This is mostly likely James “Sax” Young whom Porter (1998: 59) identifies as the main tenor soloist of the original band, “one of those fine local players who never became a national name.” Lonnie Shaw was on baritone sax. According to Tucker he later went on to work with Lionel Hampton’s band. Tucker recalls the young white musician named Joe Steinberg on trombone. The trumpet section included Bill Massey and his cousin Calvin Massey, whom Tucker knew by the name Folks. “He’s from Pittsburgh – sounded a lot like Miles [Davis].” Tucker mentioned an additional trumpet player whose name he couldn’t recall, “... section dude, he wasn’t from Philly.” He may have been John Burris whom Porter (1998: 59) identifies as “originally from Detroit, also played on occasion.” The rhythm section included Percy Heath on bass, and James Forman on piano. Tucker relates that the band carried a male and female vocalist and recalled Khadijah (Rosemary Davis), who was married to bassist Steve Davis, as the female vocalist on some occasions. “That was a very good big band!”

From Porter's account it appears the Heath band functioned for the most part as a rehearsal band which in effect was a workshop for musicians to try out new improvisational and compositional ideas. Based on Tucker's recollection I would agree:

We called rehearsals, oh, yeah, Little Bird [Jimmy Heath] wrote a lot of stuff for the band. John Lewis<sup>121</sup> wrote some stuff for the band. Tadd Dameron wrote some stuff for the band. We had some very good writers. Little Bird always could write. Then we had some other dudes in the band that could write too.

One of these musicians who tried his hand at arranging was tenor saxophonist Benny Golson. The workshop approach along with the collegial atmosphere of the Heath personnel provided the perfect setting for an aspiring jazz composer-arranger to develop his craft. As Tucker relates:

I remember when I was playing with Jimmy Heath's big band Benny was going to Howard [University]. That's where he got his degree in music<sup>122</sup>. ... Now, Benny was playing 2nd chair and he started writing, he brought in stuff at rehearsal. You could tell he dug Duke 'cause a lot of his stuff sounded like Duke. But, [the way he wrote] there's so many notes in there ... the only reason we'd play them ... it was out of respect. Now, here's a dude play with the band, bringing new arrangements, even if you don't like it, still you play it, that gives a dude a chance to hear what he's doing, and help him to improve his writing. 'Cause sometimes we'd say, 'Man, let's play one of Benny's tunes.' And the dudes in the band would say 'Oh shit' 'cause the stuff he wrote [at that time], man, it didn't swing!

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<sup>121</sup> From Tucker's recollection it's not clear if Lewis and Dameron were contracted to write for the band, or if the group obtained their arrangements from available sources, or possibly transcribed them from recordings. Dameron and Lewis both contributed to Gillespie's book and I surmise that their arrangements were most likely included in the material that Heath transcribed from Gillespie's recordings.

<sup>122</sup> Golson left Howard before completing the requirements for his degree.

Tucker's comments demonstrate that learning music was indeed a "group effort." As noted elsewhere in this study, musicians of this era, in their daily activity around music seem to display a genuine love and mutual respect for each other which went toward establishing a solidarity that transcends the notion of any individual's greatness over others in the group. By this I don't mean to say that at that time there weren't individuals who were acknowledged by their peers as being particularly adept as musicians, but that it was the idea that you help each other out in regards to learning that took precedence over the individual concern for "stardom."

The Heath band did present public performances. Ron recalls that they played occasional dances, cabarets and concerts. However, he observes that while most of the players free-lanced around town performing in other groups, the emphasis of the Heath band was on learning and practicing. Heath modeled his band in particular after the Dizzy Gillespie's big band, even transcribing some of the music from Gillespie's recordings. (Porter, 1998:59) Tucker says, "We played mostly a lot of Dizzy's stuff, "Night in Tunisia," we'd pull them [charts] out for concerts; we did "Manteca", all that kind of stuff." Tucker was already familiar with much of the repertoire before joining the band; including having learned the specific drum parts "from hearing the records."

Although Heath's ensemble disbanded in 1949, the musicians continued to get together to play in ad hoc rehearsals held around town at different individual's homes. However, the significance of the Heath band lies in part in the fact that not only did its members have an opportunity to address the challenge of performing bebop, the length of the band's existence -- almost three years -- provided a certain stability thereby allowing its young musicians, both



individually and collectively to develop, emerge, and become a “creative presence” on the Philadelphia jazz scene.

Tucker relates that early in his youth he was very much impressed by the drumming of Max Roach on the Charlie Parker recordings, “Now’s the Time,” and “Billie’s Bounce.”<sup>123</sup> Even the actual record itself was a source of fascination. It left an indelible mark, still vivid in his memory, “I remember when it first came out. [It] had a big yellow label and was shiny black on the turntable.”

For Tucker and other young drummers of the day Roach became a model for study and emulation.

I used to do a lot of Max’s stuff too, oh yeah, buy the records and listen to them. ... Learn the feel, oh yeah; you got to learn the feel. ... Well, you keep listening, listening and playing [the record] over and see how he approached things. ... Sometimes play along [with the record]. I’d be down in the basement of my mother’s house, used to listen to the record and play soft along with it. I could hear it, but still play along with it, catch different licks they doing.

Take a moment to consider the pedagogic value of playing along to records. Numerous jazz musicians have cited using this approach and Tucker is not unique in this regard. For example, I recall my music theory teacher at Southern University, Dr. Walter O. Craig relating to the members of my ear training class how he and his coterie of trumpeters all used to buy a copy of the same Dizzy Gillespie record. They knew that through repetitive playing the turntable

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<sup>123</sup> “Billie’s Bounce” and “Now’s the Time”: Charlie Parker’s Reboppers, Savoy 573, recorded 26 November 1945, New York.

needle would eventually wear out the grooves of one record, and when they did this; they would have extra copies to share for studying Dizzy's playing.

In regards to Tucker's nascent drumming skills his approach to playing along with records helped to develop key performance skills. Keeping in mind this was in the days before audio headphones and digital technology consider the control it takes to play the drums softly and still hear the recording; playing along to records in this manner helps to facilitate development of the fine motor skills needed to control the volume and tone. By "catching different licks" the drummers on record were playing, in effect, by copying their ideas Tucker is learning the stylistic conventions of the music. This is what some jazz musicians sometimes call learning the vocabulary. However, the process involves more than imitation. When Tucker says that listening enabled him to "see how he approached things", meaning the work of the drummer on record, he's acknowledging there's an analytic component to his learning. A fundamental aesthetic premise found in African American music has is that each performance is understood as a unique event. The improvisatory nature of the music allows for variation. What a drummer does on one recording (and recordings are performances) may not necessarily carry over to the next performance of that same piece. Therefore, what a drummer improvises on any given performance is only one solution from what is a seemingly infinite number of possible approaches. Understanding this process is what allows the student drummer to draw his own conclusions in developing their personal approach.

Tucker's study of recordings included "learning the feel" of the drummers on the record. Here, he's talking about the ability to comprehend subtle differences in the drummer's approach to playing time. Mr. Tucker once explained to me the difference between "keeping time" versus "playing time." When a drummer is "keeping time" all that is required is to be able to keep a

steady beat much as a metronome will do. However, “playing time” implies there is more to playing drums than the metronomic function. Depending on the nature of the composition, say for example, a blues, a ballad, or an up tempo swinger, each will require a different sensibility on the part of the drummer to support the performance, or put another way, to “play time” effectively. In fact, Max Roach addresses the very subject in his response upon rehearsing a recording of “Budo” a piece which represents some of his early work with Miles Davis. “I hear myself having a chance to do some other kinds of things here, not so much razzle-dazzle kinds of things, but beginning to play the attitude of the piece I was dealing with.”<sup>124</sup>

Of course, the value of the total effect of hearing these performers play live as well as seeing them cannot be under estimated. Although Tucker knew of Roach’s work from Parker’s and Gillespie’s recordings, that didn’t compare to the experience of seeing him play live.

What fascinated me with Max, man, Max was playing more hipper, more modern.<sup>125</sup> First time I saw him [he] was with Benny Carter. I cut school and stayed in the Earle Theater all day. I was fascinated man, ‘cause I never seen nobody play like him. The stuff that he was doing ... breakin’ the rhythms, changing it around, it was so fresh and new, the sound and feel he had was different. I said, ‘Oh God Man, who is this guy? Where’d he come from?’ It knocked me completely off my feet. ... [It] stayed on my mind.

Young musicians who become intimate with the playing of their idols from both recordings and live performances gain a wider perspective in terms of the variables of, and approaches to playing within the tradition. With the records one can take an isolated moment in

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<sup>124</sup> Roach quoted in Mattingly, 1998: 58 emphasis in original

<sup>125</sup> Here Mr. Tucker is referring to the coordinated independence approach to drumming developed by Kenny Clarke.

performance and listen to it over and over again until coming to an understanding of what is happening in that segment. While a real time live performance doesn't afford one the luxury of repeated listening other important performance parameters emerge in the live situation that aren't readily apparent on a sound recording. The visual component of performance, so important in black music is there to see as well as hear. Several examples readily come to mind. One can observe how different drummers set up their cymbals and drum sets. One can see the correlate between the physical movement of a hand stroke and the resultant sound produced. Levels of intensity indicating a player's involvement in the performance are displayed through the visual as well. One can also observe the non-verbal interaction that takes place amongst musicians as well as the interaction between the musicians and audience throughout a performance. Other, more intangible aspects of performance are present as well. Throughout my fieldwork many musicians spoke of the value of being able to see and hear live performances as an alternative, or in addition to studying records, this being an especially crucial aspect of their development when they were first starting to play and attempting to learn the tradition.

Nick Catalano devotes an entire chapter of his musical biography on Clifford Brown to covering the trumpeter's work with the rhythm and blues group, "Chris Powell and the Blue Flames." Groups such as these worked the circuit of resorts, nightclubs and dance halls entertaining black audiences with popular tunes, novelty numbers, a little jazz, but mostly blues based dance music. Catalano introduces this chapter with the observation: "There has been a tendency among writers when they analyze the work of important jazz figures to focus exclusively on their jazz music and avoid references to any other music, commercial or otherwise, that these musicians played." Continuing this line of thought he points out that many well known jazz musicians have spent significant parts of their career playing non-jazz gigs

because “they paid well, the work was easier to obtain, or because they enjoyed creating in other areas.” He cites John Coltrane, Lou Donaldson, and Milt Jackson as just a few of the many musicians who found work outside the jazz field. (Catalano, 2000: 53)

The drummers under consideration in this study have discussed playing non-jazz music. All three have come to look at the issue as being necessary to maintaining a career as a professional performing musician. However, since one goal of this study is to document their various experiences in relation to playing jazz, Ron Tucker’s comments on his work in the rhythm and blues genre are worthy of note. While he says, “jazz has always been my root” Ron feels that the time he spent playing in what he calls, “honker bands” provided him valuable experience. The term “honker” refers to the raucous style of tenor saxophone playing in which the player utilizes “shouts”, “screams”, and “honks” along with other idiomatic devices derived from black vocal performance style. The honker style was ubiquitous in rhythm and blues groups of this era. Tucker observes:

At one time alto players didn’t get as much work as tenor players. When you find small groups -- four or five pieces -- they always wanted a tenor. ‘Cause why? On a tenor you could get a honk, that honkin’ sound. I worked with dudes that used to get up and walk the bar -- Oh yeah!

Walking the bar was a common practice in clubs that featured rhythm and blues bands. The tenor saxophonist literally walks the length of the bar, stepping over glasses, ash trays and other bar trappings, all while playing outlandish melodic and rhythmic phrases punctuated by loud honking sounds directed through the bell of the sax. Meanwhile the patrons show their approval by tossing loose change into the bell of the sax, or by stuffing bills into the player’s

hand. The blatant commercial nature of this type of work did not always set well with the young, bop oriented musicians who aspired to be jazz artists. Yet, many of Philadelphia's young jazzmen found themselves regularly working in the rhythm and blues idiom. I spoke with Tucker about the famous incident in which John Coltrane is said to have been working a local club and in the middle of the bar walking routine, when, to his horror he looked up to see his good friend and fellow bebopper, Benny Golson enter the club at which Coltrane is said to have been so embarrassed that he jumped off the bar, ran through the door and never came back. Tucker can relate to this anecdote and explains why Coltrane might have put himself in such an embarrassing situation in the first place.

That ain't what he wanted to do, but he wanted to eat. You know a lot of things [in music] you got to do at some time, but you don't want to do it ... but you got to eat and pay bills. Trane been all through that ... I've been all through that too! That's what we did! It ain't what I wanted, [but] it was a good experience.

As one observer put it rhythm and blues is the heart and soul of the music. Learning to play the blues is necessary if you want to play jazz because they had a certain criteria that had to be met.<sup>126</sup> This later point will be discussed presently.

Like John Coltrane and others, Mr. Tucker played with a number of these R&B bands in Philadelphia early in his career. He recalls his tenure with the band led by tenor saxophonist, Leonard "Red" Spencer as typical of these kinds of experiences. Spencer, who started out in Chris Powell's Five Blue Flames and was later replaced by Vance Wilson, formed his own group in 1950. As Tucker recollects, this group was known as "Red Spencer and the Five Red

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<sup>126</sup> Field notes

Flames.” They worked the clubs around Philly and spent the summer playing the black resorts in Atlantic City and Wildwood, along the New Jersey Shore.<sup>127</sup> These kinds of gigs offered steady work and good pay, and while they may have left something to be desired in terms of musical fare, the alternative to not working was even less appealing. Further, for those jazz musicians working the R&B circuit many came to it thinking that any time you’re playing your instrument, regardless of the type of music being played, it’s better than not playing at all and run the risk of losing your chops. Even Coltrane seems to have acknowledged a positive side to such experiences. When looking back on this phase in his career, he told Postiff, “... Anytime you play your horn, it helps you, if you get down [put yourself into it], you can help yourself even in a rock ’n roll band. ...” (Porter, 1998: 88 op. cited) Coltrane’s use of the phrase “if you get down” is interesting. He seems to imply there is more to be gained than simply time spent on the physical exercise of playing your instrument. What he means, as Porter explains in the brackets, is that if you put yourself into the performance you can take away something useful from the experience. With this statement Coltrane demonstrates his awareness of the importance of levels of intensity as an aesthetic factor in the production and practice of black music forms. A player must demonstrate their conviction, their commitment to expression in order for the performance to “go over” with the audience. The idea being that black audiences expect more than a perfunctory performance, you can’t simply show up and play without being personally involved, without “gettin’ down”, or as one kind person once commented to me, “You’re acting as if you don’t believe it yourself.”<sup>128</sup> This is a fundamental principle operating within music of the African Diaspora.

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<sup>127</sup> Many of these resorts placed announcements in the *Philadelphia Afro-American* advertising the different entertainments being featured during the summer season.

<sup>128</sup> Fieldnotes

Like Coltrane, Tucker displays a similar awareness of this principle upon reflecting on his time spent with The Five Red Flames.

It was a good experience, now. It learned you how to play blues. When asked are you not playing the blues when you play jazz? Tucker responds: Yeah, but that was, I would say, that's one of the foundations of the blues [in jazz.] ... Because, [we] play blues all night long ... shuffles ...see that's the foundation ... it helps you get everything together.

What kind of things does this kind of playing help you get together? Are there certain drumming techniques, or execution of rhythms to be gained from this kind of playing? Tucker explains:

You know how to get funky, if you had to get funky, see, you'd know what to do. That's what develops your swinging ... your swinging conception – all that kind of playing ... we'd hit some funky grooves, man!

His comments remind us that the term Blues can refer to both a feeling as well as a musical form. The feeling of the blues is about an attitude or orientation toward the world which affirms life experiences. From Tucker's comments it can be inferred that the feeling of the blues is inextricably tied to the notion of swinging. To be swinging is to celebrate the exigencies of life. Although the term swing has a historical association with the jazz idiom, in this sense the possibility of swinging is inherent in all black music and not limited specifically to jazz performance alone. Tucker's comments reveal his thinking concerning different music styles. From his perspective the divisions that appear to separate major styles in black music are much



more fluid than stale marketing labels would have us believe. In the Philadelphia club scene of the late forties and early fifties both jazz and R & B co-existed in what can be seen as a continuum of black music.

In our conversations about music Mr. Tucker moved fluidly between his early musical experiences and contemporary practice, and by ignoring a chronological notion of time the resultant effect was often one where past and present were brought together in a single narrative stream. He would frequently end a lengthy explanation of a particular point by saying “that’s one of the secrets of drumming,” or “that’s one of the tricks of the game,” or “you learn shortcuts.” The point he made could be drawn from something that happened in his youth or something as recent as the night before our conversation took place. Most often these sayings punctuated a discussion centered on performance practice and what he learned to do in various musical situations. Tucker often culled examples from his own playing to relate to me how he developed certain musical concepts intimating that I might find something of use from his experience. In these instances he usually spoke in general terms using such qualifiers as “might,” “maybe,” or “say, for instance.” In fact, it was very rare for him to single out any one specific instance that led to his musical enlightenment. Rather he credits the cumulative effect of multiple musical experiences as for how he acquired his artistic sensibilities. Typically, these anecdotes were devoid of details such as which rudiments he may have employed in a certain musical passage, or a break down of the specific orchestration he may have used to interpret the Latin American idioms that found their way into jazz drumming. Instead, when pressed about these matters, he chose to articulate his thoughts along the lines of the concepts that allow the music to happen. These were the ideas that he wanted to relate to me. I conclude that this lack of specificity mirrors the process of transmission as it occurs in the cultural context. His attitude

toward learning to play music on the drums, as opposed to drum technique, emphasizes experience as the prime teacher. The experience of playing provides the frame work in which learning takes place. He often says, “Anytime you play your drums it’s an opportunity to learn something.” It is an empirical process and whether conducted in the company of peers bouncing ideas off one another, or learning on the job with instruction by experienced bandleaders, the basic approach is one of trial and error and self-discovery.

Tucker recognizes that the knowledge required to play jazz on the drums can come from many sources. Non-drummers may be just as capable of imparting useful information as can those who practice the instrument. The important thing is the nature of the information that is passed along. Over time one builds up a catalog of information gleaned from various sources and experiences. Whatever the source it still must be filtered through the individual’s artistic sensibility before it can be put to use in a practical manner, or as he puts it, “how to use your conception according to how you feel it.” In the following Tucker explains the manner in which bassist Percy Heath shared his expertise when the two worked the Philadelphia clubs.

Dudes like Nelson Boyd [bassist] had been all over Europe before I even thought of leaving out of Philly. Nelson, me and Percy [Heath] come up together. I learned a lot of stuff from Percy. Percy said, ‘Well, look this is the way you approach it when you’re playing it.’ A lot of times we would get to the gig earlier and certain things he’d be playing, he’d say, ‘Now listen, man. What I’m doing, all right, now you try it.’ You know, that’s how you pick up on different things.

What kinds of things was Percy suggesting to Tucker?

I would say, for instance, if we're gonna play interludes for certain songs he'd say, 'It would be best for you to play it this way, and – you can do a lot of things in an interlude that dresses ... polishes a song up ... but when both of you are on the same wave, that makes it better yet. And if you can't feel it, a bass player, he should play it for you, then you pick it up, 'Did you hear it?' Yeah, that's all gaining experience.

Note here the extra curricular nature of their effort. Tucker explained that neither musician was paid for the extra time they spent rehearsing before the gig. They did this out a sense of professionalism and a desire to make the music the best it could be. Note too Tucker's subtle criticism of musicians who may be inclined to hoard their knowledge rather than share it freely. The process of sharing ideas with each other brings the musicians closer together in their musical thinking to where they play on the "same wave" thereby making the resulting music that much better.

Tucker explains that working with older, more experienced musicians exposed him to new ways of thinking about his instrument, and its role in the ensemble. These musicians were bringing him ideas that they may have picked up from with working with other more "seasoned" drummers. Tucker found that players of this caliber tend to have a clearly defined conception of how they want the drummer to approach a particular composition or playing situation. They would guide him in the finer points of playing.

Clark Terry, he showed me a lot of things, like how to play underneath, and with color, you know stuff like that. Like, they'll tell you, 'Hey man, as long as the pulse is there, you can do anything.' If the pulse ain't there, you can't even play four-four if the pulse ain't there. That's the thing, like playing on the bass drum, you feel it, but yet, you don't hear it. The only time you hear it, back there, then,

we was dropping bombs, okay, lotta bombs, now they don't play like that, it's all feeling and pulse. So that's what they were talking about back then. ... What you can do with this. What you can do with that. How you can use your conception, but yet have the pulse in there. Keep the pulse moving, if the pulse ain't moving there's no feeling.

Tucker discussed the many ways in which older musicians guided him in performance practice. For example, here he's being schooled on how to relate his playing to the song form and how to interact with the soloist.

We'd be playing and dudes would say 'Hey, see that? What you just missed. Fill that in. So, next time it comes around you would be there. You'd get it and that's all good for you to know. [That's] what we call "throwing out the window," "fill in all the holes." Plus, I'll tell you what the old timers used to tell me, when the horn players playing, when that SOB takes a breath, put something in there. Fill that little space right there for him. Throw him back in with something [set up the next solo chorus.] Whatever else he wants to go into, we call them [fills] "throwing out the windows.

Here again the guidance he received is somewhat ambiguous. They're not telling him exactly what to play, rather just the concept. It's up to him to figure out – through trial and error – an appropriate way to fill in the musical space. However, there's a danger in this methodology. In the process of testing out his musical ideas during the course of playing; Tucker runs the risk of committing an error that can spoil the performance. And, indeed he found himself in that situation on numerous occasions. He describes the response from his elders who remind him of the prime directive in jazz drumming:

But, there's such a thing, [that] you can overplay ... play too much! That means you're getting in the way. You understand? A lot of musicians around town [Philadelphia] used to say, 'Man, I want a drummer, I don't want no shoe maker' ... you know when you in a shoemaker [shop] and a dude fixing a pair of shoes, you hear all that damn noise ... hammering and blap-blap and all that. There's such a thing of playing too much, you get in the way, distract different things. Older musicians they'll tell you, 'Look here Youngblood, Cool it ... Cool it! [You're] getting too rambunctious back there. Just swing, play time, swing! That's all you got to do.' And that's really all you got to do is swing man!

In certain Pittsburgh jazz circles Mr. Tucker is known for his masterful brush playing. He admitted that he spent a lot of time developing this aspect of his playing by working out ideas he happened upon while playing on gigs. Although he had the fundamental strokes down, it was through supporting the different soloists that he expanded his repertoire of patterns.

Horn Players ... he got a right to tell you certain things, 'cause all horn players don't play the same! He'd tell you: 'What I like, give me a nice even sound for my "shift," keep the two moving on the sock [cymbal.] I want you to sweep the floor.'

Did Tucker resent being told what to play?

No! No! 'Cause them dudes who told me they know what they were talking about. They had more experience than I did. Yeah, [they] were showing me what to do with the brushes.

He also credits a stint with the great Lester Young in helping him to refine his sensibility.

I'll tell you what helped me develop a lot, playing brushes, was when I was with Prez. Prez loved the brushes! ... You know a lot of times we'd be playing and Prez would say, 'I want you to sweep. Sweep the first two choruses, after that I want you to come in with the sticks, bring in the dynamics, then I want you to go back and sweep for me baby.' That's where experience comes in ... when you play with different groups you can't play the same way. You got to change around, but you always got to be able to swing. All that, it was giving you what tools to use at what time, and it did this, it was a great experience in this way of development with your instrument.

Over time, after working countless "shifts" with numerous instrumentalists Tucker's concept of brush playing is continually refined to a level of mastery.

Certain aspects of his performance approach as practiced today can be traced back to his early playing experiences. Playing the shows that were popular in nightclubs during the forties and fifties challenged him in a number of ways. Here he encountered a variety of tempos, including the fast fanfare numbers known as chasers which are used to enter and exit different acts on stage. It was during these early days of his career that Tucker began to explore the sound possibilities inherent in cymbals although at the time he may not have been quite aware of the impact this experience would have in regards to furthering his musical conception. Yet still, as a young drummer he was certainly interested in a musical approach to the instrument.

I would say ... how would I put this? Unconsciously – yes! Unconsciously! Yeah, to now, today, what is happening that's the reason it's simple to me to play colors on the cymbal ... I did a lot of that the other night ... on ballads and all. I

was using the other end of the brush<sup>129</sup> playing off the bell and certain parts of the cymbals. Take the hoop and ‘schooup’, ‘swoosh’, and going around [the cymbals].

Tucker believes his interest in playing the cymbal colors was stimulated in part from his work in shows, in particular through accompanying the “specialty acts” performed by different dancers. As he recalls, at that time the subtle use of cymbals was not that common in jazz drumming performances, but that his particular experiences caused him to consider the possibilities.

Well, I would say, not quite ... maybe [it] depended on what type of work drummers’ do, like in shows and things. You gotta play certain sounds and things, you know. Like a broad come out there and you got two cymbals, then with her hands she be doing an Indian type of dance. You got to build different colors up underneath her [from the cymbals]. For what she’s doing.

His work backing up dancers gave him pause to consider the practical application of learning to control the element of dynamics.

Say for instance, broads come out there with a boa constrictor, a python ... play on the cymbals soft ... play rolls, different type of rolls and patterns on the cymbal, but really light. You know, cause that snake, man, ain’t got ears, but he’s got something like we have – vibrations. If you play too loud the snake tightens up on you. You never know. And most snake dancers will tell you: ‘Play as soft as you can, ‘cause don’t scare the snake.’

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<sup>129</sup> Here he is referring to the metal hoop situated at the end of the retractable handle of the wire brush. It produces a thin, light, silvery sound effect when struck or swirled around the cymbal’s top.

Working opposite the leading jazz stars of the day afforded Ron a chance to establish personal relationships with some of these artists. He speaks fondly of the time he spent under the mentorship of Sid Catlett. Catlett, a great drummer from the early days of jazz, and one of the few who successfully made the transition to the modern conception, offered Tucker valuable inside tips on the practical aspects of jazz drumming. The two spent a lot of time engaged in conversations about the music. Oftentimes they met in the afternoon or between shows at whichever night club Catlett was appearing at. On one occasion Catlett shared one of his “secrets” of playing brushes on calfskin heads. The use of calfskins heads was still the norm in the forties. In fact, there was no accepted alternative since the plastic heads in use today weren’t invented until the late fifties. A problem with natural skin heads is that with constant use the playing surface becomes too smooth for the brush sound to project and obtaining a new head was an extra expense. Catlett showed Ron a “trick” he used to extend the life of a head. Tucker recounts that Catlett would grab a salt shaker off the dining cart and sprinkle the grains on the snare head. The salt provided the necessary grit for the brush to make proper contact with the surface of the head thereby projecting the sound. Tucker readily passed these tips on to me with such admonitions as, “always remember this,” or “don’t forget this!” These tips were especially valuable because they carried the weight of authority coming from “Big Sid Catlett.” One of the problems neophyte drummers run into is losing the time. This may happen due to him miscalculating the execution of a rhythmic phrase, or the result of mental or physical fatigue setting in, or sometimes what another musician plays can cause the drummer to get off the meter. Catlett shared with Tucker the “trick” of how to handle these temporary lapses in control.



Main thing with rolls, especially in jazz, if the time gets off, go into a roll. For instance, if you playing a solo, you supposed to come out on the one, and instead you come out on two, or three, or something, you can feel it inside you. Your rhythm is off ... [it] start turnin' around ... whap ... roll ... automatically your time comes back. Sid Catlett told me about that. He said, 'Any time the time mess up, play a roll.' Not no loud roll. Play it soft and automatic that roll will bring you into the right meter; you'll find the meter quicker. 'Cause why? That force of that little roll you're doing will give you a chance for your antennas to work. ... Your body will feel the pulse, get you back on track. That's one of the tricks ... you'll do it playing shows, you can do it on anything. Any type of jazz you can do it – if you get lost, go to the roll! You can find it every time, that's a good thing to know. Why should you have to stop, and then come back. Then you still might not come back on the right, on the one.

Did that ever happen to Tucker? Did he ever have to stop at times?

Oh yeah, when I was coming up, yeah, whap, man and lose it. Or either sometimes the bass player can do it and mess you up, get you off. Go into that roll man, 'till you feel the pulse. It could take a bar or two. It could be two bars. (The) tempo's still moving, you'll find it, better than you just stop and say, 'Oh man!' [Demonstrates roll] If you don't come back on the right beat, the right time, you gonna miss it again. You gonna mess up again, man. So, what the heck take one or two bars man, you can take four bars to get the feeling. Do it! That way you ain't messing up. The sound is moving all the time. That's how we do it.

In talking of his path in learning jazz Tucker readily acknowledges the role that other musicians played in his musical development. Those who shared their wisdom and experience

with him did so without reservation. And, likewise, he is quick to share what he has to offer with those who seek his advice.

As Mr. Tucker continued to make his way into the professional world of Philadelphia's jazz musicians he also kept a focus on improving his drumming technique. Tucker recounts that he began studies with a music store owner and drum teacher named Ellis Tollin<sup>130</sup>. "That's where I started learning how to play the fulcrum system. ... That [system] was from Henry Adler." The fulcrum system as taught by Tollin was developed by Henry Adler<sup>131</sup>, a rudimental drummer who is recognized as a master technician and teacher of hand technique. Adler was probably the most well known of the rudimental teachers because of his association with the great Buddy Rich. In fact, the two co-authored an influential drum method published during the forties<sup>132</sup>. Drum lore has it that Rich studied with Adler. But, as Adler declared in an interview with Jim Dinella of the Percussive Arts Society, while he may have instructed Rich in reading drum notation, it was Adler who studied the movement of Rich's hands and then developed his method from systematizing what Rich did naturally.<sup>133</sup> Over the years Adler instructed numerous students in this method. Whether Tollin acquired the technique directly from Adler is not certain.

As Tucker recalls, Tollin "was on Chestnut Street, second floor, and the other teacher there, his name was Bill Welch ... two very good teachers." Tollin's studio/store located at 1711 Chestnut Street was called Music City. Here he sold and repaired drums and taught private

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<sup>130</sup> I've encounter three variations on the spelling of Tollin's last name in the course of my research. These are, Tollen, Tollon, and Tolin.

<sup>131</sup> The fulcrum system developed by Adler is just one of a number of similar approaches used for the development of snare drum technique. Sanford Moeller and J. Burns Moore were also known as teachers of the fulcrum system. The main concept is the use of the wrist for achieving the drum stroke and the development of each hand through individual exercise.

<sup>132</sup> Henry Adler, and Buddy Rich. *Buddy Rich's Modern Interpretation of Snare Drum Rudiments*. (New York: AMSCO Publication, 1994) The original publication appeared in 1942.

<sup>133</sup> (PAS.ORG 7/05/05)

lessons. Catalano (2000: 36) reports that Tollin operated a “makeshift concert hall” on the second floor of the building. Tollin’s intent was to present jazz concerts to audiences too young to gain entry into the clubs. Apparently, he was able to arrange for well known jazz artists, that is, those appearing at the top jazz clubs in the city, and bring them into Music City for jam sessions, usually held on Tuesday nights. Young jazz fans, many of whom were aspiring musicians could pay a small cover to hear the music live, and in some cases were allowed to sit in with their musical heroes.

In addition to operating the studio/store, Tollin was among the ranks of Philadelphia’s free lance jazz musicians. Tucker thinks Tollin’s background may have included stints with several well known society bands, possibly Claude Thornhill and Alvino Rey among others. Tucker recollects running into Tollin on several occasions while working the various jazz venues around Philadelphia.

Ellis used to come around to a lot of the clubs where I was playin’ at then and he’d say, ‘Man! Come on down and start studying with me.’ He’d say, ‘I’ll teach you to play with the fulcrum.’ So, you know, like anything else ... curiosity ... so I went down there, and watching him teach different dudes, and I saw the technique that he was teachin’, it would be good for me.<sup>134</sup> So, I made arrangements to start taking lessons. I studied off Ellis for quite a few years.

The fulcrum system as taught by Tollin involves gripping the stick between the thumb and just behind the first joint of the index finger (right hand) with the stick extended straight out from the forearm. The tip of the index finger faces downward. “That’s what we call the beak ... it

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. interview with Philly Jo Jones in Art Taylor. *Notes and Tones: Musician to Musician Interviews*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 42.

looks just like a hawk's beak!" The left hand uses the same principle. However, the stick is held in the crotch between the thumb and index finger, thumb on top, with the palm facing inward as if shaking hands in greeting. The muscles between the thumb and first finger of the hand become strengthened over time. The wrist, by way of a turning motion, is used to execute the stroke on the drum. "That's where all your power comes from, in here [the fulcrum], and in your wrist." The idea is to remove unnecessary motion and develop power by turning the wrists instead of using the arms to move the stick head from a high to low position on the drum head.<sup>135</sup> The use of the wrist becomes a crucial factor for articulating a precise sound, playing accents and enabling one to move around the drum set at a velocity favored by bop musicians.

Tucker recounts that as he began to apply himself in this system; after a while he really began to feel like he was gaining some accomplishment as a drummer. "But, it don't come over night." As I expressed interest in using the fulcrum system myself he cautioned me not to be in a hurry, but to be patient. This technique must be practiced slowly and deliberate to yield the desired results. Here, he describes his approach to practice:

First off, don't practice three or four hours straight. Practice for a while, then take a break, go out for a walk, then come back to it. Let your mind relax; make some room there for something else. ... The main thing is the correct turn or snap of the wrist. Watch everything that you do with your wrist, and if you get just two good turns, out of what you're doing in that half hour ... all of a sudden it will start to develop until all your turns come to be right all the time. [Because] you're practicing it right, and practice makes perfect – ain't no doubt about that.

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<sup>135</sup> I was also taught this system while a student of Greg Humphries. At one point Mr. Humphries used a belt to strap my arms to my torso thereby stopping their use. The idea, as taught to him by his uncle, is to get the feel of using the wrist to generate the same amount of power achieved from using arm strokes.

When Tucker first started experimenting with playing the drums he held both sticks in the same manner, what he called “playing natural” without the benefit of instruction. The grip he describes is what is known as matched grip. Later, he says, while at the Granoff School he learned the traditional grip derived from military bands. I surmise that the minimal instruction received from his uncle, and Mr. Ewell may have introduced him to the traditional grip a little before this. And it is probable that he observed players using traditional grip when he began to attend live performances, but may not have been aware of the finer points of holding the stick. Most likely in these instances his attention was on learning the basic rudiments and note reading. However, he says he “started all over with Tollin ... [learning] a different system.” Prior to this he admits “I may have developed some bad habits that get in the way of execution.” The difference coming with Tollin is the emphasis on systematic technical development of the hands. And while Tucker acknowledges there are other approaches to technique equally legitimate, he feels that his adoption of the fulcrum system had a great impact on what he was trying to achieve in his playing. What is the ultimate value of spending those long hours developing a high degree of technical prowess? Technique for its own sake held little interest for Ron. It was technique in the service of his musical expression with which he concerned himself. And musical self-expression begins with the element of sound one coaxes from the drums. He declares:

Technique, man, where you get a sound out of the drum! If you learn correct you’ll get that sound. See, the technique that you use will develop the sound, because everybody plays a drum, that don’t mean they get a sound. Everybody don’t have a sound. ... You can play for a good long while and still don’t have that sound. Sometimes it takes years to develop a sound.

In Tucker's understanding, the sound a drummer gets is his signature. It forms the basis for creating a musical identity unique to the individual; it is tied to concepts of creativity and thus is in keeping with the oft repeated adage in jazz culture, "You can't join the throng until you sing your own song." As he explains,

See, not only an instrument's got a sound, the drummer's got his own voice too!  
... His touch! [Is] what makes the difference because that's the way you feel, it's  
your soul, your being.

Tucker recounts the circumstances under which he first made the connection between the technique he was learning and how he was able to apply it while expressing himself in the music. He put it together during an extended stay at the Down Beat club playing in Jimmy Oliver's quartet. The long-term nature of the engagement proved to be a crucial factor by allowing the time for things to unfold naturally. Oliver's repertoire consisted mostly of bebop tunes. Tucker recalls: "We was [playing] "Lover" way up fast, and "Billies Bounce, Now's the Time, Lester Leaps [In] - all that type of stuff." Nelson Boyd was on bass along with Jimmy Golden on piano. Tucker began to realize that his ideas were coming out more clearly than in the past. The fast tempos, and playing for long periods of time, among other things, that had been difficult to execute, were no longer giving him trouble. He explains:

When I went into the Downbeat, that's when I really discovered what I was  
studying, how I was learning and what was the meaning of the method to me.

What did it mean?

Well, I would say, I graduated. I come out of Kiddie-Garden and went into High School. I graduated! My mind got more broader, and it got to understanding more about what I was learning, the technique of drumming and practicing. That's the only way you can do it, you got to practice man. ... What I was hearing, what I was getting, my sound had changed ... I played more precise! That's what it was. It wasn't muggy, jumbled up, it was precise. You could hear every, each and individual thing you do. And, it turned my trend of thinking around. When I say changed the trend – I started phrasing on the instrument differently. Like with a horn player, you get two horn players, one play a solo, and [the other] one play a solo, they're gonna play a different solo, they can be playing the same song, but it's the way they phrase, you know, everybody's conception is different. You can take a 5-stroke [roll], 9-strokes and play them backwards – whatever – so you phrasing them different. The same rudiment, but it's a different sound you getting.

In recognizing the change in his drum sound Tucker was acknowledging his growth as a player. How does he assess his musical thinking before that moment of self-awareness?

Well, I'd say just like an ordinary drummer, sit down and play time and swing.

Following the study and practice sessions his musicianship changes.

I was more flexible, it made me more flexible. And, it's weird man; it's just like sitting in a dark room and somebody lift the shade up and here the light comes in! Light coming in the room, that's the way you'd feel [when] you hear the change in your playing.

Of course the choices a drummer makes in regards to cymbal selection, drum sizes, heads and other aesthetic decisions will affect his overall sound, but what Tucker is concerned with has more to do with how a drummer uses sound to project his personality or inner spirit, as opposed to the mechanical properties of sound production. And this is achieved with the physical body, the touch of the drummer's hand, as conduit for the cognitive and metaphysical interiority of the mind. In this sense clarity of musical sound and clarity of musical mind are linked.

### **5.3 ROGER HUMPHRIES**

Roger Humphries is the youngest of the ten children born to Mary E. and Lawrence G. Humphries. He grew up in a house filled with music. "Always, as long as I can remember, I was always playing drums." Roger says the earliest memories he has of his childhood are those of people playing music around him. Family lore has it that he was just a toddler of about three years old at the time the drums first piqued his interest. His older brothers Norman and Lawrence Jr. were musicians and both played together in practice sessions held in the family's living room. Lawrence Jr. played saxophone and Norman was on drums. Roger recalls,

I started going around playing on everything! Pots and Pans – Everything! My brothers, they used to be in the living room rehearsing in the afternoon, and people like Dakota Stanton used to come over, different people like that rehearsed with them. And I just wanted to sit in his [Norman] lap -- like kids do -- and find out how to do this beatin' thing. He realized, 'This dude can beat, man.' I started playing pots and pans, beatin', learning, and something else, you usually try to beat what you hear.



This last point is significant because it indicates the cognitive process taking place in the youngster's mind. He's not aimlessly beating pots and pans, but trying to decipher the sound patterns played by his brother while at the same time work out the necessary coordination to reproduce them on his own. At age three he's already begun the work of what is to become his life's vocation. Mr. Humphries' talent emerged early on. He began to play with his brother's band at around four years of age. As Roger describes it, he became the band's mascot and accompanied them at different musical events. For example, dressed in a Santa Claus suit he'd been featured with the band at their annual Christmas concert for the Veterans Hospital. He recalls on another occasion he performed with them in concert at the Kenyon Theater on Pittsburgh's North Side. He was also invited to participate on a Christmas program and other events at his neighborhood elementary school a year before he officially enrolled as a student. Roger estimates he was about five years old when he sat in with the bands of Tab Smith and Savannah Churchill at the Savoy Ballroom. The Savoy was located on the second floor of the Granada Theater situated along Centre Avenue in the heart of the Hill District.

Roger recollects that it was around this time that his family sought instruction from Bill Hammond the well known drum instructor and snare drummer with the Pittsburgh Symphony. Hammond had been Joe Harris' instructor and the Humphries family was aware of his teaching expertise. Recognizing Roger's innate talent and not wishing to disturb his development Hammond declined to teach him at that juncture. As Roger recalls,

He told my parents, 'He's too young to put him into that. It's too much right now. Let him keep playing by ear and playing from his heart ... don't wanna interfere with that until later.'

Whether those were Hammond's exact words or not isn't important here as they perfectly describe what happened next. The result of Hammond's decision was one that set Roger on his own path of development guided internally by his innate abilities; including achieving the skill to be able to hear something and reproduce the sound on his drums, his discipline, and a strong internal drive to learn.

However, young Humphries wasn't on this journey alone. Mr. Humphries relates that his family encouraged and supported his musical endeavors throughout his young life. The responsibility to nurture Roger's drum talent and to see to his musical development was always a family affair. Although he didn't take formal lessons, he did receive some drum tutoring his older brother Norman. The older brother recognized his sibling's innate talent and eventually introduced him to the basic rudiments of snare drumming.

That was my brother, he knew from day one. I was about seven years old, he had me doing rudiments. Paradiddles, you know, flams, stuff like that.

Roger would set up the drums in the living room and play along with records on the family Hi-Fidelity set.

I was always playing in the living room, but just with the record player. Later on, after my first year of junior high, I moved my drum set upstairs in my attic. By this time there were ten of us in the house. So, my brothers would sleep in the bedroom together. So, there wasn't no room [for the drums] until my people put the other addition onto the house. Then I gained a little bit of room, you know, I could practice.

Eventually both older brothers' musical activities diminished due to their own growing families and work obligations, but they kept to Roger's musical development directing his attention to the different drummers recording in jazz.

They were always bringing up all this music – Art Blakey – ‘Hey! Listen to this one.’ I studied everybody since I was a baby. All through my house, my brothers and sisters played nothing but Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, [and] Ella Fitzgerald.

Roger's older sister saw to it that he was exposed to the great jazz bands passing through Pittsburgh. She used to take him around town -- North Side, East Liberty, The Hill District, Downtown -- to the various clubs presenting live music. And, while technically speaking, he was under the legal age to enter, when it came to Roger, club owners recognized his talent with his love of the music and tended to be lax in enforcing the rule. Young Humphries, accompanied by his adult sister, was a regular on the Pittsburgh jazz scene well before he began to play in the clubs. Although his youth prevented him from being there nightly he looked forward to their weekly excursions.

We wouldn't miss a matinee. They *knew* when I was coming to the Crawford Grill. We wouldn't miss a Saturday matinee. Also went to down to the Midway Lounge, then the Liberty Lounge, then there was the Hi Hat, Chappee's. So, I made all them joints.

According to Mr. Humphries it wasn't just his family that was interested in his musical development. Roger recollects that neighbors passing in the street might stop to inquire as to

how his music was progressing. And, by making him aware of their interest in him while sharing their enthusiasm for the music, they also impacted his musical growth. This type concern went beyond merely being polite for their interest was genuine and they gave of themselves freely. For example, Roger recalls with fondness a Mr. J. B. Evers, the father of one of his junior high friends.

That's all they did, bring nothing but drummers to me. The guy used to take me to a place ... Sonny Payne was his man. 'Roger! I got the new album by Sonny Payne.' You know - Count Basie. 'You gotta come down and listen.' And I'd sit down and listen for hours.

Throughout his youth Roger played drums in church, school, neighborhood talent shows, and other social occasions. He recalls performing with his cousin Teddy, a pianist, on the Wilkins Amateur Hour radio program. "That's how a lot of people knew me 'cause I used to be on the radio show on Saturday. People sat around and listened to it." There is a saying currently in use in Pittsburgh's African American Community. It goes; "It takes a whole village to raise a child." As Mr. Humphries relates his experiences from early childhood this principle becomes apparent. He elaborates on the community's attitude toward his involvement with jazz music.

They were very excited and very much happy for me moving on and making progress in my life. As were my family, they helped me with my development, bringing me different sounds. ... Music was looked upon as a skill, as an art, it was a gift that God give you. It wasn't looked upon negatively.

True, but there were other elements of the life surrounding a musician that his family felt they needed to protect him from. Roger's musical talent, by all accounts, was exceptional and best described as prodigious. He had this in common with another young talent from across the state in Philadelphia. As Roger tells it, news items about him regularly appeared in the Pittsburgh Courier. His counterpart in the east, Tom "Sugar Chile" Robinson, himself a piano prodigy received regular coverage in the *Philadelphia Afro-American*<sup>136</sup>. In fact Robinson, who was a few years older than Roger had been touring steadily and his performances were seemingly making money. Apparently, in hopes of cashing in on their combined talents, when Roger was about nine years old Art Blakey approached the Humphries family with the intent of pairing him with the young prodigy from Philadelphia. "They wanted my dad to let me go with them, to take me on the road, get me tutors ... and all this when I was a kid." Humphries relates this anecdote not as a slight on Blakey, for he was aware and encouraging of Roger's talent for some time by then, but rather to demonstrate the concern for his welfare and the guidance that he received from his parents. With ten children in the family most likely money was tight in the household. How did his father respond to Blakey's request? Roger sums up his parent's feelings: "'No, no way in the world! What are you thinking about? Let him live a normal life, and if he still likes it when he gets older, then he can do it.'"

Roger also played trumpet while attending junior high school. He received instruction from the band director and, for a while, pursued his trumpet studies with the same vigor he approached drums. Here again his keen ear was an asset as well.

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<sup>136</sup> *Philadelphia Afro-American* 1946-1948.

I liked it, it was much different [from drums], I was a better drummer than a trumpet player, but I studied trumpet all the time when I was doing it. I could always just hear it ... I could articulate it [on the trumpet.]

But, he didn't stay with the trumpet too long. As with playing percussion in the school's concert and marching bands he simply wasn't challenged enough to maintain a steady interest, and although he continued to play percussion in school, he eventually gave up the trumpet.

That money was an issue in the household is apparent in the anecdote Roger related about his experience auditioning for the Lenox School of Music in Tanglewood, Massachusetts. In the late fifties the Lenox School had sought to expand their educational efforts by sponsoring a summer program aimed at youths interested in jazz. They had gathered some of the major players of the time, most notably the members of the Modern Jazz Quartet and engaged them as instructors. Max Roach was included on the faculty and it was he who suggested that Humphries, who by this time was in high school, audition for placement in the school. Applications for the program were distributed to high schools and private teaching studios. Downbeat jazz magazine also included them in their monthly publication which is how Roger acquired his. Again, the entire family was involved in the process of applying and subsequent events.

My sister Mary Alice helped me make a tape. We recorded me playing a solo ... we recorded me playing a tune from the record player and they loved it. And that's how I got my scholarship.

Based on his performance on tape, Roger was awarded a scholarship to attend the Lenox School. He was proud and excited to be given such recognition. His family made plans for him to attend.

I was ready to go. My mother had took me down to Rosenbaum's and bought my cloths, and [I] got a little windbreaker to go away with.

But, in the end it just wasn't to be. The scholarship he received was only for tuition. He still needed additional funds to cover incidental expenses such as dining and whatnot while at Lenox.

But, we just didn't have the money. I know my dad was hurt because I knew he wanted it for me. I cried, I was hurt, but I got past it. ... That's part of life.

What is clear is not just the parents and family member's willingness to make sacrifices on Roger's behalf, but also the sense of unconditional love that is mutual throughout the family. This comes across in the way Mr. Humphries relates these experiences from his young life. It just may be that the nurturing environment at home, along with the encouragement from friends and neighbors coupled with the vital musical life throughout Pittsburgh's African American community allowed Roger the freedom for his talent to thrive and realize his potential as a musical human being.

Mr. Humphries began playing in professional situations while still quite young. He cites a gig with the tenor saxophonist Illinois Jacquet as a high point early in his musical career. Humphries had sat in with Jacquet on previous occasions when the saxophonist was performing in Pittsburgh. Jacquet was impressed with the young drummer and remembered him. Jacquet was an established "jazz star" by that time having been featured with Lionel Hampton's band and all star programs such as the Jazz at the Philharmonic tours promoted by Norman Granz. As such his performances drew large audiences. And those musicians accompanying him would be

accorded recognition simply from sharing the bandstand with him. For a young musician this was indeed a great learning experience. One can assume that Jacquet was well aware of these factors as well. As Humphries recalls,

He was coming back to Pittsburgh again, and he called my house, called my family and said, 'I would like for him to make a gig with me.' ... 'Cause he thought I was phenomenal, me playing all the drums I was playing.

I think it's important to note the protocol Jacquet followed in order to acquire Roger's services for the gig. Roger was just fourteen years old when he performed at the Crawford Grill as part of Jacquet's ensemble. Although any youngster of Roger's talent and inclination would probably have loved the chance to perform with someone of Jacquet's stature irregardless of parental wishes, Jacquet showed respect and consideration for the family's concerns by seeking to secure their permission first before approaching the young drummer. It is also highly probable that Jacquet felt a responsibility to help nurture the young drummer, that is, to pass on his knowledge via the performance experience, by affording him a chance to hone his skills and to add purpose to his drumming by playing with seasoned musicians. Humphries relates that during his teen years he increasingly sat in with the jazz artists appearing in various Pittsburgh venues. Word of his playing eventually spread among the many musicians who made their living traveling the circuit of nightclubs and performance venues that make up the jazz world.

He began to receive offers to go on the road while still in school. Although his playing exhibited a musical maturity well beyond his years, his parents kept a watch out for his welfare. Humphries explains his parent's desire to protect him from "people whose [interest was in] just having you out here, being a freak of nature." These were the unscrupulous promoters,



bandleaders, and the like who were more concerned with taking advantage of his exceptional talent for their own gain rather than making any real contribution to his musical growth.

By the time he entered his teenage years Roger was already recognized as a significant presence among the jazz musicians in his hometown. He began to work on the local scene. Several of these players toured regionally and traveled across country as well. Stanley Turrentine had wanted Roger to join his touring group for some time before he was actually able to do so. “Stanley knew about me, but he couldn’t do nothing ’till I come out of school.” Upon Roger’s graduation in June 1962, Turrentine approached the family about securing him for a series of gigs traveling the chitlin circuit. “They came over and had dinner with my mom and dad and everybody, the family, and asked permission to take me with them. I left in July.” By this time Roger had turned eighteen years old. Now, following the custom of the day and by his family’s reckoning, he was considered an adult and was expected to make his own way in life. “Parents have guidelines. When you graduate from high school you gotta take care of yourself.”

Pittsburgh is sometimes referred to as the “drummer’s town” due to the fact that a number of great swinging jazz drummers hailed from the city<sup>137</sup>. Two of the most significant drummers of the bebop era, Kenny Clarke, recognized as the “father of modern drumming,” began his career here, as did Art Blakey. By the time Roger Humphries had begun playing on Pittsburgh’s jazz scene Joe Harris had already left to establish his credentials in New York and beyond. In fact, Harris left town about six months after Humphries was born. Although the Humphries and Harris family knew each other and Roger went to school with Joe’s younger sister, the two men didn’t get to know each other until both had returned to live in the city in the nineteen-seventies. Mr. Humphries was born into a lineage of jazz drummers that shared a

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<sup>137</sup> Personal conversation with Kenny Washington, 1April, 1998.

common cultural heritage and had made contributions to furthering the tradition. Drummers such as James “Honey Boy” Minor, Manzie Johnson, “Hot Sticks” Hackett, and Joe Watts were playing on the local scene in the twenties and thirties. Curtis Young, Walt Bradford, “Piggy” Larsen, Cecil Brooks and Bert Logan were active on the Pittsburgh scene during Roger’s youth in the forties and fifties.

I’d met Kenny Clarke early in life. I was a young one so, I really didn’t remember, but the name was like this universal eye up there you know? [That’s] when I think about hearing Kenny Clarke’s name. <sup>138</sup>

Walt Bradford played in a band led by Lawrence Humphries and Roger, as the band’s “mascot” had plenty of opportunities to hear him play as a child. Later, during his teenage years Roger continued to observe Bradford at work.

Walt used to play at the Rose Room with another organ player. I used to watch him. He played a lot of drums ... and cymbals all over the place!

Mr. Humphries says that he enjoyed an amicable relationship with the Pittsburgh drummers of his youth and he learned a lot by being around them. However, there wasn’t much technical instruction coming in the way of verbal interaction from these drummers.

Mostly watching, we may have conversed, but mostly it was through watching. ... When you’re watching [and listening] you’ve got everything. You can’t learn too

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<sup>138</sup> AAJPSP Oral History Interview, 8 August 1998. It is possible their meeting took place in 1951 when Clarke returned to Pittsburgh for a brief period.

much from talking.” On the other hand, he spent countless hours with peer musicians “just hanging out and learning, sharing ideas.

Drummer Beaver Harris, who was about four years older than Roger was one friend who shared his love of drumming. The two also shared a talent for baseball and both played in organized youth leagues. Humphries cites J. C. Moses – “he was always like a big brother” -- as another member in the circle of Pittsburgh players.

Although Roger received little in the way of formal training on the drum set it would be misleading to say he was “self-taught” because as we have seen thus far it is mostly through the experience of playing that he progressed as a drummer. Self-directed may be a better way to describe the process. Yet even this statement needs to be qualified due to the advice he received from others. He was working within a community of jazz musicians who lent their expertise in numerous ways. The initial encouragement he received at home from brothers Norman and Lawrence Jr. may have impacted the way he later related to those musicians around him as he moved out from the confines of his immediate family. I spoke with Roger about his formal study. I wondered if he felt he may have missed out on anything not having spent a lot of time taking lessons. He explains,

I think sometimes you didn’t think about lessons ‘cause you didn’t have no money to get lessons. And, the other part about it, we had big brothers, brothers there to help you with things that you weren’t able to decipher. It was nice.

Humphries elaborates on this idea and in doing so provides a hint of the group approach to learning as well as the nature of the mentoring system in effect in Pittsburgh.

I learned a lot after school. I used to rehearse with Pete Henderson and Spencer Bey, and the guys up on the Hill. Right up on the Hill ... when they were talking about LaPlace [Street] and other different places up there, on Stanley's album.<sup>139</sup> Well, when I was young I used to go up there on the Hill with Pete and them, and Tommy Turrentine used to come by and give all his suggestions and his helpfulness. ... He was basically dealing with the guys with harmony. Maybe they don't know the tune as well, and he's going over the changes. ... That's what he was focusing on, and also, to know the feel of the tune.

This last point is significant and I'll come back to it.

Roger mentions that he was learning through rehearsals with Bey and Henderson, and others back in the late fifties. I met pianist Spencer Bey and trumpeter Pete Henderson (1929-2001) while I was playing on the Pittsburgh jazz scene in the nineteen-nineties close to forty years later. Throughout this time Mr. Henderson had developed a reputation for being a master teacher and keeper of the tradition. And, in my experience, both Mr. Henderson and Mr. Bey possessed a willingness to share the wisdom they had received from their mentors. For a brief, yet intense few weeks I played in a quintet led by Henderson which also included Mr. Bey. In fact, the group never played in public, but met for several private sessions at Mr. Henderson's home. I can attest to his knack for relating musical concepts and getting at the core feeling inherent in a musical performance. In one instance we were rehearsing the Ellington-Tizol composition, *Caravan*. Henderson's arrangement started with an open-ended, two-bar vamp initiated by the rhythm section with each entering the performance one instrument at a time ala piano, bass, and drums. This was followed by the guitar, followed by Henderson coming in on trumpet with the melody and head. There were several false starts in which the rhythm players

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<sup>139</sup> Here Mr. Humphries is referring to the album recorded by Stanley Turrentine in which he pays tribute to his Pittsburgh roots. It's called *LaPlace* and is titled after the street Turrentine lived on as a child.

were at odds both harmonically and with clashing rhythms. However, Henderson let us continue to play even as we became more and more mired in our jumbled and confused attempt to realize his concept for the piece. When it became apparent that left to our own volition the performance would continue to deteriorate Henderson finally stopped the group. He proceeded to “break down” what everyone was playing and demonstrated why it didn’t work, which in his estimation had to do mainly with the fact that we got too caught up in our own part and weren’t listening to each other. He then set about to “build” the performance by assigning each player a specific rhythm and note selection, and demonstrated why his choices made musical sense, taking pains to show us how each note and rhythmic part interconnected to form a whole musical idea. He continued this direction along with verbal instructions and as the rehearsal performance of the tune progressed he continually shaped the dynamics and other musical parameters until the players were able to “carry the performance on their own.” He then told us that it was only after we could get to this point of cohesion and be able to maintain it that maybe we’d be able “make some music.”<sup>140</sup> And, upon reflection all agreed he was right.

Time and time again throughout my field research Pittsburgh musicians have emphasized the point that jazz is not about things technical; chords, scales and playing correctly, it’s about feeling, playing together, and “being able to express your life experiences through your instrument.”<sup>141</sup> Pittsburgh musicians also expressed the notion that jazz can’t be taught. This maxim is oft repeated throughout the literature on jazz. I’ve found that in most cases the musicians who express this ideal have themselves come up through the African American oral tradition. For example Betty Carter and Mary Lou Williams have made statements expressing

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<sup>140</sup> Fieldnotes

<sup>141</sup> Dr. Nelson Harrison, *In Pittsburgh Newsweekly*, June 6-12, 1996, p. 40.

the thought that while jazz can't be taught one can provide the environment in which learning may take place. Mr. Humphries expressed a similar notion to me.

I find out it comes to pass that it's a feeling with me. I can feel it! You can't teach it. You can learn to have a feeling of feeling something though. But, how do you get it?" Humphries provides the answer to his question. "If you think about it, all of them went and sat underneath somebody's bandstand and watch everybody else. That's how everybody did it. It wasn't that you went to a book and do it. It's all part of development. Everyone thinks it's a mystery. ... I was studying it, *living it* everyday, man.

What Humphries is talking about here is a way of life centered around jazz. It has to do with developing oneself within the music, or put another way, the occasion of performing provides the context for learning not just music, but the expectations of being an individual in society as well. You can't play jazz unless you listen to the other musicians and pay attention to the audience expectations as well.

Humphries distinguished himself from other drummers when he first began to play regularly on the Pittsburgh jazz scene by virtue of his musicianship. The basic qualities that continue to define his playing were obvious from the start. First, he had developed a considerable amount of technical ability to play the drums. Roger could execute the snare rudiments with a high degree of proficiency and he had worked out the coordinated independence necessary to be fluent in the polyrhythmic language of modern jazz. Second, he had learned the melodies to a significant number of tunes which formed the repertoire then in practice. Lastly, he knew the work of a number of the top drummers of the day. Meaning that

he knew the musical arrangements and could precisely execute the rhythmic parts these drummers played on recordings. Humphries explains:

I studied everybody since I was a baby. ... You have to learn the language. I knew the language before I came out. I knew how Chick Webb played on that drum solo [Liza]. I knew the tune inside out, any of them, whatever the tune was, I knew the tune before I got on the gig. That's why they would turn around and look at me – Wow! See it's a language. You can't just be playing anything in the passage. When they get to the bridge, there's certain things you play in the bridge and guys be waiting around to hear if you got the bridge part. Art Blakey played [demonstrates.] You don't just sit down and play [anything.] 'Damn! He's playing Art's part, man.'

Of course here we're discussing the jazz tradition therefore to simply imitate what another musician had already played is not quite satisfactory. But, considering Roger's youthfulness, his ability to display his knowledge of the repertoire and the drummer's role in the ensemble by way of performance acumen puts him in a position to be invited for continual performances opportunities with his musical elders. It is through playing on these gigs that he is able to continue refining his musical sensibilities.

Well, I had heard the music and kind of learned it at home, but it's always something else when you go out, people wanna hear something a little different ... [they] tell you how they wanna hear it, so you're always paying attention to do things that make someone else happy. I mean as far as the arrangement goes. After you play [the arrangement] you're on your own. ... But, you pick up so many things. That's where I learned from a lot of musicians. Like Sonny Stitt, when I was with him, 'Hey Baby, when we get here, I want you to do this.' Or, how his style was, the way he wanted you to play behind him.

Listening to Mr. Humphries recount his early experiences playing in jazz ensembles, it appears that much concentration was given over to learning the art of the drummer's role as that of an accompanist. In this sense accompanying goes well beyond simply keeping good time on the drum set, although that ability in itself is a necessary prerequisite to being a competent accompanist. Following the innovations of Kenny Clarke, jazz drummers were expected to contribute to the arrangements and improvisations in a supportive manner being sensitive to the needs of the particular individual soloing at a given moment while at the same time maintaining the mood, or attitude of the piece they were playing. In the early stages of his career Roger may have been told to play a certain rhythm or style behind someone as in the example he cites from working with Sonny Stitt. Over time though, as one builds up experience doing this, one's listening skills develop to the point where verbal suggestions are no longer needed. Humphries explains this process in terms of his ability to take on the "different personalities" of the musicians that he's accompanying.

Throughout our conversations Mr. Humphries has constantly emphasized two themes which guided his musical development and influenced his approach to playing jazz drums. The first has to do with culture and the context of musical life within Pittsburgh's African American community. As a member of the community Humphries was immersed in the norms and operation of black music production from birth. Given that he was exposed to jazz at a very early age, even performing with his older brothers by the time he was four years old, one could come away with the impression that it was the experiences in jazz alone which provided the impetus for him to pursue a life in jazz. Mr. Humphries cautioned me not to discount other of his musical experiences while investigating the cultural factor in black jazz artistry. He declared



that throughout his childhood he consistently played in church as well. Further, he came to understand that these experiences were crucial for the formation of his musical conception. Burnim and Maulsby (1987: 111) posit that while each genre within the Black American musical tradition may be distinguished as a product unique to specific historical or social circumstances, there exists a cultural framework, that is, a world view which “serves to unify them into a conceptual whole.” Included in this framework is a well-defined aesthetic which operates as a core set of criteria for the production and evaluation of black music performance.

Mr. Humphries relates that his background playing in the church, and the specific way of thinking about the parameters of music within the black sacred tradition introduced to him there, was invaluable to his career because it provided him with tools that he could later draw on in his work in jazz. I asked him in what ways did he consider the church music experience to be important for jazz musicians. Humphries explains his thinking.

I’m gonna give you an answer that I think is very important. I’m glad you asked that. See, if you play in the Baptist church you learn how to play the backbeat early. So, that becomes a part of you, being able to play a backbeat. I mean you take the backbeat from the church, you take it to the blues; you take it to the shuffle. You dig? So you relate some kind of way. Maybe nobody told you exactly what it is, but you know. You relate to it that way. Okay, now it’s also in R&B and church. In the Baptist church you have a lot of 6/8 time going. You understand? So, you’re familiar with [demonstrates]:

**Example 13 Baptist Groove**

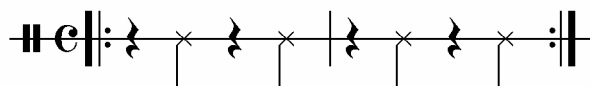


That's the Blues. You dig it?

Humphries points are well taken. What's important in the tradition is the way one relates to the sound and the feel of the music and not the label attached to it. His statements echo Burnim and Maultsby's argument that African American sacred and secular music traditions cannot be neatly separated. Humphries articulates a key concept of this argument by reminding us that ultimately it's the sound and the feel that serves as a unifying agent between distinct genres of music. He continues:

So, basically you come up with that, and 2 and 4 [demonstrates clapping hands]:

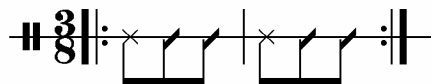
**Example 14 Clapping on the Back Beat**



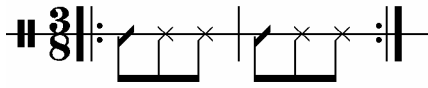
You come up with a lot of that!

Humphries then proceeds to demonstrate the different rhythms that one might hear people execute through clapping their hands and patting their feet. For example:

**Example 15 Hand and Foot Rhythms**



### Example 16 Hand and Foot Rhythms



I mean you get so used to it that you don't even have to count it. You feel it. It's a feeling more so than you count it. 'Cause, like, everybody don't know what 12/8, or what the time signature is, but they can feel it. [In the] sanctified church – one of the places [where] they really get down – they beat the tambourine, but the rhythm, man, they be playing behind the beat, on top of the beat, syncopations be going on! And you get like a layering of rhythms after a while.

The interplay of the various 'syncopations', when considered in the aggregate, work to create a polyrhythmic effect, or as Humphries describes it, "a *layering* of rhythms" this being a fundamental organizing principle germane to the art of black music. The use of different sound sources such as hand claps, foot pats on the floor, and the variety of tones coaxed from the tambourines provide contrasts in timbre; the heterogeneous ideal preferred in sound quality. Humphries' description of the rhythmic procedures used in the church applies equally to the modern jazz drumming conception. For the various rhythms he heard in sanctified communal performance may be orchestrated around the components of the drum set and executed by a single player. For a musician like Humphries, having acquired the knowledge and techniques of their operation through playing in church, the transference of these underlying rhythmic precepts to his jazz drumming is achieved with little, if any, adjustments. (Burnim and Maultsby, 1987: 133)

In discussing his approach to jazz drumming Humphries acknowledges that it's the interrelatedness of black music genres, and his recognition of this fact that allows him to move fluently between stylistic conventions. Further, by drawing on his diverse experiences as needed he is able to create freely in any given musical situation. The key to Mr. Humphries' ability to employ this knowledge in a practical sense, that is, in performance, may be found in the subtle workings of the enculturation process. Having been immersed in black culture from childhood Humphries is able to ascertain the salient qualities which are at the core of the music. In everyday conversation about music Mr. Humphries follows convention by utilizing, perhaps for the sake of clarity, the various genre designations such as; blues, gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues and the like when discussing the outward manifestations of sound, but in the way he conceptualizes the cultural framework of the music, the way he identifies the principles underlying the performance practice, and the unique world view that informs them, he understands these, first and foremost, as the aural manifestation of the African American experience and a distinctly Black Identity.

Right, because when we sing in church, or when we be playing in church, I mean if you come from where I come from, you know, being *Black* and going to the Metropolitan and other churches, I can identify with it immediately. There are certain things people ask me to do. I can identify and make it happen, 'cause I know what they're looking for. They may not be able to express themselves. And, when you come from this kind of background it's like second nature. By me explaining to someone else, 'It's a backbeat, do that *shuffle!*' Well, they do this all the time [in church] where I come from. Where I was born and raised.

In talking about the cultural factor in music, Humphries recognizes that the same characteristics, which in his view give the music its African American identity, are exhibited throughout black cultural modalities and serve to link them as well.

You know why? ‘Cause a lot of times we say, ‘Hey man, [sings]. Now, when I’m singing this, man, it’s no reflection on [you,] but black guys talk this shit. They taught it to me. You didn’t hear nobody rap that kind of shit ‘cause it ain’t your culture. ... It’s a dialect. It’s a language we speak! Even if you’re not a musician you still understand that when it’s being spoken.

Just as one musical genre may inform another, as in Humphries explication of the aesthetic core underlying blues, R&B, gospel, and jazz, so too can one mode of cultural communication be read in terms of another.

I tell my students, you start with small four-bar phrases and you play through part of it soft and part of it dramatic. It’s like being an actor.<sup>142</sup>

In Humphries’ words we find that the Pittsburgh jazz musician’s insistence on the ability to express one’s life experiences through one’s instrument comes into play here. And, as in the art of the master actor-storyteller, these life experiences are never a mere recitation of facts, but rather, are performed through improvisation using expressive, dynamic, and dramatic means.

In Mr. Humphries’ experience as a youth, jazz was a desired aspect of musical life in Pittsburgh’s African American community and he received support and encouragement not just from family and friends, but also from the very musicians he desired to emulate. As he explains

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<sup>142</sup> Harriet L. Schwartz, “Anatomy of a Drum Solo,” *In Pittsburgh Newsweekly* June 6-12, 1996, p. 39.

it, music was basic to his development as a human being and he inherited his expertise in the norms of performance of the black music tradition through “living it everyday.” Yet, at the same time the work of learning to be a jazz drummer is predicated as much on individual inclination as it is on cultural forces. Humphries believes he was blessed with copious talent and drive, but that his conscious effort to study the available recordings and master the principles of jazz drumming as explicated on the records was as crucial in determining his success. A significant portion of his young life was given over to;

Just playing, and you know, hanging out when they would come – Art Blakey, Max Roach, Philly Joe – all them guys would come in town – Louis Hayes and Roy Books. But I studied, I’d hang out with all the guys, they’re at the Crawford Grill, all the time, and the Midway Lounge, wherever, the Hurricane, wherever. That’s what I was doing, constantly studying the records and watching them.

Like the other artists in this monograph, Humphries employed a similar methodology of study dividing time amongst observation, listening analysis, and application. It is understood, of course, that the professional performance experience adds another dimension to this kind of learning. However, given that in our conversations Mr. Humphries emphasized (as did the other artists under consideration here) the importance of jazz records in acquiring knowledge of the norms of performance, it’s appropriate that we consider the ways in which recordings played a role in his musical development.

Mr. Humphries imaginative approach to aural analysis centered on four areas of enquiry all of which are germane to jazz drumming. In the early stages of his development the family living room doubled as his learning laboratory. He begins his enquiry away from his drum set contemplating on the sounds emanating from the turntable. First, he studied the playing of the

drummer on record in order to ascertain key elements of their personal approach, to study the possibilities that exist within improvisation. This may include; taking note of the size and number of drums and cymbals utilized in the drummer's set along with the particular tunings of the drums used; the use of dynamics; shifts in timbre through use of brushes, sticks, hands, or mallets; identifying particular snare rudiments and their application; overall phrasing of musical ideas, as well as other considerations the possibilities of which appear to be limitless. Second, he learned the specifics of the composition and arrangement under consideration; the melody, harmonic form, backgrounds, shouts, and other details executed in the recorded performance. Appraisal of this type of detail requires repeated listening and an ear for nuance. With the third area of enquiry he brings the drum set into action by way of playing along with the records. Here his purpose is to develop the requisite accompanying skills needed to play live with other musicians. Still listening intently; this time he ignores the recorded drummer. Humphries places himself as a surrogate to the drummer on record now focusing his attention on what the soloist is doing while playing along. Humphries imaginative play performance allows him to experience the possibilities of what may come up in an actual playing situation before he gets out there on his own. At the same time he's honing his technique and refining his concept. Although he can't change what anyone on the record plays, by playing along to individual tracks repeatedly, he certainly can make adjustments in his own playing and try out new ideas, thereby accommodating an ever deepening comprehension of the musical sensibilities needed to perform creatively. While playing along with records may offer rewarding challenges to the novice drummer there are limiting factors as well. Humphries explains:

To me, keeping up with the record is the hardest thing you can do. 'Cause if you don't have the volume up -- we're talking about sitting in front of a High Fidelity

set -- you always lose time on that record unless you are fully focusing and you imagine. You make adjustments in your playing [volume] until you can hear the rest of the band. [There's] two different ways of playing along with the record. I always first started by listening to whoever the drummer is on the record. Not playing ... I'm not gonna play, just listen over and over. Then, after that, I get the tune, then, I start playing. Sometimes I have to let go of the drummer, what he's doing, because you can't hear too good, what the drummer's doing, so later, after listening to the drummer, [I'd] focus on the saxophone player, whosever doing the solo, 'cause wherever he's at is where the drummer's gotta be, the drummer may be doing some tricky things, get him out of the way, as long as I'm with the saxophone player, it'll come back in 'cause you're playing with a record. Because he's the main man, whoever the solo player is. But, it's always nice to listen to another drummer [on record] to see what he's doing.

Humphries' comment about getting the drummer on record "out of the way" makes an important point regarding the use of records as learning tools. These jazz recordings featured musicians with formidable technique. For the novice attempting to play along; he simply may not have the technical skills to execute "some tricky things" going down on the record. Humphries ran into this problem as well, but used his encounter with the records as a learning opportunity with which to develop his technique. As he explains it, the practice of playing along to records presents somewhat of a paradox.

The two things go together you have to build the chops to do it, meanwhile, while you're doing that [you're building the chops] ... [you] can't even think about the applied if you can't even break it down. And then after a while you'll start getting your own thing.



This brings us to another consideration in regards to modern jazz drumming. Most musicians consider that the primary role of the drummer in the jazz ensemble is to function as an accompanist albeit in an interactive manner. However, modern drummers became increasingly known for their ability to perform extended drum solos in which they utilized coordinated independence while exhibiting a mastery of virtuosic technique. Max Roach, in particular, was noted for his technical abilities and his numerous recorded performances served as models for countless drummers from the time he first began recording in the mid-forties. Humphries cites Roach as an influence on his own thinking. He recalls that it was through listening to Roach's recordings and seeing him play in person that he began to realize a distinction between the drummer's role as accompanist and as a soloist.

Max did that  $\frac{3}{4}$  album<sup>143</sup>. That was something that really impressed me. I'd sit down for days and learn them solos ... learn them solos over and over because he could tell a story, he was a soloist. And there's something else – to be just a player, and to be a soloist, and to be able to be both of them.

Roach's formidable technical skills are impressive. As Humphries suggests, some musicians consider the ability to be a sensitive accompanist as first priority, but in addition, to be able to step out and execute an outstanding solo is to be the epitome of what jazz drumming is all about. I should remind the reader that jazz musicians tend to be highly individual in their thinking and in my experience there seems to be no consensus as to whether these dual drumming capabilities are indeed considered to be the pinnacle of jazz drumming accomplishment. Many drummers became highly regarded based solely on their ability to

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<sup>143</sup> Max Roach, *Jazz in  $\frac{3}{4}$  Time*, Emarcy Records, Cat # B000202102, 1957.

provide accompaniment. However, having said that, Mr. Humphries set about learning to solo using the model set forth in the Roach recording. He explains the approach he took in this area of enquiry.

I used to break my learning solos up in phrases, four bar phrases, for myself, so I could get it, because sometimes you listen to the whole picture – you can't get it. So, I used to break the solos down -- you dig it? -- until I put them all together.

Mr. Humphries method of dissecting solos into their constituent parts, committing them to memory and then reassembling the phrases to reform the complete solo brings him deep inside the details of style. As he often says, in this sense, jazz is a language, or a dialect and one must learn the “rules of grammar” and build up a “vocabulary” of usage in order to be an effective speaker. By transcribing phrases and solos one internalizes the music and learns the intricacies of their instrument. Humphries recalls that he spent a lot of time “finding” the sounds on his drums and cymbals. We should keep in mind that in the jazz field transcription does not necessarily imply notating the music on paper. What's important here is that the student learns through aural means. Mr. Humphries recounts that he made up his own exercises. For example, he may take a particular musical phrase and practice playing it with various hand combinations attempting to get the same feel/sound each time irregardless of how he's executing each stroke. Practicing exercises like this moves the student away from thinking in terms of snare drum rudiments and sticking patterns and brings them into thinking about sound production and musical ideas. Humphries method is consistent with what other jazz musicians have to say about how they learned the tradition. This is especially true for those players who came of musical age before the popularity of jazz pedagogy in mainstream colleges and universities. Humphries has

given serious consideration to the problems inherent with the institutionalized approach to learning jazz, which for him, is essentially an oral/aural process. Our discussion on the explosion of books purporting to teach jazz improvisation prompted the following comments:

When you become *so* academic you can *lose* something. What about common sense? What about how I learned to play? In order for you to play this music you gotta listen to it! It ain't gonna be out of the book ... you gotta *listen* to it. ... When you first started playing as a baby, they didn't give you a sheet of music, you just started playing [laughs!]

His statement "What about how I learned to play?" hints at the perception that master musicians whose musical qualifications were forged by way of participation in the African American oral culture, are, by virtue of their lack of academic credentials, excluded from participating in the majority of academic programs built up around the teaching of jazz, or when they are allowed to participate, they are relegated to a position of low status.

Two final considerations on the subject of the use of recordings in learning the art of jazz drumming concerns what the recordings don't allow for; that is seeing what the musicians are doing when they play. A practical side to being able to watch a drummer perform is that one can see exactly how a particular musical idea is executed on the set. When going strictly by sound some ideas may seem impossible to play. Novice drummers typically run into problems as they attempt to replicate an idea heard on record. Mr. Humphries recalls he spent many fruitful hours watching the great jazz drummers play live. Citing the following example, he discussed the importance of being able to observe them play and how that works in hand with studying the records.

To me, it's important because I was doing some things at home, by listening to the record that was ... I was doing it a little more complicated than what it was. And, to actually see them do it, to see the method that he was doing. It made it easier for me 'cause I was doing it only completely by sound. How I thought it came out. I was getting the same thing, but I was making it harder. You know how a drummer go [demonstrates] from the mounted tom to the floor tom? Well, without me seeing it, I was going [demonstrates] with two hands coming down there [on the floor tom.] Max is going [demonstrates keeping the left hand on the snare.] I said, wow! These guys are doing it so easy. It's better when you go see people play, not only hear them on the record. Because when you see them play you can use two things ... if you can go by sound and go by looking at how he's doing it. It makes it that much easier. That's why it's so important to see the artists.

A certain amount of the expressive aspect of jazz is communicated through non-verbal means and the visual display of intensity. In watching these drummers perform at the Crawford Grill and other Pittsburgh venues, Humphries picked up on the visual cues that become as much a part of a musician's expressive style as the sounds and rhythms they play on the drums. He recalls:

Yeah, there were different moves that you know. Like the guy's getting ready to take off ... sometimes when I see Max Roach play and all of a sudden I see him sit up in a very erect [posture.] I said, 'Oh man!' Then he starts laying out that message on you, yeah there's a story gonna get ready to be told, everybody in the band quit playing, and they left it over to him!

Other drummers have told me that in the practice sessions of their youth they would often mime the gestures and movements of their favorite drummers thinking that by doing so they

might achieve the same intensity of sound and force of presence that occurs when they see their idols express themselves in this manner.

By the time Mr. Humphries turned twenty he had been playing drums for over seventeen years; or for more than three-quarters of his life on earth. He had been a professional musician for six years, including experience in Pittsburgh backing up artists of international repute, and touring on the national circuit with Stanley Turrentine. As such, Humphries was uniquely qualified when the call came inviting him to audition for a new assemblage of the Horace Silver Quintet. Humphries spent two years in Silver's group and during his tenure he traveled the world achieving an international recognition that lasts today, he made three records for the Blue Note label, and played on several of Silver's signature compositions including the well known jukebox hit, "Song for my Father." Humphries' work in the Horace Silver Quintet proved to be the capstone experience of his young professional life and he continues to draw on that experience today both as a teacher and performer as well as in his outlook on life. Over the years he has maintained a relationship with Silver that remains amicable up to the present. Horace Silver is one of the most influential musicians of the modern era. He, along with Art Blakey, is recognized as one of the main innovators of what became known as Hard Bop. Silver is known equally for his skills as a pianist as for his compositional and arranging style. He continues to be a presence on the jazz scene today. Humphries feels that the time he spent with Silver had a significant impact on his growth as a player and helped to make him the musician that he is today.

As Humphries recalls, Silver had already been hearing about his playing for a while -- the word coming from Max Roach and Art Blakey via the informal network of jazz musicians -- when he decided to invite Roger to audition for the new group he was putting together. Mr.

Humphries telling of the audition process and subsequent events is germane to our study and it's worthwhile to consider his experiences here.

The audition took place in New York. Silver sent Humphries a plane ticket and covered all his out of pocket expenses. Impressed with Roger's demeanor Silver invited the young drummer to stay at his home. It may have been that Silver was predisposed to having Roger in the band based on his reputation as a player. Acting as host allowed him the opportunity to get to know him better as a person. This being an important consideration given that if accepted in the band Humphries would have to be compatible with the other musicians and endure all that comes with traveling for long periods of time. On the other hand, it could have been that Silver just wanted to make the young man comfortable being that Humphries was coming from out of town and that's why he offered to host him. Carmell Jones, Joe Henderson, and Teddy Smith, the other members of the new band, were on hand to perform with those auditioning. The audition consisted of playing through some of Silver's then current repertoire and playing new pieces as well. Humphries recalls:

I stayed at his house a couple days. We hung out together. I think the following day we went up and auditioned at Glen Oliver Studios. Billy Cobham, Billy Hart, Edgar Bateman Jr., all kinds of guys there. The audition was with Horace's band. Edgar Bateman Jr. was scary, he can *play* you know. People ask me all the time – they had all them other guys up there – ‘What you do? Outplay them?’ No, it wasn't a fight. [The] man heard what he liked, my style that fit his thing. Edgar Bateman Jr. played his butt off! But, it wasn't fitting with Horace Silver because he's [playing] a little too aggressive, playing too much like Elvin [Jones]. See, too much on the drums. Horace has got arrangements and a way he wants you to play.

Mr. Humphries' observations are telling and they provide some insight into the mind set of the musicians. The audition process is inherently competitive, but I think, as Humphries points out, the drummers aren't coming to the situation to try to "outplay" each other. Rather, I surmise what may have occurred is that each musician chose to play in a manner true to their own conception letting the outcome of getting the gig fall where it may. In regards to Edgar Bateman's audition, as impressive as his playing seemed to be, I think Humphries point is well taken, it simply didn't work for what Silver had in mind. It is not my intent nor, for that matter is it Mr. Humphries' to cast aspersions on Mr. Bateman's drumming and not having been a witness I can only speculate on what exactly may have occurred that day so, setting him aside for the moment, I'd like to use this opportunity to bring up another point about the drummer in the jazz ensemble. In the role of accompanist the drummer must strike a balance between following their individual predilections and being supportive to what the other musicians are playing. This requires constant listening. What may be impressive from a strictly drumming standpoint may not be appropriate in the context of what's taking place in the ensemble. When the drummer plays "some tricky things," meaning when the ideas played get too complex, or when the drummer is too involved in only what they are doing, there's potential for the music to deteriorate as a result. Apparently, what set Humphries apart at the audition was his ability to execute the arrangements, play for the ensemble, and to fit in his own ideas while at the same time accommodating Silver's musical conception. Humphries continues:

Horace went through all the drummers. ... [Afterwards] we went back to Horace's place, so gradually, while we were doing this he said, 'Hey man, I want you to join the band.'

Being the drummer in the Horace Silver Quintet presented Humphries with musical challenges beyond those of any of his previous experience. Humphries recalls, at first, he struggled with learning the repertoire in the band's book. Performing the arrangements in Silver's book required Humphries' focused attention and brought all his musical faculties into play. Yet, in the end this proved to be a particularly fruitful period for him in terms of his musical development and he came away from it having learned a lot, and the experience continues to influence his musical thinking as well as his approach to teaching today.

What I learned from those experiences is discipline. [You] learn knowing when to play loud, knowing when to kick hard, learn when just to ride, and you learn all kinds of terminology.

Humphries relates that a portion of the rehearsal time was given over to discussion of the fundamental musical concepts and the mood, or character of the various compositions within the repertoire. Silver had very specific ideas about how he wanted his music to sound and what he needed from the drummer to achieve this. However, Silver wasn't necessarily concerned with the details of what was played only that it met his ideal. This is similar to what I've heard some band leaders instruct the drummer -- 'Play what you hear. I'll tell you if I don't like it.' What's interesting is that the nature of the language he chose to explain these ideas allowed Humphries some latitude to interpret them within the framework of his own musical conception. As Humphries explains:

With the little bit of time I stayed with Horace, while I was joining his band, you learn all kinds of terminologies that you just don't learn it in the book. You gotta learn it with the guys! Guy says, 'Hey man, when we get to this part, baby, I want



you to “tip” a little bit.’ They say “tip.” “Tip” means to tip on in, it’s an expression, a feeling – “tip” – like you’re tippin’ in the house, ‘cause the music’s getting real nice and soft, you don’t wanna wake nobody up. And then, ‘Come in, out bashing, baby.’ Dig what I’m saying. It’s the conversation that’s talked to you. Without you even playing no drums, you having a conversation, like a coach giving you all kinds of plays to go out with, you remember these plays when you get there.

The sports analogy makes sense here, and just like the young quarter back, once the musical play commences, it is the drummer alone who must carry the day. Humphries continues:

See, it’s heavier than that, man. Horace say, ‘I want you to tip through that, now when we get back there, I want you to play nasty, like Philly Joe.’ You know how Philly Joe be playin’ nasty, like he just don’t care! You know, it’s expression. ‘And now I want you to play. Get down and play some. When we get to this other part, man, we gotta do the shuffle part.’ And, you know how Art [Blakey] play, see they drop names to relate to different people, and you identify with their playing.

Keep in mind Silver is not telling him to duplicate exactly what any these drummers may have played, but by calling their names, they become a point of reference assuming that the young Humphries is familiar with their work. I should also point out that Humphries cautioned me that this technique of coding is only useful if one has studied a wide spectrum of a drummer’s representative work. Indeed, he listened widely throughout the recorded legacy of jazz drumming. In regards to the drummer being identified, to have only studied a few of their recordings is to run the danger of essentialism, that is the tendency to encapsulate the entire

musical personality of an individual within a few short “representative licks” or phrases. This in itself becomes a limiting factor in the novice’s ability for expression. And, the point of this kind of instruction is just that – to develop his depth of expression.

Phrases such as those mentioned above; “tippin’”<sup>144</sup> and “nasty” are commonly heard in black vernacular speech and thus serve to locate the music within an African American cultural framework. Having grown up in the culture, Humphries, undoubtedly, would have been familiar with their broader meaning. However, I was interested in how he came to interpret their musical meaning. Humphries explains his thinking.

“Tippin,’” yeah, on the cymbal, “tippin’” meant, basically just a single beat, just single strokes on the cymbal and imagine you tipping, on your tip toes, meaning to be quiet, he said, ‘Kind of tip in, gradually tip in’, and that’s what that meant. ... He had a tune called “Tippin’” and he gave you different terminologies so you can understand when they say, ‘Hey tip a little behind this.

Mr. Humphries cites another example of the use of black vernacular speech to relate a musical concept.

When they say “lay back in the cut” it’s like somebody said, ‘Just chill out!’ Just lay back in there where the pocket is, in other words, just lay back there, man, and let the tune float on it’s own without you pushing anything because music can be very wonderful, sometimes we try to make a tune go where it don’t wanna go, where it’s not naturally fitting. Some tunes are not all bashing tunes. You can’t

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<sup>144</sup> I ran across an advertisement in the *Philadelphia Afro-American* from 1948 that listed a nightclub called the “Tippin’ Inn,” which announced good food and drinks as its main attraction.

always bash, they're nice little [tunes] like "Strollin,'" they have different personalities.

Humphries statement hints at a philosophy of the cool. If we understand that in the context of a jazz performance, which during Humphries tenure with Silver, typically took place in a nightclub where the band plays for several hours over the course of the night, this period is usually divided into sets lasting anywhere from forty five minutes to an hour and a half, musician's generally like to achieve an overall balance of expressive ideas throughout the duration of an evening's performance. The term "bashing" as drummers understand it, refers to the act of playing with an observable outpouring of energy highlighted with musical and emotional intensity. This is often achieved through the use of increased dynamics along with the filling up of musical space with drum fills and crashing cymbals. A tune like "Strollin,'" with its laid back feel has the effect of "cooling down" the atmosphere when following the intensity achieved through an episode of "bashing." To call a tune like this allows for a period of repose in the sequence of the total performance event and thus helps to create an overall balance.

Returning for a moment to Horace Silver's use of "different terminologies" to relate musical concepts, Humphries refers to these terms and their explanation as parables. This is correct in that there is a lesson to be drawn from these terms and the lesson, of course, has to do with how to express one's musical self. Humphries explains the pedagogical value of this technique.

Parables – not musical terms – 'cause [to simply say,] 'play a quarter note,' would be just a quarter note, but when you describe the quarter note by saying, 'tip with the quarter note.' See that gives it a description, then you get a feeling as well, [instead of] somebody just talking to you, just telling you what to do.

Mr. Humphries recalls with fondness the time spent with Silver. He speaks well of the musical knowledge he gained during his tenure. And, while there were challenges to be met, joining the band was in effect a lateral move. By this I mean that Humphries was already quite an accomplished drummer by the time he joined Silver's musical aggregation. Throughout the history of jazz, certain bands, by virtue of the number of players having passed through their ranks who go on to be high caliber musicians, become known as a "university" or, "finishing school" for young jazz musicians. Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers with its legacy of over forty years is perhaps the most well known ensemble to be given this moniker. The numerous bands organized by Horace Silver over the years also fit in this category. The edition of the group that Roger joined represented a complete change over in personnel from its predecessor. With the new band came a change over in repertoire as well. New tunes were added to the book including several composed by Joe Henderson. Humphries says that learning these new arrangements posed certain problems for him, but also opened up new vistas in his musical understanding. Keep in mind that when a new tune is brought into rehearsal it requires an approach different from learning an arrangement off a record. There's no previous established model of performance. This is a situation where the drummer's creative faculties are tested. When rehearsals began with the new group Humphries realized he had his work cut out for him.

We rehearsed up in Olive Studios, maybe about four days. Nina Simone was down the hall rehearsing. Rehearsal was fine. Just paying attention to the things, it was a little scary, because there ain't no music. What I mean by that, I had to memorize "The Kicker," and "The Natives Are Restless Tonight." How my solo went, how to come out of the solo. Remembering them shout choruses [laughs] Pow! [Where to] come in ... can't be floating all over the top. See, you got to

think about that, and you have to think about that while you're soloing. It isn't like you're just soloing; okay and somebody touch you in the shoulder [to indicate the end of your solo.] No, no! *You* keep track of them! Horace told me that. ... But, before that I started learning structures of tunes, a long time ago. I play hundreds of tunes in my head. When I'm playing it, when the bridge comes up and everything, see, that's what makes the difference sometimes in solos -- playing on the form. The structure of the same tune the guys are playing.

Here Humphries is talking about what is considered to be one of the hallmarks of modern jazz drumming. That is, the drummer is expected to keep his place in the music and solo on the form of the tune that's being played. However, when you take into consideration that at this point in the performance the drummer is the only one playing, and therefore without the benefit of accompanying instruments to remind him of his place in the song form, this objective may be a bit daunting. Not only that, but as in the arrangement on Joe Henderson's "The Kicker," he also has to be aware of exactly where the shout choruses come in, and since they relate to the form as well, this requires focus and discipline. Focus to keep your place in the music and discipline to rein in your drumming ideas in order to mesh with the shouts, interludes, or whatever else the arrangement calls for. As Humphries says, "you can't be floating all over the top," you have to know exactly where you are at all times and everything you play is related to the form in some way. This type of experience raises the drummer's awareness of the underlying musical structure on which the tune is based. And by doing so puts the drummer in a position to dispute the notion of being a lesser musician than those who play harmony or melody instruments.

In this chapter we have discussed the social process by which three individuals learned the jazz drumming tradition and acquired the norms of jazz performance. We have focused

attention on the cultural factors that influence the drummer's musical development. Through examination of the various experiences of the three musicians under consideration we have demonstrated the interrelatedness of black music genres and posited the existence of a world view which acts at once as a framework, linking cultural domains, and as a well-defined aesthetic which operates as a core set of criteria for the production and evaluation of black music performance.

## **6.0 THE PERSONALIZATION OF JAZZ DRUMMING STYLE**

It is understood that within the black jazz tradition there are basic musical techniques and concepts that all drummers must master, and while the seminal work of Kenny Clarke, Art Blakey, Joe Jones, Max Roach, and others provides models for performance, in the end, each drummer must find their own way in meeting the challenge of the tradition laid before them. In this chapter we'll look at the implications of this with particular reference to improvisation, notions of originality and the personalization of jazz drumming style as interpreted by the three musicians under consideration in this study.

### **6.1 JOE HARRIS**

Joe Harris identifies himself first and foremost as a be bop drummer –“my specialty” – he does other forms of music as well. As discussed in chapter two, throughout his musical career, in addition to jazz, Harris' accumulated performance experience includes work within a wide variety of musical idioms; Western classical orchestral; show, dance and musicals; as well as European folk and popular music. In talking about his career Harris prides himself on being a professional musician; a player not having to rely on teaching or working outside the field of music in order to make a living. His mastery of musical styles also demonstrates a desire on his part, one that continues through today, to explore and learn about other musical cultures outside

the African American experience. This aspect of his career, I believe, serves as a source of pride for Harris as it is proof of his ability to overcome the musical and social boundaries placed on black jazz musicians of his generation. However, being able to play a number of non-jazz styles and his pursuit in acquiring the “tools of the trade,” such as technique and sight-reading skills, which allowed him to venture into the commercial arena should not be taken as indication of a lack of interest on his part in the African American “art” aspects of the jazz idiom. As he puts it;

To read music is nothing, it’s just a mathematical process, to be a jazz improviser, a soloist, is another breed, you have to have an extra amount of practicing and creativity.

Harris acknowledges a certain degree of inward tension between the necessity of commercial work and his drive toward a practice of creative art. As an artist, the question he asked of himself, ‘how much commercialism am I willing to do?’ While not discounting the creative aspects involved with the other idioms he’s familiar with, I wish to focus attention on Harris’ ideas concerning jazz drumming.

Harris is known as a powerfull and dynamic drummer with a strong musical personality and one who can demand the attention of musicians and audience alike. As with the other drummers in this study, Harris stated that the main role of the drummer in the jazz ensemble is to keep time and accompany. Yet, when I first encountered Harris in performance I was struck with the fact that, in contrast to the practice of most drummers I’ve heard, he would often take extended drum solos regardless of the genre of song being performed -- ballads, blues, rhythm changes, Latin American styles, up-tempo swingers and so on – he would play masterfully on all. This habit I’ve come to understand as an expression of his creative thinking.



As Harris sees it, the impulse to express one's self creatively is a natural outgrowth of the process of musical discovery and self-development. In one discussion I asked about how he developed as a soloist. Did he work on the fundamentals of keeping time and rudiments before attempting to play unaccompanied solos?

Well I think it goes with playing from the very beginning. After you develop a little technique ... and basically when I started and I had this little drum set. I was more or less teaching my self, so I guess the drum solos and the experimentation started from the very beginning.

As stated in the previous chapter, learning the recorded works by well known drummers as models for performance played a major part in the development of these artists.

I don't know if there are that many drum solos that you are acquainted with. I know there was a highly skilled solo of Chick Webb's drum solo on Liza. And then, probably the most popular drum solo was Gene Krupa's solo on Sing, Sing, Sing with Benny Goodman. But technically, Chick Webb's technique with his solo was so much over the Gene Krupa solo, if you're interested in rhythm. Cozy Cole's Topsy [was] a very commercial type drum solo. They played this every time. These solos were repeated every time they played. It wasn't an improvised creative solo like the Chick Webb solo on Liza.

What Harris appears to be saying here is that he expected creativity to be present, to be a part of the musical approach and that Chick Webb satisfied his expectation. The improvisations he identified in Webb's solos, whether through intuitive understanding or through conscious analysis, helped set him on a path of thinking as an individual. In his case, self-expression as in

the personalization of drumming style is built into his musical practice from the time he enters the tradition.

A lot of these things are individualistic, there's no set pattern for anything. Everybody finds their own way which is very simple because we all talk differently. So, it should be easy to have your own style. But what happens is everybody gets to imitating somebody, which is fine, we all do that in the beginning, but then, eventually you're gonna get your own thing regardless of what happens – if you stay at it long enough. Because we are all individuals on this earth, everybody's different. So, the music is the same way.

In regards to soloing Harris observes that there are drummers who are known for their capabilities as soloists and those who are known, primarily, as great time keepers. He cites Kenny Clarke as being an example of the later type player. For Harris, the thing that motivated him to emphasize the soloist approach was what he came to regard as “the difficult challenge” that comes with attempting to make a solo statement on the various musical genres typically utilized by jazz musicians. The challenge, as he describes it, can be of a physical nature with regards to instrumental technique or just as likely a challenge to one's imagination. The two aspects are related. Consider what's involved in playing a slow blues as I have heard him perform on several occasions. For example, in one passage Harris utilizes a series of rolls across the drums in attempting to “sustain the tone on the drums.” Here, the slow tempo challenges the drummer's technique as it has potential to reveal any flaws in the execution of the rolls while at the same time the drummer is challenged to make a musical statement within the confines of limited pitch material found on the four piece drum set.

Of course these challenges are similar to those that any other instrumentalist would face when playing ballads or blues. I think what makes Harris' approach unique is the way he links his practice as a soloist to his ideas of creative artistry. As a jazz drummer; "It's never been done before, not that much – why not?" Not that he is interested in novelty as a gimmick. Harris began to experiment with these soloing ideas more when he began leading his own bands.

A bandleader can do what he wants within limits. ... I don't think of it as starting something new. It's just that I wanted to do it. You're supposed to use your own creative ideas. I study harmonic instruments. I solo over the form. I sing the melody in my head.

In this study I'm less concerned with the counting of rudiments, syncopations and the like which may be found to occur in a particular drummer's performance than I am with documenting the thinking process behind the execution of musical ideas. In attempting to gain some insight into Harris' approach to performance I asked him to explain how he goes about practicing improvisation. Before we continue I should note when examining the process of jazz improvisation, Dr. Mike Taylor observed that in reality one cannot actually practice improvisation because improvisation is an art of the present moment. Therefore, one can only practice the potential possibilities of what could occur when one is experiencing the actual improvisational situation.<sup>145</sup> Taylor's astute observation should be kept in mind as we continue our present discussion.

Harris' response to my interrogative demonstrates how easily blurred the demarcation between these cognitive processes may become. On practicing improvisation Harris says:

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<sup>145</sup> Fieldnotes

Well, this is the easiest thing 'cause if I start practicing and there is something that I want to work on this particular practice session. It's very hard for me to stay concentrating on that thing I wanted to practice on because I will start hearing so many different other ways to play.

As Harris describes it above his practice routine can be seen to operate as a continuum. He may start with a pre-conceived idea to practice but as he proceeds his study moves to an improvisatory approach. Harris offers an example by way of explanation:

Well it just comes, it's like a road, you're on a single road, now you come to the big intersection, so you have more choices of roads to take. It's the same way when I start practicing I might hear something I want to do between my left hand with the snare drum and the tom-tom, and the bass drum and I might hear something and I want to do just the opposite (with) the right hand on the big tom-tom to the right of the bass drum, then I might hear a combination of mixing this all up. But, there's no definite pattern that I can say this is exactly what I do but, it's just things that you start hearing, different things as soon as you start practicing.

As Harris explains it, the longer he sits down and plays the more ideas that are generated. We can also see that repetition and variation in the form of different combinations of rhythmic motives, timbre and the melodic implications of indefinite pitched drums are employed as a way to keep the music interesting. Harris concurs:

Absolutely! When I practice on a four piece, the physical thing, left hand on the snare, and moving the right hand around or keeping your right hand on the floor

tom and moving your left hand, it's the same rhythm, but mixing it up between the drums and coming up with different patterns that way.

By taking the same rhythmic sound or hand pattern and executing them in different combinations around the various components of the drum set Harris is able to generate a multitude of musical ideas from a small amount of material. For example, the paradiddle (RLRR - LRLl)<sup>146</sup> which Harris characterizes as, “a wonderful beat” can be played in permutations each producing a slightly different emphasis.

Where do the ideas originate from? They may relate to Harris' knowledge of melody and harmonic structures, but may also derive from the kinesthetic appeal of a certain rhythmic move. Something that feels good to the performer.

When I'm playing I just hear certain things. I don't know where they are coming from, but naturally everybody has standard phrasing that you can relate to, or go back to when the creative force is not a hundred percent in effect. All musicians have that [stock patterns.] ... Then there comes other things that you hear and you start building from there. So, I really can't say how I think when I'm soloing, it's just like certain things come and I might hear something or I might have an idea. I say, 'well, just let me try this.' Now, sometimes it comes in a rhythmic pattern, sometimes it comes in a harmonic pattern. ... Suppose I was gonna play a phrase that a harmonic instrument would play, I would say, [unintelligible]. So, all those phrases would transfer into a certain drum or cymbal or rim shot or something. [Unintelligible] Well, that might be snare drum, bass drum [unintelligible] snare, bass, snare, bass. The “che-bam” might be ... the bam would then be the bass drum and cymbal; if I'm not crashing the cymbal. So, in other words, what you do, after you've played for a long time, it doesn't matter what instrument it is,

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<sup>146</sup> R = right hand; L = left hand

then you start duplicating what you think or what you hear in your mind. Then your technique and knowledge is so great that you can simply hear something in your mind, and you can translate that and reproduce it in your instrument. But that takes years. <sup>147</sup>

Harris credits the time he spent studying snare drumming as an adolescent as providing a crucial foundation for the subsequent success he achieved throughout his career. In particular, learning the basic drum rudiments and practicing the snare drum etudes out of books such as Wilcoxon's Rudimental Swing Solos equipped him with a repertoire of codified hand patterns which are then applied in musical passages. Of course, in the split second decision making that takes place during improvisation these patterns are used intuitively. For Harris there is great value in developing such skills.

You gotta get a form of playing things. So, when that phrase comes up it's gonna be the sticking that makes it.

He equates the various sticking patterns to "shifting gears in a car." For example,

The beauty of the paradiddle, if you're gonna play a series of notes, the paradiddle [sticking] allows you to get across the snare to the toms.

Yet, it's not just the hand pattern or sticking used but the articulation that comes with stick control that matters. By way of illustration, Harris demonstrates the difference between

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<sup>147</sup> Unfortunately, due to poor sound quality, the specific examples that Harris sang were not intelligible on tape.

accented and unaccented notes in executing the paradiddle variations; an articulation he calls “strong and clean.” As Harris puts it,

My hands are known all over the world, ‘Joe’s got hands, he plays clean.’ ...  
Clean! You can hear the beats and you don’t get sloppy.

The idea of “clean drums” can be considered an element of Harris’ aesthetic sensibility and a quality that helps characterize his personalization of jazz drumming style.

Harris is quick to point out that this “clean” technique is what works for him for he allows that other drummers can also have a good sound albeit not necessarily what he prefers. In his view the individual should determine what works best for his needs. Therefore, the quality that may be referred to as a good drum sound, actually involves a set of criteria which, ultimately, is up to the individual creative artist to determine.

What constitutes a good sound on the drums? Well it’s your own technique. How you hold the sticks. How you stroke the drum with the stick, also the different tuning of the drums. I tune mine different than another drummer. ... But like some drummers, for me, their drums are too tight. For me, I want mine just a little looser. And this also constitutes who I’m playing with, what size group.

Harris elaborates on the evaluative criteria he considers when conceptualizing his drum sound.

You tune your drums to your own preference first. Then tune according to what type of ensemble you’re playing with. You never want tight drums with a big band because the drums [heads] are not vibrating enough. The tighter the drums,

the higher the sound, so, therefore, the volume is not as much. You want a looser drum [head] which develops more volume, so, you have to work less hard to get the sound to come out ... a tight drum with a big band? Then you're working *too* hard. That's why in the old days they had different size drums, they had these twenty-six inch bass drums. I remember Jo Jones with Count Basie, he used unmuffled timpani heads which were the clear calfskin, and he used those on his drums and no muffler. That bass drum! Man, you'd feel it all in here [holds hand to chest over heart.] What would he do with a twenty inch bass drum – a doot-doot short sound? 'Cause he had that size drum.

Harris' criteria extend to the type of sticks, mallets, brushes and other implements he uses to produce sound.

[Play with the] brush left open – played like a brush should be -- not closed up like a stick. ... Why use 7A sticks with a big band? You're working yourself too hard? I use a 5A, a good all round stick. ... What do I mean by 'work hard'? Because the drum stick doesn't vibrate off the head quick enough. In other words, when you hit the drum the skin is going to depress and it's going to kick the stick back off of it. Theoretically, that's what's happening. Well, when you got the little tight drum, you're not gonna get enough sound out of it. So, in order to make more sound you're gonna exude more physical energy to try to get a bigger sound. ... For me, I don't like a tight drum. Many drummers like a tight head. For me, I just don't get the feel out of it, but that's why everybody has their own different sound.

His evaluative criterion further extends to the hardware and set up of his kit.

Even the way I set up my drums. It's in the middle of what I want to do. If I want to play be bop jazz, if I want to play Latin American rhythms where I'm



playing on the rim of the snare drum. [My set-up], versus the drummers nowadays, they got their snare drum tilted backwards. That's nothing for me. I could never do that. I set up my drums so I'm ready for anything that you'd want to play. That's what I do. I've got the right tool for the job to make it easier for me.

Whether as a featured drum soloist or playing in the ensemble and accompanying instrumental soloists Harris is known as a dominating and forceful musical personality. In his view; "the music wouldn't be that great if I was timid. Everyone [in the band] would do what they want." Here we're reminded of the adage that the drummer is the 'real' leader of the band regardless of whose name is out front. In Harris' view the drummer bears a huge responsibility in setting the direction and flow of the performance. Accordingly, he approaches the art of accompaniment in a straight forward manner. "Keeping the time, the tempo, a steady beat, and whenever possible adding some type of pulsation." Harris' concept – pulsation – can be understood as a defining aspect of his personal style and therefore linked to his ideas on creativity. As such, conceptually, it subsumes a wide spectrum of musical and non-musical parameters.

Pulsation means some type of push to the band, in other words, you do extra things when you're playing. Accents, loudness here, softness here, certain rhythmic phrases there, pushing it a little more, adding more power from you. This is why if you're gonna be a jazz drummer you should be in great physical condition. Otherwise you're not gonna make it.

As Harris describes it above, his straight forward approach to accompaniment does not necessarily mean just simply keeping the time. It is interactive and dynamic. In regards to

creativity, the personal factor manifests itself in the ways he achieves pulsation. I asked him if other musicians critique of his efforts;

You can't really tell a creative artist too much about how they should create because creativity comes from an inward personal spirit in your body, mind, soul or whatever. So, therefore, when I do something I'm hoping that I'm able to create something. I try to play something creative, at the same time, I don't want to get in the way, if a musician is soloing, I don't want to get in the way of them. Yet at the same time I'm not a metronome, I am a living human mechanism, so therefore, I try to do something different.

Harris offers further insight into his aesthetic sensibilities in continued discussion. Here, he describes his preference in the various ways one can manipulate timbre and textures through the numerous possible combinations of striking the cymbals and drums.

I try not to crash a cymbal, meaning hit the cymbal on its edge. You will very seldom hear me crash the cymbals, because to me that's just a hard, loud, harsh sound. These little cymbals they got out – the splash. They have nothing to do in my repertoire of cymbals. Because I learnt, I don't know where, but I would say I had to learn from someplace, unless I discovered it my self, I don't know which one, but I found out there's a different effect created when you hit the cymbal in the middle of the cymbal and the bass drum at the same time. You still get the same loud percussive effect without it being harsh and brutal.

Note Harris' observation on musical self-discovery. In jazz, the musical gestures or licks that form part of one's personal repertoire are often first 'discovered' through the process of performance. One stumbles onto an awareness of certain combinations of sound sources,

melodic motives, rhythmic cells and the like which are then recalled and drawn upon in subsequent performances.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Harris' playing style is his conception regarding the bass drum.

Yeah, 'cause remember the main thing, the main instrument of the drum set is the bass drum! The bass drum not the cymbals!

Here he differs from many of his younger contemporaries, that is; drummers who emphasize the cymbals for time-keeping purposes. No doubt some of his focus on the bass drum can be attributed in part to the strong influence players such as Jo Jones and Chick Webb seemingly had on all drummers during Harris' formative years. However, as a continually developing artist, Harris is open to new ideas and he regularly assesses his concepts with a willingness to adapt to changing trends if he deems them of use. Harris use of the bass drum plays a fundamental role in how he interacts with the ensemble as he proceeds through a performance. He states;

I always play the bass drum. The bass drum is my control of the band or orchestra I'm playing with.

For example, he once observed to me he'll rely on the bass drum to 'strong arm' a bass player whose time feel may be erratic or momentarily out of sync with what Harris is playing. He may also use the bass drum to articulate the downbeat of a measure or index the phrasing of the soloists and rhythm section. He stresses that control over the bass drum is imperative. If

improperly used or simply played too loud the bass drum has the potential to “hold back the flow of rhythm.” Yet, oftentimes in performance or on recordings the bass drum isn’t an audible presence.

That’s because the bass drum is felt more than heard. If you stop playing the bass drum then you would know immediately that it’s not being played. It’s more or less similar to Freddie Green with the Count Basie Orchestra who played only acoustic guitar. Many people would say, ‘How is that possible? How is he gonna be heard? But the thing is if he stopped playing everybody says, ‘What Happened? It’s the same with the bass drum. You know when it’s missing. It’s felt!

In Harris’ conception the presence of the bass drum acts like ‘timbral glue’ that binds the cymbal and other elements of the drum set together both in terms of rhythm and of sound color.

## **6.2 RON TUCKER**

Ron Tucker’s varied professional career began in earnest in the early 1950s when he spent some time living and working in New York City. It was during this period and as a result of his musical relation with Jackie Mclean that led to an opportunity for Tucker to record in the studio as part of McLean’s quintet. Tucker recalled the circumstances surrounding the recording of, *Introducing Jackie Mclean*. The band had been together for some time and on October 21, 1955 they went into the studio to cut tracks. According to Tucker, there was little preparation, the material having been well-honed through nightly performances. This in itself wasn’t unusual as it was the custom when making jazz recordings in this era. With McLean on alto sax and Tucker

on drums, the remaining personnel included Mal Waldron, piano; Doug Watkins, bass; Donald Byrd, trumpet. The recording features six tunes; two composed by McLean, Blue Doll and Little Melonae; one by Waldron, Mood Malody and three standards; It's You Or No One (Styne-Khan,) The Way You Look Tonight (Kern-Fields,) and Lover Man (Sherman-Davis-Ramirez.)

Using the method of feedback technique, I played the recording for Tucker soliciting his running commentary on the tracks and then followed up with more involved discussion. One of my concerns was to find out how much leeway Tucker was afforded in expressing his own ideas within the arrangements. Did Mclean give him any instructions or ask him to play a specific part?

All he wanted a drummer to do is play good time and swing. That's all it was about; play time and swing. That's something I always could do. I didn't have no trouble. ... Know how to play time and can swing – that's what a drummer's for, and actually, that's the truth. That's what a drummer is for, 'cause if he's not the motivation, the band ain't gonna play, I don't care how good a musician you are, if the drummer don't put the fire on ... you just there!

Tucker's comments reveal his primary motivation as a drummer; to be an effective accompanist that contributes to the overall flow and intensity of the music. Although perfectly capable of executing fours, eights and extended solos, Tucker, like Kenny Clarke, and others before him, views accompanying as the priority responsibility of the drummer.

Technically the drum is not a solo instrument ... it just come to be a solo instrument starting from the time of Chick Webb and Gene Krupa, they started making the drums noticed because they were a hell-of-a-soloist, but it's a rhythm instrument. But, see, a lot of drummers didn't get a chance to hear dudes like

Denzil Best, drummers like Jimmy Crawford and Panama Francis. They were drummers, man. Or, Sid Catlett ... Sid Catlett played so much drums it would make you cry to hear him play, and control, [pewh!] he had so much control.

Tucker's reference to Best, Crawford, Catlett, and Francis also serves to emphasize his point as these players were known for their impeccable time keeping and sensitive accompaniment.

The tune on the first track, *It's You Or No One*, utilizes a sixteen bar form played twice thereby resulting in a thirty-two bar chorus. It opens with an eight bar solo piano introduction. Tucker starts the tune playing time on the hi-hats when the band comes in with the head.

**Example 17 High Hat Pattern on *It's You Or No One***

The musical notation for Example 17 consists of two systems. The first system is labeled "Hi Hat" and shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with "x" marks above them, indicating hi-hat hits. The second system is labeled "5" and shows a similar pattern, but with a final measure that includes a quarter rest and a quarter note, indicating a change in the pattern.

In listening to this track I remarked that in contemporary practice one rarely hears a drummer playing the tune's head on the hi-hats and wondered if Tucker's doing so was a vestige of the swing era drumming ala Jo Jones' well known approach to time keeping.

Well, back there then, we used to use a lot of sock cymbals, on introductions to tunes and then go over onto your ride. That was the type of way they was playing then. It was the best way to feel. What I mean by feel, when I say feel, instead of just playing on top of the cymbals on the introduction, there wasn't no coloring there, see when you move from sock cymbal over there is coloring. Some dudes still do it today. Roy Haynes do it still, I do it too – sometimes. That's coloring. That's what you call playing with color when you do that. That's on intros, certain passages of the music you can go back into it [playing the sock cymbal], come back and play [the sock] for about eight bars, move back in on the top of the cymbal. That's coloring, getting different sounds.

In his approach to time keeping Tucker is interested in changing timbres on a consistent basis throughout the performance thereby maintaining the listener's interest in the performance. The changing sounds serve to intensify the music while at the same time to mark off different sections of the form. Returning to the question, did he receive performance instructions from Mclean, Tucker elaborates on why this wasn't necessary,

No, 'cause that was the style in them days. He expected it. Sure, Max [Roach], all of them, moving on the sock cymbal and crossed on over to the ride for the solos. That was a natural thing [within the idiom], they still do it today. It ain't never gonna be out of style.

In considering the above example take note of the fifth measure, here, Tucker turns the time pattern around on the first beat. This little change in the flow of the rhythm creates a tension that is resolved with the return to the basic pattern of the fourth beat of the measure. Notice too, Tucker's use of the bass drum as an independent voice, momentarily released from

feathering the pulse as it propels the music forward with upbeats on the fourth and first beats of measures seven to eight, and thus serving as an important structural marker.

The concept of “coloring,” that is; being able to draw a variety of sounds out of the cymbals plays an important role in Tucker’s personal approach. “What colors are, it’s a way to approach hitting the cymbal where it will give it a different sound off the cymbal and things. That’s what colors are all about, you dig?” He’s often told me that in a pinch he could forgo the tom-toms and make due with just a snare and bass drum [which I’ve seen him do on a number of occasions] but, given his preference, would be inclined to augment his set up with additional cymbals.

Cymbals are very important, more important than the drums. You gonna play on them all the time. They come in notes like anything else, some cymbals are too low, and some are too high [pitched]. Some of them be so high they sound like a telephone ringing. Cymbals can get very monotonous, the sound of them, if you ain’t got good sounding cymbals ... See, I can approach it in a way where it’ll give it a different sound off the cymbals and things. That’s what colors are all about ... where they can play the whole spectrum of different colors, ‘cause each cymbal’s got a different sound.

However, I don’t mean to imply that Tucker limits his notion of colors to the cymbals as there are colors to be found on the drums as well. For example, in commenting on *It’s You Or No One*, he points out his accompaniment on the piano solo.

See, now I switch to brushes. ... That’s what we call playing with colors. ... Well, that’s the way you feel when you’re playing. So, today, [we] still use brushes on



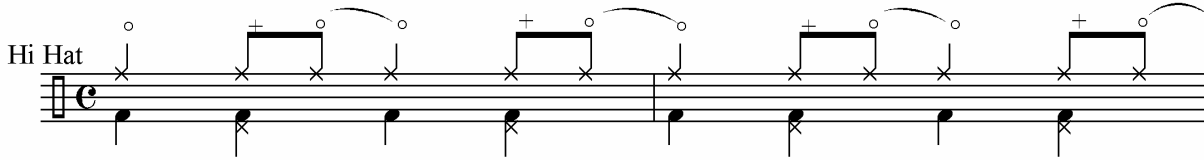
piano solos. I do, if I feel like I want to play some brushes on the piano solo I'll switch on over.

His comment on switching over to the brushes brings him to a question on the practical aspect of playing drums. In this instance, how does one put down the sticks and pick up the brushes without interrupting the flow of time or dropping a stick?

That's easy, you can touch a cymbal a little, the cymbal sustains over until you can get to your sticks. Back to the sticks – put the brushes either on the bass drum, or on the [floor] tom tom, [ready to] pick 'em up. Some dudes play brushes with sticks under their arms while they're playing [indicates how to hold stick]. But, you can time it man, you don't need to hold them up under here [indicates arm.] You can take the back to your brushes, hit the cymbal sustain, and then pick [the sticks] up, you don't have to wait until the chorus ends.

In turning to Blue Doll, the second track on the recording, Tucker calls my attention to the way he articulates the rhythmic phrasing on the hi hats as it relates to the tempo and what he perceives as the required feel for the tune. The song is a twelve bar blues played in a slow tempo. In playing the head Tucker uses the standard jazz ride pattern on the hi-hats as in example two below. Here, the time is articulated in triple division. In doing so he strikes the last eighth note partial of beats two and four which gives the rhythm slight propulsion. He then lets the cymbals stay open for the full duration of beats one and three of the measure thereby creating a loose overall flowing sound. Then, while striking the top cymbal with the stick, he uses the foot pedal to close the cymbals tightly on the second and fourth beats emphasizing the back beat; a necessary element of the blues.

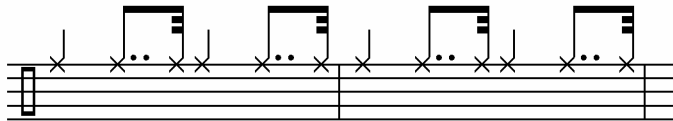
**Example 18 Riding the High Hats on Blue Doll**



In discussing this performance with him, I observed that it appeared to me as if he was playing the same rhythmic pattern he used on the opening of It's You Or No One but getting a different effect. He affirms with an explanation:

Yeah, riding on the sock cymbal instead of playing, 'tink-i-tang, tink-i-tang'. Because that was a faster tempo, this was a tempo down blues. So, you riding with the tempo, you could play 'tink-i-tang,' but it would sound too corny, too stiff in a tempo like that [slow blues tempo.] Instead of playing that, let it flow with the tempo, instead of playing 'tick-i-tang' – that's too technical, it would take the feel away. (see example nineteen below) You understand what I'm saying? The sound that you get out of the instrument is also gonna affect the feel for the song you're playing.

**Example 19 Tink-i-Tang Rhythm**



Tucker continues his point by acknowledging that while technique is necessary in order for one to execute their musical ideas, to place emphasis on technique alone can also have its drawbacks if one is not careful to keep in mind the purpose behind performance, which in

African American music, is to feel, communicate and interact with other members of the community.

Sometimes you can have too much technique and that can crimp you too. 'Cause you try to play everything perfect. For example, take Art Farmer, a great trumpet player, he plays so correct, if you listen to him he don't play no bad notes. But, if you hear Miles, he plays bad notes, Dizzy plays bad notes, a whole lot of dudes do, some of 'em play sharp or too flat. But, that flatness right there, what that did, there was a *meaning*; it did something for the tune. ... Playing perfect, jazz is not supposed to be like that. Jazz is a thing that you play the way you feel, if you feel perfect all the time -- no good! ... [Tucker discusses the training of classical players, which in his understanding places an emphasis on score reading and perfecting instrumental technique.] ... Two different planes! One is a technical plane; the other is a jazz plane. In classical music, ain't but one direction. Play that score note for note, no bending notes or whatever, the way it's writ, the way it's supposed to be played. ... All of them tell stories, but what kind of stories? There's a difference. They can't take no chorus and tell a story. What do they know about living in a ghetto and paying dues? They didn't come up in no ghettos like we have. Our train of thinking is different.

Notice that in comparing jazz with classical music Tucker is not saying that one musical style is of a higher artistic quality than the other. Rather, his concern is with making clear the distinctive traits that give jazz its African American identity. Here, the improvisational nature of black music demands that each performance be given a unique interpretation. Instead of re-creating a composition from a score the aim of the jazz musician is to compose – to tell a story -- according to how he feels or conceives of the piece in the present moment. And, as Tucker

points out, ideally, that story will be one which reflects a shared experience within the African American cultural continuum.

The last song on the album is the standard, *Love Man*; played in the usual manner as a ballad. Jazz musicians consider ballads as one of the most difficult genres to perform due to their slow tempos and relatively soft dynamics. Conventional wisdom has it that these elements tend to reveal a musician's weaknesses, be they concerned with technical control of the instrument, the nuances of theory and harmony, flow of creative ideas, or even at the most basic skill level, being able to maintain a steady tempo. Therefore the proper playing of ballads can be quite challenging and requires certain prerequisite skills and concepts.

For drummers, ballad performances often involve the playing of brushes. The basic technique involves sliding the left hand in circles across the top of the snare head, one rotation per measure, while the right hand taps out the standard ride pattern.

#### Example 20 Basic Brush Pattern




A variation of this stroke is using both hands to sweep circles in contrary motion. Tucker is very fond of the brushes and he utilizes a number of variations on these patterns in his repertoire.

You got to know how to play time. You can improvise in a ballad. You can be playing a ballad and some dudes will say, 'Take a solo.' With brushes, it's simple

and easy, just got to know the time, how the time is moving, that's all. It's all in here man. [Taps hand over chest to indicate his heart.] You can double up! [Claps tempo then double times the basic beat.]

**Example 21 Double Time Feel on Snare and High Hat (with foot)**

Brushes



The notation shows a drum set with brushes on the snare and high hat. The snare drum part consists of a steady eighth-note pattern. The high hat part consists of a steady eighth-note pattern. The brushes are indicated by 'x' marks on the snare drum staff. The tempo is indicated as double time.

Just like when you're playing a ballad, with brushes, when the chorus comes – see how my feet are moving? – [He doubles the tempo with the hi-hat pedal.]

**Example 22 Double Time Feel on High Hat (with foot)**

Brushes



The notation shows a drum set with brushes on the high hat. The high hat part consists of a steady eighth-note pattern. The brushes are indicated by 'x' marks on the high hat staff. The tempo is indicated as double time.

Then you can do it the other way, keep the same tempo moving here [indicates the feet] and double up here [indicates snare drum] ... it's pretty each way. You do it unconsciously.

**Example 23 Double Time Feel on Snare**

Brushes



The notation shows a drum set with brushes on the snare. The snare drum part consists of a steady eighth-note pattern. The brushes are indicated by 'x' marks on the snare drum staff. The tempo is indicated as double time.

Tucker, like many of his contemporaries, approaches the use of brushes with a different conception than that of the sticks. Over the course of our numerous conversations he observed that the young drummers of today are not adept at using brushes. They appear to employ brushes, if they use them at all, as surrogates for the sticks when the performance situation requires playing at soft dynamic levels. For Tucker, this is inappropriate, for brush playing is an art of subtlety and although they do allow the drummer to play at soft volumes, with proper technique, one can also play at fortissimo levels.

If you know how to handle brushes you don't miss the sticks. You gotta know how to handle the brushes, it's a different thing. You can dance with the brushes, like a dancer, play them open or closed, all that stuff, use different styles of sweeping ... gives it certain effects, but see it takes time, man.

His reference to dancing with the brushes, I think, refers to the fact that in his earlier days, Tucker learned to refine his use of the brushes while backing up tap dancers and other entertainers in playing floor shows. The sweeping motion used to push or pull the brush across the drum head is a parallel to the movements of the dancers as they execute their routines. Here we see that even when dancers are not physically involved, the dance element, that is; the association of movement with music, is nevertheless an integral concept of jazz performance.

Tucker relates that understanding and being able to execute these types of nuances in one's approach to performance is what makes a good drummer great. But these are things that don't come overnight and they take time to develop.

It's the same with a drummer; you've got to use *class*. Whatever you're doing, certain, [there are] lots of ways [you can approach the musical situation.] You

can take the brushes and turn ‘em around, and inside out, according to how the mood of the music, and how you might feel at that time. Where you might feel it, might just be the right medicine for it, for the song.

Further, Tucker’s conception of brush playing relates to the senses; the tactile as well as movement of motion in time with the music. And this informs his aesthetic sensibility. “You sweep the floor, like you take a broom sweepin’ up dirt on the floor, a good even sweep man, that’s what makes a ballad so pretty.” The stroke of the brushes evokes sounds and sensations found in the natural world; “like somebody took sand and threw it across the floor.” As such, his employment of brushes extends beyond simple time keeping and used in this manner they are capable of executing meaningful, full of feeling, expressive gestures.

The performances found on the recording, *Introducing Jackie Mclean* present songs varying in mood, harmonic form and tempo. Of the six tunes, two are up-tempo swingers, two are in medium tempo, one is a slow blues, and one in ballad tempo. I inquired what, if anything was talked about when McLean selected tempos for the performances.

You don’t have to count a tempo, especially if you’ve been playing them tunes, you know where it’s gonna be, ‘cause right away you gonna hear the melody of the intro when they’re playing. ... We played them things where we knew what time, where the tempo’s gonna be. You can tell right as soon as the piano hits that first note or chord, that’s the down beat. Some bandleaders don’t use no tempo counts, but there’s always a downbeat to everything. The horn players don’t snap his fingers, or pat his feet, he just do this [drops his head], yeah, catch it right from there, or like when a horn player inhales [demonstrates taking a breath], that’s the time right there.

In reflecting on my question and the album as a whole, Tucker initiated a discussion on the element of tempo and how it contributes to a song's affect. This in turn leads to further discussion on what he feels is the nature of the drummer's responsibility in regards to considerations of tempo. Referring to *It's You Or No One*, Tucker says:

Most everybody played that tune in that tempo. Then, you can play it up. [Sings melody] But, I mean you can take a beautiful song, but if you don't play it in the right tempo, you not gonna get the effect you're supposed get out of it. Now them old timers – like, Prez, Ben Webster, Benny Carter, Dexter [Gordon], Basie<sup>148</sup> – they knew what tempos to play tunes in. If it's supposed to be a ballad, they play it in a ballad, or they could use some type of gimmick for the intro, they know what to do. You can't take any song and play it in any tempo you feel like you want, 'cause certain tempos will take the beauty out of a song if it's not in the right tempo.

Referring to *It's You Or No One* again:

You know on that tempo you got to swing it, it's one of them type of tempos, it's a swinging type of tempo, you don't play that as no ballad, or play it down like you do certain types of blues. [Snaps fingers while he sings the melody] You understand what I'm saying? Now if you play it faster, it might take something away from it, or if you play it too slow, it's gonna take something away from it. I'll give you another example that tune Stanley [Turrentine] cut -- Sugar. If you don't play that in the right tempo it's gonna sound bad; that tune. You can play it too fast or you can play it too slow, it's got to be just in that right tempo to get a

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<sup>148</sup> One of the most well-known examples of this can be found in Count Basie's version of the Neal Hefti composition, *Lil Darlin*. Hefti originally conceived of the piece as an up tempo "barn burner." However, during rehearsals Basie reshaped the tune to fit a slow tempo with a straight four feel in the rhythm. This version was universally praised as an outstanding example of just what the right tempo can mean for a composition.



groove out of the tune, 'cause if you don't – the tune is a blues – you don't feel it! And, in a tune like that, you gotta be careful, 'cause the average dude that'll play it, they'll wind up dragging it if the tempo ain't right.

In Tucker's way of thinking the tempo and feel of a tune are intimately connected. Feel, in this case, refers to the emotional or spiritual affect of the performance.

I'm gonna tell you something. A good drummer man, now this is the secret of a good drummer. A good drummer is supposed to, and should know where the tempo is supposed to be, if he's been around long enough and played with a lot of different people, he knows where the tempo should be. You can put it the opposite way. If a drummer's not comfortable with it, ain't nobody else gonna be comfortable with it, he's the motivation of the band, he's the dude, just like when a fuse blow out. What you do? You go put another fuse in the box. Well, if his fuse is down, everybody else gonna be down, 'cause certain things that's supposed to be there, that's not gonna be there 'cause he don't feel it.

In this sense the quality of tempo relates to the overall level of energy expended in the performance.

In the role of accompanist the drummer is expected to be subservient to a bandleader's musical intent. Tucker feels that an experienced drummer should strike a balance between what leader calls for and his own conception. I commented that, on several occasions during my fieldwork, I had observed what happens when the leader calls a certain tempo and Tucker doesn't feel it in quite the same way? In these instances he made slight adjustments, adjusting the tempo up or down to accommodate his own sensibility? "Yeah, you can do that, but that comes from experience." Is that a good thing to do?

Well, sometimes it is. It depends on who you are working with. You'll find some bandleaders, they're very temperamental when it comes to tempos; 'don't play it where you want to play it, play it where I want it!' In that case you just have to deal with it. He's the one paying me, do what he wants, just to be done. To an extent! You don't have to flush your whole being over to what he wants. You've got a mind too. Think for yourself, you can't let nobody else think for you all the time, you've got to think for your own self, using reasoning and a lot of times it will come out better than his reasoning. The other dudes in the band will say, 'yeah, that's the way it's supposed to be, forget what he said.'

Returning our attention to the McLean recording, I asked Tucker how he developed the ability to play with consistently on fast tempos such as the one on the group's performance of the standard, *The Way You Look Tonight*. I was curious if this was the kind of information passed on in formal lessons or something that, he, as a working drummer, figured out on his own. Tucker's philosophy, which values experience and belief in one's own concept of playing, is at the core of his response.

Well, I know this man, when I was coming up, certain things a teacher couldn't teach you. For example, he can show you all the notes on the chart, how it's supposed to go. Go home and practice it, learn how this is supposed to go and stuff, but when you go out and play that all comes in, that helps you develop. Then you start learning tricks of the game, and then you take short cuts. You think you can set up there all night and play [claps out extremely fast tempo] like that, and play 4/4 all night? No! You got to know how to cut things in half, that comes from playing, when you start grasping things, how you can get around it [fast tempo], and still be even and the pulse will be there. You can rest up while you're playing, but if you try moving [at that fast tempo] all night long, then

you'll burn yourself out. You gotta let it come to you. No teacher would show you that!

He refers to employing 'tricks' and 'short cuts' as a strategy for dealing with the challenge of keeping fast tempos from dragging. These 'tricks' and 'shortcuts' are in actuality highly musical solutions to the sheer physicality of drumming. In his usage these ideas provide relief from physical strain while at the same time add variation and flow to the music being performed. Here again, Tucker underpins his response with an illustration gleaned from his own experience; something that he deems will be useful for me to know as well.

When I say rest, you know when you're playing four-four, you can always 'cat' on a cymbal. Like, [sings] 'ding-ding-ding-ding-ding,' on certain choruses you can do that, you're resting up, your resting your wrists.

Playing rhythms such as straight quarter notes or half notes provides relief as opposed to playing the standard ride pattern which increases the load on the wrist.

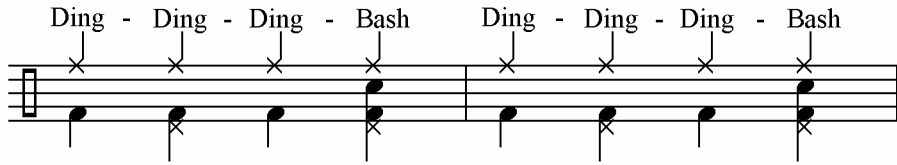
You might play that stuff [up tempo songs] for half the set at some of the clubs; you can cut them [tempos] in half. [Sings:] 'Ding – ding ... play in two ...

**Example 24 Half Time Feel**



Ding – ding – ding – bash – ding – ding – bash – ding – ding – bash – Wham! ...

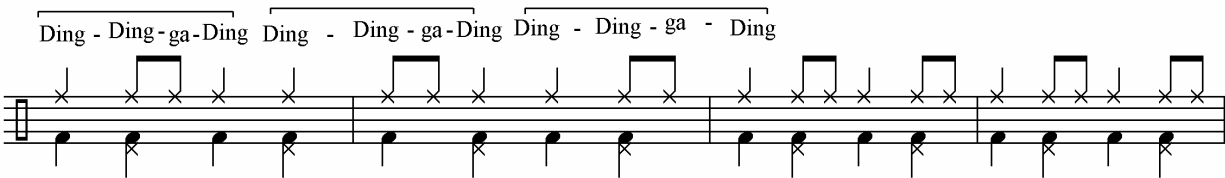
**Example 25 Single Stroke Feel**



Ding-ding-ga-ding, ding-ding-ga-ding; like that. ‘Bash’ ... ‘wash’ ... resting ... but it’s still making things very effective. There are all kinds of ways. And you can deal with the feet. You can play one beat to the measure, on the “one.” [Indicates bass drum] Boom -- -- --, Boom -- -- --, then play off the pulse ‘till you hear where you can feel it, know it’s there. Give your hands a chance to relax. You don’t have no plug in your ass and stick it in a socket and expect to keep going all night long.

His last comment calls to mind the black folk hero, John Henry, as Tucker reminds us of the humanizing quality of African American music.

**Example 26 Three Beat Idea in Four-Four Time**



Example twenty-six above is interesting in that the rhythm sung super imposes a three beat idea on the four-four pulse of the bass drum and could be interpreted as three measures of three-quarter time over two measures of four-four time. Also, in light of Tucker’s commentary on resting one’s wrists, this example actually increases the load somewhat.

Over the course of many interviews and our more informal conversations Tucker has reiterated these ideas and expounded on other aspects of his musical philosophy. He stresses that the drummer's supporting role is not just about passive time keeping but also about interacting with the soloist by filling in the musical space and contributing to the overall flow of the music. Here he talks about his concept of phrasing and treating the musical element of dynamics within the sound producing capabilities of the instrument as a means to keep the music moving.

You can start off real loud, you can't get no louder, when you reach your peak of playing certain loudness, and you can't go no louder, but you can always play so soft, until you just feel the pulse, you don't hear nothing, but the pulse is there. Sometimes I'll close the sock cymbal, just play on top; you can stay underneath the piano player, and then when you get the shout chorus, come out [swinging.]

Here, the extremeness of the soft dynamic actually adds certain intensity to the performance. By breaking down the dynamic level he focuses attention on the elements of structure; the fundamental motor pulse.

Sprinkled throughout Tucker's conversation on music are words like, 'whup,' and 'bash,' which he uses to describe his musical thinking. These phrases are not easily transcribed in musical notation but are, in fact, recognized as audible phrases when Tucker plays them in performance. And they are not to be thought of as having a literal translation either. For example, 'whup' may refer to a short burst as in the five stroke roll or just as easily refer to a series of strokes on the tom-tom. 'Whap' could be a staccato rim shot on snare drum and so on. Yet, an inventory of these phrases reveals an immense vocabulary of sound colors which he employs in his art. Words such as; bish, bash, muggy, puggy, tubby, whap, bip, tip, biff, baff,

whup, blap, ding, dang, tinki, blam, ka-blam, splang, represent just a few of the phrases I've heard him employ over time when talking about drumming.

For Tucker, timekeeping is not a static operation but a rather dynamic and interactive process.

When that horn player takes a breath – “whup,” “whap,” “bash” – you know, keeping something moving. Keeping things moving don't let him just take a breath with the time keep going, especially if you're playing something hip – jazz -- fill in them holes man! But don't get in his way. You can come in and play on the turn around, make it exciting for the horn players, building up different climaxes ... dynamics.

The examples below, taken from his accompaniment on McLean's solo on The Way You Look Tonight illustrate how he puts these ideas into practice. The tempos on this performance is fast, 300 BPM and it is typical of the fast pace preferred by many bebop players.

**Example 27 Turn Around Leading to First Solo Chorus, The Way You Look Tonight**

Example twenty-seven displays a figure Tucker plays coming out of the turnaround on the head and into the first solo chorus. He momentarily stops the time on the cymbal to fill in the

musical space by executing a roll on the floor tom which is punctuated by a strong accent with the cymbal on the downbeat of the first chorus.

**Example 28 Bass Drum as Independent Voice**

Musical notation for Example 28, showing piano accompaniment and bass drum pattern. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The piano part consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The bass drum part is shown on a separate staff below the piano accompaniment. The notation is divided into three measures, each with a chord symbol above it: D7, Gm7, and C7. The piano part features a melodic line in the treble staff and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass staff. The bass drum part shows a pattern of eighth notes and rests, with 'x' marks indicating accents on the downbeats of the second and third measures.

In example twenty-eight, we see another instance of using the bass drum as an independent voice. Tucker maintains the time on the ride cymbal while using his bass drum to pick up on the eighth note figure played by the saxophonist in a call-and-response fashion.

**Example 29 Rhythmic Idea in Unison with Saxophone**

Musical notation for Example 29, showing piano accompaniment and bass drum pattern. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The piano part consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The bass drum part is shown on a separate staff below the piano accompaniment. The notation is divided into two measures, each with a chord symbol above it: D7 and Gm7. The piano part features a melodic line in the treble staff and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass staff. The bass drum part shows a pattern of eighth notes and rests, with 'x' marks indicating accents on the downbeats of both measures.

Over the course of our discussions, Tucker often emphasized the importance of a drummer's ability to develop his "radar." That is, the ability to not just mimic or mirror the ideas played by the soloist but the ability to be able to anticipate the soloist as well. Example twenty-nine I believe provides an instance of this type of occurrence. Mclean plays a sequential pattern using a three note motive on the interval of a minor third. Tucker anticipates the idea and plays the same figure in unison, thus outlining the rhythmic architecture of the motive, which serves to highlight Mclean's idea. Following this brief "hook-up" he returns to playing the time.

**Example 30 Interaction with Soloist Sustained Over Extended Period**

The musical score for Example 30 is presented in two systems. The first system consists of four measures. The first measure is marked with the chord F. The second measure is marked with Bbm7. The third measure is marked with Eb7. The fourth measure is marked with Bbm7 and Eb7. The piano part in the first system features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords, with some measures containing rests and accents. The second system consists of five measures. The first measure is marked with Ab7. The second measure is marked with A°. The third measure is marked with Bbm7. The fourth measure is marked with Eb7. The fifth measure is marked with Cm7. The piano part in the second system features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords, with some measures containing rests and accents.

Example thirty demonstrates Tucker's ability to sustain musical interest over a longer period of time. In measure two, he plays strong accents on beats one and four which articulate the phrase structure of Mclean. The first accent marks the conclusion of a longer idea by



McLean while the second accent marks a diminution of that idea. In the fourth measure he plays the snare and cymbal in unison to fill in the musical space left by the soloist. He momentarily returns to keeping time in measure five. In measure six and seven he plays a series of quarter notes and with the snare and cymbal in unison plays strong accents on beats one and three thereby setting up a tension against the rhythmic flow. Tucker returns to the basic ride cymbal pattern supported by the bass and hi-hat in measures eight and nine. Here, he increases the rhythmic density through the coordinated use of his snare drum as an independent voice in polyrhythmic fashion.

**Example 31 Filling In Musical Space**

Example thirty-one shows Tucker’s use of short rolls to fill in the musical space. In this case he uses contrasting levels of dynamics to bring out the drum phrase idea. The rolls are played soft and lead into the cymbal in a manner that brings out the quarter note pulse. The saxophonist’s phrase is concluded with a strong downbeat accented on snare, bass, and cymbal before Tucker returns to playing the time.

### 6.3 ROGER HUMPHRIES

Roger Humphries currently leads two bands both of which regularly perform around the Pittsburgh region. His quintet, The R. H. Factor has been in existence for over twenty years and for the past eight years he has been leading The Roger Humphries Big Band. While his initiative to form the big band springs in part from a desire to challenge himself artistically, it is his work with the quintet which I was able to observe on a consistent basis. Therefore, much of what follows relates to the small group. The quintet is made up of trumpet-tenor frontline plus piano, bass, drums and is sometime augmented with alto sax making it a sextet. With Humphries as the leader, the ensemble, at least during the period I observed, was peopled by a group of players, a generation or two younger than Humphries; musicians in their twenties and early thirties. Thus, as in the tradition of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, the band served somewhat as a finishing school for local musicians of promising talent. And, like the Messengers, the band draws on the hard bop repertoire as well as standards and original compositions from group members. Choice of repertoire, along with other musical decisions, is given approval by Mr. Humphries as the final authority. The approach to performance as exhibited by The R. H. Factor can in large part be understood as a reflection of Humphries aesthetic view albeit tempered by a group sentiment.

During the period I conducted fieldwork Humphries' group had a number of standing weekly engagements around Pittsburgh. I was afforded regular opportunities to hear the group as well as talk with Mr. Humphries about his musical thinking. In some cases I could speak to him within minutes of a performance, at the venue, in-between sets, or at the end of a night. On other occasions our more formal interviews took place at his home where I employed the feedback technique. As with the other drummers in this study my intent is to document Humphries' thinking in regards to artistic process, notions of creativity and aesthetic orientation.

On one occasion while listening to the group at the *Club Café*, I was particularly struck by Humphries actions during a rendition of the Horace Silver composition, *Nica's Dream*.<sup>149</sup> The piece was first introduced to the public by the Jazz Messengers. The composition is built on an A-A-B-A form with the somewhat unusual plan of sixteen bars for each section. On the original recording Blakey utilizes a Mambo rhythm on the A sections while swinging the bridge. Generally speaking, jazz musicians have come to emulate Blakey's contrasting rhythmic signature and it is accepted as the normal procedure when performing the piece. R. H. Factor's arrangement also tended to retain the contrasting dynamics found in the original recording with the *subito* drop to a softer volume when playing the bridge on both the head and during the solo choruses.

In the instance I'm referring to, Humphries made a departure from his standard practice. It came a few choruses into the trumpeter's solo which had just been preceded by a rather lackluster solo effort on the part of the saxophonist. On this occasion it seemed to me as if the sidemen lacked commitment and were just going through the motions of playing as if marking time until the song was over. Here is where things got interesting. Instead of maintaining the soft dynamic at the bridge as he had been Humphries changed his tack. He barreled through this section drumming bombastically. The increase of expressed energy had the apparent effect of startling the soloist as he later hesitated somewhat before launching into a series of double time passages riding along with the flow created by the drums. Humphries continued to stay on the swing feel, including the A sections, for several more choruses adding momentum and increasing the rhythmic density of his drumming.

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<sup>149</sup> I was unable to record this performance.

I was curious as to Humphries thinking here. What was his motivation for the sudden intensity of his playing at this point in the performance?

That goes on the same page as being creative, using your imagination. If you hear things starting to get bogged down – take it in a different direction! Everybody ain't gotta play the head, then swing the bridge. That's just how it started, but if you got something else to say, and everybody's paying attention and listening, you'll follow [unintelligible] maybe another plan.

Through his playing Humphries was sending a message to his sidemen.

Yeah, I took it in another direction because of the fact that everybody was not puttin' anything more to it. I had to take it to another level. To wake them up! ... It's a show, you know, you entertaining people, you can't get stagnated, get bored. Besides, me playing the drums, playing my feelings, things being exciting, being creative, drawing pictures, yeah, drawing pictures on the drums through the music. Change, maybe instead of playing straight ahead [sings quarter notes] dang, dang, dang, dang you may feel [sings half notes] gang – gang, feeling like they do, like Ahmad Jamal do it, you gotta change up the feeling.

Humphries is perfectly capable of executing a sensitive accompaniment but in this instance he exercised his prerogative as a leader and with an awareness of the audience's role in all of this. He finds that breaking away from the norm is necessary in order to create the more important flow of energy rather than following a predetermined musical formula. All actions he deems indicative of a creative mind.

As part of my research plan I had intended to share with Humphries my analysis of the rhythmic ideas (see examples thirty-two to thirty-four) I had heard in his playing in order get his

feedback as annotations to my work. I had hoped to be able to identify and attribute certain of these ideas to seminal players including Philly Jo Jones and Max Roach. Two musicians who Humphries has stated were influential in his formative years. What I found was a seemingly lack of interest or even a reluctance on his part to verify my transcriptions. Given that in learning to play he had analyzed the drumming of a host of drummers I found Humphries response to my questions something of a paradox until I understood the rationale.

**Example 32 Philly Joe Jones Idea**

6 6

R L R R L L R L R R L L R

**Example 33 Max Roach Idea**

x x >

3 3

**Example 34 Max Roach Idea**

3 3 3 3

In Humphries thinking rudiments are a means to an end and in a sense not considered as music per se. It's in their application that the hand patterns are transformed into musical phrases.

To me, I don't think you can get away with remembering to play those things. You don't think about rudiments and things when you're playing. 'Cause the thing that's in your mind ain't got nothing to do with it. It's merely an exercise to give you stability and some chops, but when you think about playing, it don't matter if you play a five-stroke roll or not. It may be a five-stroke, but I don't know if it was, I'm playing something that I felt, I heard something [in my mind.] ... So, you don't think about what exercise in a book that made you do this. When you're able to develop and become talented enough to be able to play what you hear in your head -- that's what you want to do anyways -- that's the point that you want to get to. The things that you hear [in your mind] you want to be able to play.

As a mature musician Humphries is not going to play the ideas of his influences verbatim. Although I may be able to argue a connection, I realized that for Humphries, these ideas operate in a sense as metric cells which, over time, by adding different embellishments or accents, are then transformed into a personal language of his own. In fact, this realization, in part, accounts for the eventual approach I've taken in this study. That is; the interpretation of performance style through the views of the musicians involved. For Humphries, isolated rhythms, when taken out of the performance context are meaningless without understanding the thoughts from which they're generated.

Despite Humphries lack of enthusiasm I continued this line of pursuit mentioning that I thought I could hear ideas on four stroke ruffs and paradiddles in his playing.

You may just happen to hear that but I ain't thinking about that. You just hear it. See, you can write it out and document that. But, that ain't where my mind is at.

Here we come up against the old bugaboo of the so-called emic-etic dichotomy which has been the subject of much ethnomusicological discourse. My attempts to impose outside categories onto his drumming were met with resistance. Humphries continues to explain his thinking;

Okay, when I come down [stairs] to play and practice. I don't practice none of that stuff. I would practice soloing for -- not to interpret any rudiments in there -- I'm playing for feeling and sound in my head.

In other words, while we hear one thing and can identify it as a certain rudiment or rhythm that's not necessarily what he is concerned with while playing that idea.

Yeah, and that's kind of hard for me to tell you what's going on inside. I'm just thinking about telling a story. That's all I be thinking about when I'm playing the drum set. And there's so many things I can tell a story with; like playing on the rim of the drum, or the side, using dynamics, the beautiful touch of the brush. *It may be* a ruff in the foot and the hand – I ain't thinking about that though, just doing it.

I asked Humphries to consider the way he plays today [2002] compared to earlier in his career, particularly his time with Horace Silver. I mentioned that from what I was able to observe it seemed that he played a lot more rhythms across the drums as opposed to his earlier

approach in which he typically expressed the timeline on the cymbal while comping with the left hand and bass drum.

That's because I'm leading now. I got more things to be able to express myself in my way as part of maturity. [When you grow as a musician] and you're being able to reach for your identity. You know. Do the things [the way] you like to do them. ... I have a thing more like an orchestra now. But the cymbals, I don't have to hit the cymbals so many times, it's where I'm hitting the cymbals that counts.

Humphries also notes that the other musicians must be able to relate to his approach and be open to allow for adjustments in their playing.

As a rhythm section [we have] more freedom, the guys who are playing. It's like me playing with Dwayne [Dolphin] now and David Budway. You see how we take off! Take it on another level!

Reflecting on his time with Silver, Humphries expresses gratitude. For his former band leader allowed him the opportunity to grow within his playing albeit with certain musical restrictions.

I always felt Horace gave me quite a bit of freedom. It was just the way his music was structured, with Horace you got to play the form, more on top. ... But Horace, if you notice his music, the focus is on discipline, straight ahead, he had more control. ... .



Yet, Humphries artistic sensibility at the time, his talent for intuitively knowing what to play, served him fine in that it fit well within Silver's conception.

Horace had a very rhythmic approach on the piano. ... Very rhythmic, he didn't leave a lot of space in there [for me to stretch out.] If you do too much you're gonna block what he's doing. You gotta learn your place, put the stuff in and out, knowing what to do, that's how I got the gig.

Humphries discussed the creative latitude he was given in developing the rhythmic part he played on Silver's composition, *Nutville*. Humphries performed on the original Blue Note recording, *Caper Verdean Blues* released in 1965. The tune uses a somewhat unusual 24 form which moves back and forth between a Latin feel and swing feel. In executing the Latin sections Humphries utilizes what can be considered a mambo rhythm. However, the specific rhythmic part that Humphries came up with on the Latin section can be seen as a creative response to the challenge found in Silver's music. Humphries approach is based on his inherited knowledge of jazz drumming as well his understanding of the Afro-Cuban tradition. Of the later, he had direct knowledge of the tradition through informal experience jamming with Latin American musicians in New York City. "I always knew I was playing four peoples parts. [As an] Afro-American drummer, you learn how to play all of that, you put it together, and then you put the extra on it."

**Example 35 Standard Mambo Pattern**



**Example 36 Humphries Mambo Pattern as Played on *Nutville***



Here we see how Humphries individualizes his performance through a variation of the standard pattern. The little “extra” that he put on it can be understood in terms of his creativity. As compared to the standard mambo his left hand plays the clave sound on the rim of the snare as anticipation to the down beat.

It’s a slightly different feel, but to me -- that’s Latin. Latin rhythms are always on the off-beat.

Also he plays the right hand part in such as fashion as to accommodate the rhythm of the melody.

Humphries response when I pointed out that the rhythm he played was not the standard mambo pattern I had learned in college helps to illuminate his thinking and points to the cultural context of creativity.

Well, you have to realize what we're talking about. We ain't talking about standards -- the book. See you got to have a formula for those who don't have it to play. But, you a drummer, we come from the damn jungle with Art Blakey and all of them, *we make up* rhythms, they had to get the rhythms *after* we played them to put it in the book. Dig what I'm saying? So we can play all kinds of stuff around it because we got the ability to do it. If you don't know how it goes you got to get somebody to write it out for you. *Then*, you learn how to play it.

Drum set manufacturers, according to the changing trends in popular drumming styles have responded by increasing or decreasing drum sizes as well as expanding the number of drums offered in a basic set-up depending on the market need. Humphries current drum set reflects these trends by allowing for an additional mounted tom-tom making his instrument a five piece set. I asked Humphries to compare his playing on this set-up to that of the four piece kit which he grew up playing. Did the extra tom-tom require him to change anything about his approach; does it make any difference whether he plays a four or five piece set?

I like to think about it being colors. I got another drum to make some color out of it. Like on timpani -- it's another melodic note.

Humphries had recently acquired a new set of cymbals and I was curious to also know how these may have affected his approach to performance.

They're affecting me in a good way, like putting me in a brand new Lincoln compared to my old Lincoln. But you're still in a Lincoln, they're fresh! Fresh sounds -- they're brilliant. When you hit them they get kind of like an explode [sings, khang] they reach out more, they sound like you throwing a pebble [in water] they linger a little bit more in sound, there's an undertone.

Our discussion of cymbals also brought up the concept of musical color.

How do cymbals become colors? We experiment, depends on what you're looking for, find what you have and maybe put something else into it.

However, Humphries also points out that while he enjoys using three cymbals in his setup it's not all that necessary if the drummer has a creative mind.

Let me say this to you – just imagine if you had enough money to have everything you want, you may have twenty cymbals, but life depends upon your conditions. ... If you didn't have but one cymbal, life is made up about what you have, not what you don't have, and if you have two cymbals, you still play them, but the crash, to me, at different times wasn't played too much as a ride. The crash, my crash is maybe a little darker, than the other one [ride] but it's more to crash upon. ... But most of the time you're on the right hand side. And this is something I never thought about because your favorite one is on the right. Favorite, in terms of sound and feel, cause it seems like it's pitched for everything. You ride behind everybody. You jumping up and down [crash cymbal], you jump maybe behind somebody, or do this to change to another color on the bridge, but it must be a favorite, something that you hear otherwise you wouldn't play it.

In his role as band leader Humphries assumes responsibility for helping young musicians develop themselves as players. Yet he offers little in the way of verbal direction as it is through his drumming that he instructs those musicians in the finer points of the musical art of “telling stories.” Of the musicians that I observed it appeared they benefited from Humphries in a number of ways but two aspects stand out in particular. First, was in regards to the development of their rhythmic conception. That is; over the duration of membership in Humphries band, in my opinion, they developed a stronger sense of time and the ability to execute more complicated rhythmic phrasing. In many ways their newfound abilities are reflective of the leader’s rhythmic conception. Second, in regards to developing the arc of their solo improvisations, these musicians improved markedly in their ability to make coherent statements capable of capturing the imagination of their colleagues and audience alike. Interaction in jazz music takes place within the ensemble as well as between the musicians and those present at performance events. In the course of listening to a performance I often observed people in the audience offering subtle commentary on a given player’s solo effort as it progresses. Usually these are spoken out of earshot of the musicians they’re directing their comments toward. Although, on occasion I’ve heard people express themselves in a less subtle manner. In some cases they may caution musicians, “don’t wear out your welcome;” they may remark about certain players who are, “running at the mouth” and “not saying nothing,” or mark the point where a solo begins to gel with the comment, “it’s about time.”<sup>150</sup>

In talking with Mr. Humphries about this phenomenon he related that a soloist must acquire a feel for how to develop a solo and must also learn to know when their solo is finished; a complete musical statement. This is something he emphasizes with the musicians in his

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<sup>150</sup> Fieldnotes

ensemble. “Yeah, you did it, now don’t mess up, [you can see people] being bored, you gotta know how to feel that.” Humphries has different strategies for relating this message to the players. For example, I’ve heard him interrupt a soloist through an outburst of increased musical activity or bring the solo gently to a close with a deliberate cooling down of the expression of energy. Humphries emphasizes that his musicians pay attention to what’s going on around them. They need to learn to hear his direction without him having to make it too obvious. Of course, this kind of subtlety may be lost on certain individuals as in the case of the player who goes on and on. As Humphries observes,

Yeah, [you] finish a guy’s solo and he keeps playing more choruses. I took you all around the city of Pittsburgh, and he wants to go back around again. See, he can’t do no more, enough is enough – can’t you tell it!

How does one develop this awareness of when enough is enough? Humphries counsels his musicians;

Follow your first intention, follow your first mind. The more you keep practicing; you’ll know when to get out [of the solo.] But, see, you’ve gotta make up your mind. It’s like how you talk, and how you make sense. You’ve got to think sometimes before you do things, think your solos, and don’t just ramble on. Then you’re slowing things down.

For several months during my field observation Humphries group, R. H. Factor hosted a weekly jam session at *Too Sweet Lounge* in Pittsburgh’s Homewood district. The session was held in the afternoons between 4 and 8 PM thereby allowing other musicians time to sit in before

attending to their evening gigs. In many cases Humphries group would also have to leave immediately following the session for a second gig. *Too Sweet's* is typical of the type of small bars or lounges serving up music, food, and drinks for hard working people wanting a good time. These kinds of establishments were found in abundance throughout the African American community in the period following the Second World War and the collapse of the steel industry in the nineteen seventies. People dress up to come out and the atmosphere is one of celebration. The audience is outgoing and participates in the musical activities with shouts of encouragement and physical motion which may include dancing. In addition, it is not unusual to find some people singing along with the melody as the group plays the head tune. Playing in front of a musically astute and knowledgeable audience affords Humphries' group the opportunity to dig deep into their repertoire. The "hits" of the hard bop era are particular favorites with the crowd.

The musical ideas heard in Humphries' playing behind Delano Choy's trumpet solo on the sextet's rendition of Clifford Brown's composition, *Daaood* are worth examining a little closer. This performance took place at Too Sweets Lounge in the atmosphere described above and it provides an illustration for a number of Humphries' points regarding his role as band leader and developer of talent. Humphries explains the impetus for his accompaniment style can be found in the interactive nature of jazz performance.

What it is, it's like you see gaps and you get a chance to get in the gap without getting in his [the soloists] way. And you play something, a nice little riff to complement what he's playing, like you're dancing together, and trading off your ideas with his, filling in the end of the phrase.

Humphries' playing here is not only conversational in the sense that he's signifying on what the soloist is playing it also serves a structural purpose. That is, his practice of filling in the ends of phrase serves to index the musical form and thereby helps to keep the soloist on track. It also serves to key in the rhythm section as they progress through the song's harmonic cycle.

**Example 37 Indexing the Form, *Daaood***

The musical notation for Example 37 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a series of slurs representing a drum pattern, with some notes in the final measure.

In example thirty-seven Humphries starts a series of buzz rolls on the upbeat of the fourth beat of the third measure. He concludes the syncopated roll figures with a snare and cymbal punctuation on beat four of the following measure as the trumpet player starts a new phrase.

**Example 38 Indexing the Form, *Daaood***

The musical notation for Example 38 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a series of slurs representing a drum pattern, with some notes in the final measure.



Example thirty-eight shows a similar idea. In this excerpt Humphries stops the time flow on the cymbal and uses double stops on the snare and floor tom which emphasize the downbeat. In a counter move, he uses the bass drum to fill-in the musical space between beats. This figure presents a sonic balance by juxtaposing the higher pitched snare and floor tom played in unison against the lower pitched bass drum. Although I can't say for sure, the balancing effect of the bass drum may have well been generated from its kinesthetic appeal as well. He concludes the fill-in idea with a well placed accent on the second partial of the third beat orchestrated across the snare, bass, and cymbal.

**Example 39 Interaction with Soloist, Musical Intensification**

The musical score for Example 39 consists of two staves. The upper staff is the soloist's line, and the lower staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is two flats (Bb-7). The piano part features several triplet figures in the first two measures, followed by a sequence of buzz rolls (marked with 'x') in the third measure. The soloist part has a melodic line that concludes with a strong accent on the downbeat of the fifth measure.

Humphries is constantly listening and adjusting his accompaniment often pushing and prodding the soloist to new musical heights or settling him down to refocus his ideas. Example thirty-nine demonstrates Humphries interactive approach in a longer phrase exchange. He introduces a group of triplets, accenting the third partial upbeat, which correspond to the trumpeter's articulation. Humphries' triplet figures saturate the musical space while pushing the flow of energy. On beat three of the second measure he begins a sequence of buzz rolls. First with a quarter note pulse, then in a series sixteenth and eight note divisions which conclude with a formidable accent on the downbeat of the fifth measure. On beat four of measure three

Humphries inserts a metrical phrase that extends beyond the time span of the measure. This figure adds a degree of intensity as it brings his phrase to a climatic close. One can see a relationship between the architectural structures of this extended metrical phrase and the ideas of Max Roach as in example eighteen above. Humphries' idea can be seen as an augmentation of the triplet phrases played in measures one and two of this example. Both Roach's and Humphries' ideas are polyrhythmic in that they superimpose a feeling of three meter across the four beat time span.

That Humphries is constantly listening in attunement as the trumpeter progresses through his solo is evident in another incident heard in the group's rendition of *Blue Monk*; during a performance at *Too Sweets*. Here, he demonstrates a keen awareness of the musical possibilities inherent in even the most miniscule ideations of the trumpeter. Humphries opens up the solo by picking up on a three beat trumpet motive and interpolating a brief expansion of the idea on the drums. As Humphries explains his thinking in regards to directing the soloist, "Yeah, I caught him up in that. Then, I got out of it and leave on." By inserting his idea, Humphries' provides occasion for the trumpeter to pause in the development of his solo. In this sense the trumpeter is forced to deal with the musical implications of his playing and not just spewing out notes. Humphries causes him to stay on that idea, to consider its possibilities a little longer, before moving to the next thing. For those listening,

It has an effect on you, making you know something was happening. ... And, change the colors -- it don't matter what he [the soloist] was doing. Even if it may be a little subtle, you see, something else came up to keep the music exciting.

Humphries emphasizes this last point as it is an important aspect of his musical conception. Variation keeps the music fresh and exciting and is achieved through multiple ways and means. His drumming ideas are constantly changing not only throughout the overall performance but within the compositional framework; chorus to chorus; section to section; phrase to phrase; measure to measure; and beat to beat. For Humphries, his approach to jazz drumming is akin to his approach to life.

I can't put it no other way than; music, to me, it's like how I try to live life -- you gotta make it exciting. Everything got a new twist to it, and every moment got a new twist to it. And so when I'm playing I like to feel that I am generating you something, no matter who else [in the band] is bland.

Humphries is interested in novelty not simply for its own sake or in the sense of cheapness but as a challenge to his own creativity. Part of that challenge has to do with reaching out and connecting with the people in attendance, to bring them into the challenge of the music.

I like to feel that when I go to play, I'm giving the people something, you know what I mean? Give them something extra because they don't always understand drums. They say, 'Well I don't understand drums but I did like what he did, what he played.' You gotta make it like that for yourself and for people to get to a certain level.

In my observances of the performances discussed above it appeared to me that the trumpet player was playing with a certain attitude almost as if he's struggling, fighting with himself to get out his musical ideas. I contrasted this with Humphries apparent demeanor where

he's laying back while at the same time seems to have the entire band in his musical embrace and under his control.

You got the whole world in your hand! ... I'm glad you see that, that's good. What you see is my experience and my [unintelligible] around the guys. Me not getting' excited and knowing what to do, making things flow easy, the way it's supposed to be, being able to go in and out, ... pushing the band.

Humphries attitude is reflective of what Robert Farris Thompson identifies as the philosophy of the cool. That is; patience and collectedness of mind and coolness as in a sense of control and balance.

Finally, in the following passage Roger Humphries elaborates on the above and talks about the interactive nature of jazz performance.

I keep taking my time, I keep layering it up, start some quiet tippin', I keep layering until that motion keep getting up there, once you done took it up, you got to the top of the mountain. ... To have enough so we can enjoy it, like the conversation, call and response, whatever you doing, it's my job to feed you. And then, maybe even suggest to you, 'cause you runnin' so hard you forgot that you need to take a breath and stop, if I suggest to you, but then if you don't hear the suggestion, I suggest it one more time, ... after that I quit, but don't do that! Because you can get the audience, then all of a sudden you lose them, they would be ready to clap and you keep going and going, they say, 'I ain't clappin' for that!'

Humphries statement reveals the master drummer's awareness of the parameters which frame the performance event in regards to the communicative potential of jazz. His role as

drummer and, in this case, bandleader is multifaceted. On the one hand his concern is with the soloist which he is accompanying. He supports the soloist and helps to shape his performance, yet at the same time Humphries is also aware of the audience's reaction. While the soloist may be focused on his own ideas and most persistent about "runnin' hard" in the pursuit of them, it is Humphries who must negotiate the soloist's musical tendencies within the larger context of an overall satisfying musical experience, which of course includes the audience's involvement as well.

Nketia's observations on traditional drumming practices in Ghana reveal a similar sensibility at work. Nketia describes the feedback and aesthetic criticism offered by various musicians in listening to examples of kete drumming which he had recorded. In regards to the African consciousness present in jazz, note the parallel between Humphries' statement above and the following from Nketia; "In one piece the master drummer was apparently too persistent; the player should have stopped for a few seconds from time to time or played single waiting beats, so that there would be gaps or appreciable moments of silence while the other drums continued to play." (1974: 239.)

In this chapter we have seen how musicians approach the personalization of the jazz drumming tradition. The imitation of model performers that was essential to their youthful development is abandoned in favor of a more personalized approach. Creativity is considered to be *sine qua non* and is understood in terms of the achievement of a unique musical identity. Individual players develop their own musical ideas, techniques and concepts based on their interpretation of the tradition. Individuality manifests in the particular ways the drummer executes essential musical functions which among others, includes time keeping, indexing the form, and interacting with the soloists and audience. Each performance is treated as a unique

experience and drummers utilize repetition and variation, timbre or colors, the filling in of musical gaps in phrasing or formal structures to achieve a continuous flow of energy throughout a particular performance. The drummer as bandleader often has more leeway to express their ideas and shape the direction of the performance. In addition, the drummer as bandleader may assume a responsibility to develop the talent of other younger musicians in their musical employment.

## 7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study presupposes an understanding of culture as something flexible, able to respond to change without losing its identity. This understanding allows us to view jazz within the framework of the African musical continuum and to use techniques and modes of enquiry established in the ethnomusicology of African music. In doing so we are able to go beyond the surface structure of the music and attend to its deeper meanings. Further, this approach enables us to avoid the distortion that occurs when using analytic techniques derived solely from Western European Classical traditions and it allows us to consider jazz, as Davis suggests, in terms of having an “existence of its own.”

The two central concerns which form the basis of this study are: (1) the social processes through which these musicians acquired the specific knowledge of the improvisational techniques necessary to perform jazz on the drumset. (2) What are the various ways in which these artists personalize the jazz drumming tradition to express individual experience and sensibilities, why do they do this, and how do they achieve this?

The idea of the nexus relationship between lived musical experience and its expression in cultural forms was introduced by the musicians under consideration. In the jazz tradition the musician is expected to interpret the music when he plays it. However, importantly, he interprets his experience in the way he plays it. It is through the experience of performance that these musicians and others of the community share and re-experience their cultural heritage.

Jazz is an art form with a cultural history, musical structure, and aesthetic system of its own. Using the techniques of contextualization allows us to deal the multi-dimensional nature of jazz. Contextualization enables us to extend formal analysis to include the experience and knowledge of the jazz drummers under study in order to interpret and explain their art.

This study has focused attention on the various contexts, the ways of musical learning and the development of musicianship that takes place within the African American community. In discussing their musical lives all three musicians allow that their attraction to music emerged early in life and was primarily the result of direct exposure to music in their home environment. The decision to play the drums may have been influenced by early exposure to the instrument through family, peers or otherwise, but ultimately was the result of an individual aesthetic choice although the reasons why may not be fully explainable.

Formal training was limited to learning the fundamentals of snare drumming through a private instructor. Basic note reading skills, as well as concert band and symphonic percussion techniques being reinforced through public school music programs. However, the task of learning to play jazz on the drum set became the responsibility of each individual and the community provides the context in which learning takes place. Awareness of the formal aspects of music including, but not limited to the constituents of structure, compositional processes, performance practice, and music as aesthetic and creative expression are learned through the enculturation process beginning at birth. This includes active participation at music events. Further, it is through the social experience of community that one learns to value the cultural relevancy, and to interpret the meaning of music sound and its associative behaviors.

In our case we're referring specifically to the African American communities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the early to middle years of the twentieth century. The process of



learning jazz drumming is seen as essentially a self-directed effort with emphasis on observation and experience. First steps to learning takes place in one's local neighborhood often with knowledgeable family members or more experienced neighborhood musicians providing informal instruction and mentoring. Additionally, we have seen that practical performance experience conducted in the company of like minded peers can be a strong motivating force to continue pursuing drumming expertise. Much of what is learned took place as a group effort and can be seen as related to the formation of an individual's self-identity. Non-musicians may also play a significant role in the process of an individual's musical development by way of, for example, sharing of resources, directing a youngster's attention toward exemplary musicians and recordings, providing useful performance feedback, as well as positive reinforcement (which, in some cases, is expressed in negative terms) along with encouraging thoughts.

All three drummers have spent inordinate amounts of time devoted to solitary practice sessions. Much of this time dedicated to building technical facility on the instrument by addressing individual strengths and weaknesses. The purpose here is to develop the high degree of virtuosity including what is known as coordinated independence which is considered to be a hallmark of modern jazz drumming. Recordings were employed as a pedagogical device and utilized towards specific ends. By repeatedly listening to records the novice drummers were able to familiarize themselves with the overall sound of the music, the details of select compositions and arrangements, certain rhythmic parts and other musical parameters such as, timbre, dynamics, texture, densities and the like. Recordings were used to study the work of individual drummers and how they approached various musical genres (ballads, blues, Latin, up-tempo, etc.) and performance routines (trading twos, fours, eights, extended soloing, shout choruses, etc.). By listening to a wide variety of recorded performances the novice becomes familiar with

the degree and scope of individual variation allowed within the black jazz tradition. Playing along with records allows the drummer to develop the basic skill of time keeping and to try out new musical ideas, that is, to 'improvise' within the confines of what is taking place on the recording. An important distinction regarding the role of recordings in the overall learning process of the drummers under consideration here is that records were considered as a supplement to, or used in conjunction, but not as a replacement to hearing/seeing the drummers play in person. All three drummers emphasized the importance of witnessing live performances as being essential to their musical growth and development.

The opportunity to observe regular live performances -- on a daily basis -- was predicated on the abundance of musical/social venues in Pittsburgh's and Philadelphia's African American communities during the period when these musicians came of musical age. Jazz was a desired component of black musical life and received support from those within the community as well as from those who traveled to the Hill District and other neighborhoods for the express purpose of enjoying black entertainment. The ability to see master drummers perform in a musical context fills in certain cognitive gaps that simply listening to the recordings on their own doesn't address. For the observant musician the kinesthetic quality of drumming on display in performance provides a visual connection to the musical ideas, and the manual technique necessary to execute and orchestrate those ideas around the drum set. Further, the communicative potential, that is the kinesics of body movements, facial expressions, and the like that accompany jazz drumming are there for the musician to observe as well as interpret their meaning.

As musicians reach a certain level of musical and social maturity they become active participants on the local jazz scene gaining valuable performance experience playing in jam

sessions and professional engagements and thereby interacting with local players and those of national reputation. The musicians in this study all began performing professionally between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. This kind of ‘on the job training’, under the tutelage of seasoned jazz musicians, which typically lasts for a period of years is seen as crucial to the full formation of a musician’s professional craftsmanship as well as their creative and aesthetic sensibility.

These findings are buttressed with an ethnography of jazz in Pittsburgh’s African American community, which in turn, allows us to place the three individuals under consideration within the larger frame of the workings of the jazz tradition.

In regards to our second concern, this study presented a discussion of the personalization of jazz drumming style. In jazz the notion of creativity is linked to individuality. Creativity, although not necessarily defined by these drummers, is nevertheless recognized when its presence emerges during performance. While imitation and emulation is encouraged in the musician’s early development stages, eventually one has to break away from relying too much on “borrowed” ideas and develop their own approach. The tradition demands it and the notion is often summed up in the colloquial expression, “You can’t join the throng, until you sing your *own* song.” According to the testimonies of these drummers, the inward drive toward individuality comes from the beginning as they enter the tradition and is ongoing. And from what we have seen, this idea is reinforced through interaction with other musicians and the community that surrounds the music.

Of the musicians under consideration here, each has had to find their own way in meeting the challenge of the tradition laid before them. In practice, the drummer draws upon the tradition in seeking models of performance and to ascertain the nuances of individuality. For these artists their listening and observations of master drummers is not limited to mere discovery of technique

but also to the master's use of that technique to his express feelings at particular musical moments. It is in this sense they become carriers of the tradition.

These drummers worked hard at developing a personal sound as they progressed in their musical development and continued practiced. This being achieved not only through mastery of drum rudiments and technique, but also through the individual choices in selecting the various cymbals and drums, including their tuning, that make up the components of their drum set. The sound a particular drummer gets from his instrument is related to their "touch" a quality that's likened to the uniqueness of one's fingerprint. Personalization of drumming style takes place not only at the level of basic sound as described above. Individuality also manifests itself in the particular ways the drummer puts sounds together when executing essential musical functions which among others, includes; time keeping, indexing the form, and interacting with the soloists and audience. Here, the notion of how and why something is done is as significant as what is being done. This approach privileges the process over the end result. Repetition and variation, the juxtaposition of sounds, colors and timbres, and the increase or decrease of various levels of intensity are just some of the means with which the drummer may invest his presence and being in order to achieve a particular performance. It is this sense of aliveness that serves to distinguish the African American jazz artist.

## INTERVIEWS

Joe Harris

1994-APR-10

1995-MAR-23

1995-MAR-30

1998-APR-01

1999-AUG-24

2001-SEP-01

2002-JUN-06

2004-JAN-10

2005-MAY-03

Roger Humphries

1997-MAY-02

1999-JUL-01

1999-JUL-15

2002-SEP-10

2003-JUL-01 thru 2003-AUG-31

Ron Tucker

1994-APR-10

1994-NOV-30

1994-DEC-16

1996-MAR-20

1996-MAR-28

1996-MAY-02

1996-SEP-24

1999-APR-05

2003-JUL-01 thru 2003-AUG-31

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