THE HEARTBEAT of JAZZ

The BEBOP YEARS

Burt KORALL

Drummin' Men

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2002

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Oxford New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto

and an associated company in
Berlin

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016
www.oup.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Korall, Burt.
Drummin' men : the heartbeat of jazz : the bebop years / Burt Korall.
p. cm. Includes bibliographical references (p.),
discography (p.), and index.
ISBN 0-19-514812-6
1. Drummers (Musicians)—United States—Biography.
2. Jazz musicians—United States—Biography.
3. Bop (Music)—History and criticism.
I. Title: Drumming men. II. Title

ML399 .B658 2002 786.9'1655'0922—dc21
[B] 2001066041

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

For my wife, Paula—
sage, supportive, marvelous in every way.

For Alyssa and Ryan, our grandchildren—
I wish good health and all the positive things that life can bring.

For my parents, Martha and Max Korall,
who were so caring and thoughtful, and for Dora Landau, my dear grandmother, who bought me my first drum set so long ago.

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PREFACE

Passion makes all the difference. If you care deeply about something, life becomes so much more meaningful on a variety of levels. In my case, a passion for music enhanced the good and made the bad tolerable.

Jazz on the radio initially caught my ear. Bands big and small and singers live and on records cemented a relationship with jazz and popular music that has lasted as long as I have.

Drums have been my instrument since a kindergarten teacher asked what each of us would like to play in a kiddie band. There was something quite seductive about the snare drum and the glistening cymbals. Drums and I connected. It was love at first sight and sound.

In theaters, hotels, ballrooms, clubs, and concert halls, the music and the drum set took on a reality and dimension they lacked on the air. Wherever I went, my eyes and ears inclined toward the drummer. The sound of the instrument, its look, the responsibility and glamour of being a crucial factor in the music—these completed the seduction.

There are some wonderful memories that spread out over the years. Seeing and hearing and coming to know Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Ray McKinley, Louie Bellson, Jo Jones, Max Roach, Roy Haynes, Mel Lewis, and so many others put me in touch with a great deal I had to learn.

My affair with drums intensified when I began to study with Allen Paley on West 99th Street in Manhattan. He had stopped playing because of illness, but it was apparent to me, even as an inexperienced teenager, what drumming had lost. He was an extraordinary technician and had a particular flair for jazz. Beautiful to watch and to listen to, he loved what he did. He never wanted to do anything else. Tuberculosis made it impossible for him to carry on his work at CBS and on the road with bands. Just before the diagnosis, Jo Jones had arranged for Allen to join the Benny Goodman band. Then, quite suddenly it was over. Eventually he left music entirely.

I learned from him what dedication meant. He set a formidable example. He would tolerate nothing less than the best you had to give. I must say that there was nothing better, at that time in my life, than learning and earning the approval of those I respected.

All acts of kindness were very much appreciated. On a cold winter afternoon in 1947 or 1948, I dropped in at Manny's, the now famous music store on West 48th Street in Manhattan. As was typical of the drum students who hung out at the store, I began playing on a large practice pad on the counter. An older man stood behind me and watched my hands. It was Jesse Price, from Kansas City, who had played with Basie and was appearing at the Savoy Ballroom with the Jay McShann band. He showed unusual interest and respect after listening a bit, and issued an invitation to taxi up to Harlem and attend a McShann rehearsal.

It was great to be noticed and invited to hear the band that had featured Charlie Parker a few years earlier. Price, the guys in the band, and the lady singer made me feel very much at home. As a drummer, Price provided a propulsive gift to the band, lifting it up in an unpretentious, straight-ahead, emotion-filled manner. He played simply and potently, paying no mind to technique or flash for their own sake. He gave a technique-obsessed kid a formidable object lesson. Late that afternoon, I made my way to the train at 125th Street with one of the tunes, "Uptown Blues," resounding in my head. I can still sing it so many years later. Does this sort of link still exist between older musicians and young players deeply enmeshed in what Gene Krupa used to call "the learning groove"? I wonder.

Years of study and playing and listening increased and widened the range of my interests. I learned what I could do and what was impossible. I began to know myself. Listening to Buddy Rich with Tommy Dorsey and his own band, Max Roach and Roy Haynes with Parker and Bud Powell on 52nd Street, and Shadow Wilson with Basie gave me pause. Would it be possible to move to that level?

A writing instructor at NYU—someone I admired a great deal—suggested that I think about writing. She had sensed something in the pieces I submitted. She gave me an option.

All through school, in the service with Armed Forces Radio, and for a while thereafter, I lived several lives at the same time—writing and playing, working in radio. Finally I gave up regular performance in favor of writing. I was comfortable as a writer and enjoyed the many aspects of the creative process.

Since the 1950s, I have written about jazz, popular music, and entertainment in multiple outlets, worked in radio and recording, and filled executive positions at BMI, the world's largest music licensing organization. During the past fifteen years, I have been the director of the BMI Jazz Composers Workshop, helping develop composers for jazz's symphony orchestra, the big band. Nothing has been lost. What I started out to be nurtures what I ultimately have become.

This book and the one that preceded it, *Drummin' Men—The Heartbeat of Jazz: The Swing Years*—indeed, all of the magazine, newspaper, and book work I've done—document a life. My passion for music, musicians, and percussion has not cooled. If anything, the feeling has gained in strength. The love affair continues unabated in the years of so-called maturity.

Like the others I've done, this book was a collective project. Thanks are due to many for their kindness and interest. First and foremost, my love and appreciation to my wife, Paula, for her continuing encouragement and work. I also want to thank Bill Miller, editorial director of *Modern Drummmer*; Frank Alkyer, editorial director of *Down Beat*; Artie Shaw; Dick Katz; the innovative teacher and drummer Jim Chapin; bebop pioneers Stan Levey, Max Roach, and Roy Haynes; my colleagues in the BMI Jazz Composers Workshop, Jim McNeely and Michael Abene; Louie Bellson; Sonny Rollins; Bob Brookmeyer; George Wein; Audrey Wilson, the widow of Shadow Wilson; Dan Morgenstern and his associates at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, Newark; Deborah L. Gillaspie, curator of the Chicago Jazz Archive, University of Chicago; Charles Walton, Joe Segal, and Valarie Campbell, distinguished members of the Chicago jazz community; Bruce Boyd Raeburn, curator of the Hogan Archive of Traditional Jazz, Tulane

University, New Orleans; Phil Brown; Flip Manne, widow of Shelly Manne; Richard Mealey, who transcribed well over one hundred interviews; Manhattan School of Music's Justin Di Cioccio; writer-musicians Bill Kirchner, Loren Schoenberg, and Dick Sudhalter; Doc Severinsen, Ira Gitler, David Baker, Nat Hentoff, George Russell, John Riley, Illinois Jacquet, George Shearing, Johnny Mandel, Gene DiNovi, Elliot Lawrence, Eddie Bert, Vinnie Dean, "the jazz maniac" Kenny Washington, New York jazz radio's Phil Schaap, Andre Previn, Hal McKusick, Terry Gibbs, Bill Holman, Bill Russo, Billy May, *Le Jazz Hot*'s Louis-Victor Mialy, Stanley Cowell, Russ Freeman, George Shearing, Ira Sullivan, Don Sickler, Benny Golson, John Levy, Donald Byrd, Hope and Star, the daughters of Billy Exiner; the J. C. Heard family, wife Hiroko, son Eric, and brother David; Max Bennett, Don Lamond, Billy Bauer, Larry Bunker, Charli Persip, Sonny Igoe, Paul Motian, Jack Sperling, Cindy Blackman, Stanley Kay, Joe Morello, Earl Palmer, Jake Hanna, Teddy Edwards, Freddie Gruber, Irv Kluger, Ed Shaughnessy, Bobby Rosengarden, Billy Taylor, Chico Hamilton, Laurence Marable, Joe Harris, Ed Thigpen, Ted Sommer, Rudy Van Gelder, Bill Crow, Cecil Payne, Jimmy Knepper, Pat Metheny, Clora Bryant, Bobby Watson, Hank Jones, George Coleman, Jack Eagle, Henry Jerome, Pee Wee Erwin, Jimmy and Percy Heath, Marty Napoleon, Howard Rumsey, Rufus Reid, Marvin "Doc" Holladay, Vin Haynes, David Amram, Chubby Jackson, Al Epstein, Al Porcino, Jimmy and Juanita Giuffre, Clark Terry, Grady Tate, John LaPorta, Jimmy Gourley, Ron Carter, Art Davis, Aaron Bell, Snooky Young, Dick Hyman, Nathan Davis, Gary Giddins, Hollie I. West, Chuck Bernstein, Dave Blume, Phil Leshin, Horace Silver, Charlie Rice, Hal Gaylor, Tom Ferguson, Abe Siegel, Bruce Paulson, Milt Bernhart, Cliff Smalls, Annie Ross, Jon Hendricks, Benny Barth, Jack Brand and Bill Korst, Gene DiNovi, Fred Tillis, Michael Cuscuna, Terri Hinte of Fantasy Records, Jeff Atterton, Larry Goldstein, Mike Wofford, Kenny Soderblom, Thelonious Monk Jr., Drs. Arthur Lindner and Nat Stockhamer; and three very close friends: Dom Cerulli, Chuck Stewart, and mentor Bill Simon, who recently passed.

Gone but certainly not forgotten: Nat Adderley, Manny Albam, Georgie Auld, Walter Bishop Jr., Conte Candoli, John Carisi, Doc Cheatham, Kenny Clarke, Al Cohn, Bob Cooper, Helen Oakley Dance and Stanley Dance, Alan Dawson, Billy Eckstine, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Mercer Ellington, Tal Farlow, Art Farmer, John Garcia Gensel, Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie, George Handy, Bill Hardman, Woody Herman, John Lewis, Mel Lewis, Steve McCall, Remo Palmier, Charlie Perry, Roy Porter, Joe Puma, Buddy Rich, Red Rodney, Shorty Rogers, Sal Salvador, Zoot Sims, Alvin Stoller, Barry Ulanov, and Tony Williams.

Drummin' Men

1.

Bebop

Two Drummers' Views of Things

You play because you must.

I was drawn to the instrument when I was a kid. I loved the way drums—and cymbals—looked, the way they smelled, the way they sounded. Once I began playing and studying, there was no turning back.

I had several goals.

To learn the language of music and percussion.

To reach for completeness as a player—by developing my hands, arms, feet, and back, by gaining full technical control—by becoming as consistent as is humanly possible.

To try for the romance of the violin, the impact of brass, the tenderness of the guitar.

To feel and bring all kinds of emotion to performances.

To make music work and sound great.

To instill in the musicians the feeling that they want me back there.

To never cheat audiences.

—Tony Williams

You can't take the instrument lightly! Relatively new to the world of music, the drum set is very difficult to *really* master. There's so much to the whole process. Just the coordination of wrists, arms, and legs, in various rhythmic circumstances, is challenge enough.

—Max Roach

Bebop—Some Comments

Change was in the air during the mid- and late 1930s. Venturesome players, composers, and arrangers sought to develop a more expressive, contemporary form of music. The most important of those attempting to take music to a new place included the highly innovative and visionary drummer Kenny Clarke; Dizzy Gillespie, the chief theorist of the new music; Thelonious Monk, the outwardly eccentric but surprisingly creative composer and pianist; and, of course, the God figure, the primal source of modernism, Charlie Parker.

Key figures paved the way for Parker and the others. Without them and their contributions, the turn left might not have been possible.

Count Basie tenorist Lester "Pres" Young had a major effect on jazz across the board. A mysterious, wounded figure, cool, subtle, sensitive, withdrawn, enigmatic, Pres was widely admired for his imaginative, highly individual treatment of melody, harmony, and rhythm and for his light, lean dancing sound.

Another precursor of modern jazz, southwestern electric guitarist Charlie Christian, came into view after joining the Benny Goodman band in 1939. He played and partied almost around the clock, downtown and in Harlem. His was a short life. By 1941 Christian was ill with TB. He passed the following year at twenty-five.

Christian and Lester Young brought a sense of chance and brightness to their music. Infectious jazz rhythms and swing enlivened what they played. Never unduly complicated, their solos flowed freely, often moving across bar lines. Like Pres, Christian had a cool, quietly intense and flexible sound consistent with his linear conception of jazz.

Bassist Jimmy Blanton also lived fast. He contracted TB and died young. A member of the Duke Ellington orchestra from the fall of 1939 until his passing three years later, he transformed and freed the bass, conceptually opening the way for how the instrument would be used in modern jazz.

Pianist Art Tatum, the music's greatest virtuoso, had a major effect on young musicians looking for a new way to do things. His impossibly fleet, imaginative single-note lines and extraordinary harmonic combinations defined what was possible.

The influential tenorist Coleman Hawkins also helped open the way for the advent of bebop. He was excited by change and by players who put him in touch with his untapped resources. He gave some indication what would happen in the music with his legendary recording of "Body and Soul" in 1939.

"Everybody . . . said I was playing wrong notes," he told writer Arnold Shaw. "A lot of people didn't know about flatted fifths and augmented changes. Of course, that sort of thing is extremely common now. But it certainly wasn't before I did 'Body and Soul.' "

You can't forget trumpeter Roy Eldridge. He set precedents regarding instrumental technique. He found his own solutions on the horn rather than altering his harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic approach to music, as Dizzy Gillespie did.

Gillespie's restless nature, his need *to know* music and explore its possibilities, and, above all, his talent and imagination were *crucial* to the development of the new discipline of bebop. His theoretical and analytical talents paralleled and supported his ability as an instrumentalist, composer, and arranger.

Increased use of chromaticism, altered chords, and upper extensions of chords—ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths—were essential in the bebop concept. Passing notes and chords—generally serving a connective function—were key to the compound as well. A wider range of harmonies and unconventional intervals affected the structure, feeling, and movement of the melodic line.

Rhythm and the rhythm section changed to accommodate what was happening in the music itself. The new pianist's accompaniment, by necessity, had to be spare, telling—a major change from the orchestral piano style that had been dominant earlier. Teddy Wilson, who had no real connection

to the modern movement, suggested promising possibilities with an economic, well-edited piano style. But it remained to those immersed in bop, like Bud Powell, Al Haig, George Wallington, Joe Albany, Elmo Hope, and other disciples of Parker and Gillespie, to take the piano to an appropriate level of relevance. The new pianist supported his colleagues in the section and the rest of the band, allowing them freedom, the latitude to think and be expressive in what was a refashioned context.

The bassist assumed a larger, more musical role because of the way the new music set up and moved. Virtuosity and knowledge of music became a must. The bass player had to loosen up and break with the inflexible, almost rigid announcement of time common to Swing Era players before Blanton. The move was away from grayness and anonymity, with emphasis placed on the musicality and the personality of the man and his material. The drummer became a time-informed, liberated voice in the rhythm section and in the music as a whole, with far more responsibility for the shape and form of the music.

The flexibility of the new rhythm section was suggested in the Count Basie band of the 1930s.

Dick Katz: Listen to Basie on all those original Decca and Vocalion records. He does a little "oom-pah" in there—for emphasis, particularly behind Pres. But more often than not, he's suggesting bebop. Listen to the way he comps, playing those offbeat stabbing accents, pushing the soloists on "Taxi War Dance." Basie laid the groundwork for what became modern accompaniment on the piano.

Jo Jones was quite undeniable, making the hi-hat sizzle, swish, and dance, bringing a light, graceful quality to the time and the feeling of the rhythm section. Freddie Green provided an undercoating to the rhythm. Walter Page played intelligently and well and was very much a part of that Basie rhythm "sound."

Bebop was inspired by four fathers. Dizzy Gillespie met Thelonious Monk in the late 1930s. Both lived in New York. They were close and discussed their music, sometimes on a daily basis, yet there were essential differences between the two. Gillespie was harmonically more fundamental, and his link with the jazz past was more immediately apparent. Though it is evident in Monk's work that he was involved with tradition and certain key styles and innovators—Ellington, for example—he essentially was a musician who followed a path of his own.

Peter Keepnews: Monk didn't feel he was part of the bop revolution. He always insisted in his rare interviews: "I'm not a bebopper." Some of the key characteristics of bop were not found in Monk's music. He had no interest, for example, in playing in very fast tempos. For him, technique solely served an expressive function. What most interested Monk was challenging himself and those he played with—and having his compositions played *correctly!*

A great interest in harmony and its possibilities tied him in with Gillespie and Parker. They both looked up to Monk because of his harmonic knowledge and originality. On the piano in Monk's apartment was a picture of Dizzy, inscribed "To Monk: My first inspiration. Stay with it. Your boy, Dizzy Gillespie."

The truth of the matter—the boppers got more from Monk than Monk got from the boppers. If there is a link, it's essentially *harmonic*.

Dizzy Gillespie's development from an adept Roy Eldridge imitator to a highly original writer and player first took on speed after he joined the Teddy Hill band in 1937. It was a particularly significant experience for him. He replaced his idol Roy Eldridge in the band's trumpet section—a great responsibility, at the very least. And he met Kenny Clarke.

Clarke had been trying new ideas, involving the ride cymbal, the snare, and the bass drum. He was in the process of changing the essential character of jazz drumming. Clarke moved the time centers from the snare and bass drums and the hi-hat to the ride cymbal while modifying the character of the hi-hat, using it much as he did the ride cymbal.

More colorful and fluid in his approach to the drum set and cymbals than his predecessors, "Klook," as he would come to be known, moved beyond what was suggested in the work of Jo Jones and Sidney Catlett. Like them, Clarke broke time and moved afield. But there was never any doubt where "1" was.

Clarke showed how to better integrate and sharpen a performance. As a piece opened up and revealed its character, he gave it a sense of pace and perspective by doing a variety of things. He placed snare and bass drum accents where they added strength, musicality, and surprise. By playing seemingly off-balance rhythmic combinations, cleverly coupling the "sounds" of the snare and bass drums, Clarke increased the drummer's impact. He brought new dimension to the drums and to the music itself, indicating by what he did that the instrument could and should do *more*.

With the information and understanding provided over the last sixty years, it is clear that what Klook did was truly profound. He changed how time was viewed, used, and physically presented. He proved that the symmetrical and the asymmetrical could live in a state of intimacy. He took the drums from black and white to Technicolor.

"Rhythm was always my thing," Gillespie told me on several occasions, adding: "It really comes before the other musical elements." Rhythm supported and gave reality to his other innovations. The rhythms he employed became less symmetrical, increasingly diversified, and more tied in with his overall thinking. The shape and structure and rhythmic qualities of Gillespie's improvisations owe a great deal to Charlie Parker. But what he did with harmonies—organizing them imaginatively, provocatively—added interest and brought to his commentary a boldness of spirit, a sense of range and continuity, and the subtlety and color that are possible when knowledge and ability meet on a high level.

Clearly the *new* music called for a *new* musician—knowledgeable, dexterous, deft, adventurous. The new repertory asked much of the player, physically and emotionally. Bebop's speed, fury, precision, its built-in sense of difference and risk; its suggestion of chaos: all these things partially masked the music's substance and great significance at first. Time and increasing understanding of what the innovators wrought in the 1940s have provided a clear view of the truth. Bebop was a master stroke of invention that made possible a fruitful future for jazz.

DAVID BAKER: The new music promoted the whole concept of virtuosity. It had always been a factor in jazz. But now it was the prerequisite for being able to survive.

Modern jazz no longer was really connected to particular functions—dancing or entertainment. This had the effect of removing jazz from the mainstream of popular music; until then, the terms *jazz* and *popular music* were interchangeable. As a result, previous limitations were being eliminated. The tempos could be faster, slower; the music, generally more flexible. For instance, one can't imagine someone in the Swing Era actually playing a tune as slow as Charlie Parker's treatment of "Embraceable You." And by the same token, it's very difficult to imagine a traditional jazz musician playing something as fast as Bird's "Ko Ko."

The most dramatic change, however—the one that sets bebop apart from everything that happened before and after—was that for the first time in the history of jazz, the tunes, were one with the means, the techniques the players utilized to express themselves when they were improvising.

The boppers played a common repository of material, using the same phrases and phraseology as Bird, Dizzy, Tadd Dameron, and Don Byas. A player or writer could learn the craft by getting into the tunes themselves. From an improvisation standpoint, the innovators had produced a body of literature that was tune-specific to the music.

The boppers, however, still played standards that were compatible with what they wanted to do and say. Many of the first creations were based on well-known "musical" songs. As bop developed, the writers relied less on what already existed and moved into idiomatic, original compositions. Unlike most of the writers—with the exception of Tadd Dameron—Dizzy wrote full-blown compositions, e.g., "Woody 'n' You" and "Night in Tunisia."

Repertory often determines what happens in the music. With the coming of bop, what I like to call instrumentally oriented music emerged—wider in range and capable of being played at a faster tempo than vocal music. More chromatic and angular, like Dizzy's "Hot House" and Bird's "Moose the Mooche," it is music that a singer wouldn't normally try to tackle.

There was another drastic change—from the big band, with all of its opulence, controlled by the arranger-composer and band leader, to the stripped-down small group: a trumpet, a saxophone, and a rhythm section. None of the duplication of function so typical of the big band. The unnecessary and inconsequential were edited out in the small band context, including introductions and backgrounds and elaborate endings. Getting to the improvising was the overwhelming concern of the music and the musicians.

The concept of chromaticism, more than anything else other than the strong link between tune and improvisation, was the thing that gave bebop a sharp sense of distinction. That and getting rid of all the encumbrances. The speed and the thrust of the music were such that you *had to* play as cleanly as possible without extra vibrato, without any trills, without the use of the plunger mutes.

All of that stuff disappeared because you didn't need it. Very simply, the music was intended to be something else. These are the things that a lot of

people criticized because they felt what had been done somehow dehumanized the music. But as you move from period to period, the imperatives change.

IRA GITLER: Bebop was very strong in the black communities in the big cities: Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, of course, New York, and certain parts of Los Angeles. Young black people really got with it. The music struck a chord in the black communities. It wasn't just the musicians who went for it. The recordings by Dizzy, Parker, Dexter Gordon, and others sold heavily—seventy to eighty thousand on 78 discs. The records also were on the juke boxes in the black areas and very much appreciated.

Young players and writers and even singers were captivated by bebop. All kinds of bands began hiring modern musicians and playing bop things. Benny Carter had a band in the mid-1940s including Max Roach on drums, J. J. Johnson, trombone, and Miles Davis, trumpet. Woody Herman, Boyd Raeburn, Georgie Auld, Stan Kenton, Claude Thornhill, Benny Goodman, Elliot Lawrence, Buddy Rich, Artie Shaw, Gene Krupa, so many bands—mirrored the influence of Bird and Dizzy and the others.

Make no mistake, bebop never became a *really* popular thing. It didn't sweep the country, like the Goodman, Miller, and Shaw bands; it didn't have best-selling records of the magnitude of "Sing, Sing, Sing," "In the Mood," and "Begin the Beguine."

The music wasn't tailored for the dancer or lazy listener, as some earlier jazz and many big bands had been. To get the full benefit of bebop, you had to be able to *hear* in a certain way—be aware of the passing tones and the relationship of updated improvisation to the melody, rhythm, and harmonic base. So many years after it was first introduced, bebop is still putting players, writers, and audiences on the spot.

Though others made contributions to the evolution of modern jazz, Charlie Parker was the key to its development. So much originated with him. There were new techniques—how to go from one note to another, as Dizzy Gillespie so often put it. Parker brought into play syncopations, intervals, and a feeling and flow that were particular to him. Jazz ***rhythm*** changed to accommodate Parker and Gillespie. "Every music has its own rhythm—a time feeling that goes with it. Our music has a rhythmic approach particular to itself," the trumpeter insisted. ***Bebop phraseology*** certainly stemmed from Parker. The ***harmonies*** mirrored the direction taken by the two pathfinders. They both continually experimented and invented, with the piano as prime guide and resource. But if ***one musician*** had to be singled out for bearing the responsibility for the new music, it was Bird.

Barry Ulanov, co-editor of *Metronome,* alerted the world when Parker came to New York's Savoy Ballroom with the Jay McShann band in 1942. He was the first critic to sense the importance of Parker and to focus press attention on him.

BARRY ULANOV: I was absolutely knocked out at the Savoy. I thought Bird's tone was peculiar. But it took me maybe a few more evenings uptown to get used to it. One thing's for sure: I had never heard such ideas!

He was far from the finished musician he would become very quickly. All

the same, I was overwhelmed at the Savoy and by those blessed remotes, featuring the McShann band. They felt like flowers being delivered to me in the middle of the night.

Forgetting for a moment Bird's tremendous fund of melody, in many ways he was the most *rhythmically* interesting musician to come along in my lifetime. He was a figure of legend. Much larger than life. Heroic in size.

Nobody ever created such continuity. He thought in the absolute, melodically. He just understood note after note after note after note. That's the rarest of talents. Bach had it.

Bird was a tremendous move ahead—not a violation of what came before, not some kind of eccentric addition that stands out by itself and has no connection with the past. He was one of the three or four most important people in jazz history. He was *the link* [with the past and future]. He was the *mind!*

PHIL LESHIN: So many musicians got involved with heroin because, more than anything else, they wanted to play like Bird, play with Bird, be around Bird. If that's what he did, maybe that's why he was so good. I don't think the decision in regard to hard drugs was made consciously. It just kind of happened.

STAN LEVEY: The junk thing spread like a cancer, from one to another.

GEORGE WALLINGTON: Everybody started to follow that pattern. I guess we thought getting high would make things better.

GERRY MULLIGAN: It became the social glue that tied us all together.

AL EPSTEIN: I first became aware of Bird while I was in Georgie Auld's band in the early 1940s. One of the guys in Georgie's trumpet section had heard Bird at the Savoy with McShann. He came to my room in the Plymouth Hotel downtown, raving about Bird's playing. Because Bird was using, he felt there was a link between "stuff" and what Bird could do. He brought out his "works" and prepared to do the thing. "It can't do anything but help," this guy insisted. I couldn't make that. My father was a diabetic, and the whole thing turned me off.

So many people went down because of Bird. He set an almost impossible example, musically. I remember one night in particular at Child's Paramount on Broadway—the restaurant-club underneath the Paramount. Nate Peterson, an alto man in Henry Jerome's bop band, threw his horn down on the stand, breaking it into pieces because he couldn't deal with the frustration of not being able to play like Bird.

Bird made heroin hip. Even some of the best players got involved. The drug has the capacity to alleviate anxiety. No matter how good someone is, there's that fear down deep of sounding ridiculous in front of people. The dominant attitude back in the forties was "Whatever it takes to consistently play well."

But this tension-release mechanism is a destroyer. The habit can't be controlled, as some thought. There's never enough money to support it. Eventually the body falls apart. And then it's all over.

JIMMY KNEPPER: Now that generation is keeling over one by one. . . .

The drug epidemic related to Parker, but it also was linked to the number of insecurities characteristic of the young boppers. Not the least of these had to do with how different and difficult the music was, compared to what had come before.

To perform in a manner that would be considered suitable made for pressure and stress. Trumpeter Red Rodney, who got caught in the heroin web during the bebop years, ultimately freeing himself much later, told me that the young players tried desperately to be original within the style. "It was the thing everyone wanted," he said.

The need *to use* revealed how a number of these musicians viewed themselves. It documented their feeling of distance from the musical and general mainstream—their separation and difference.

Parker performances were a virtuosic measure of contemporary life—its uncertainty, feelings of joy and happiness, rebelliousness, dissatisfaction, and alienation in an uncertain world. His sound and ideas, then and now, are pervasive because they are a matter of unsullied truth.

Jailed within personal and racial limitations, some basic to his time, Charlie Parker could be viewed as a king, or a wastrel, or a sacrificial figure—or all three. His story came to a close on March 12, 1955, as it had to. Addicted to narcotics and alcohol, physically ill, emotionally exhausted, psychologically badly damaged, he was a classic study in self-destruction. But Bird lives—for those who experienced the bebop period, and for more than a few who didn't.

Bop and Drums—A New World

It is difficult for young musicians and jazz devotees to fully comprehend the tumultuous effect that the advent of bop had on drummers. The new music demanded new, relevant, trigger-fast, musical, well-placed reactions from the person behind the drum set—an entirely revamped view of time and rhythm, techniques, and musical attitudes.

How well did drummers deal with bop? The innovators, like Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, opened the path and showed how it was done. Young disciples—if they had talent, sensitivity, and the necessary instincts—caught on and made contributions. Other drummers stylistically modified the way they played, trying to combine the old with the new. This was tricky at best. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it was a matter of apples and oranges. Still others fought change and what it implied.

Not welcomed by many swing drummers and their more traditional predecessors, the new wave was looked upon as the enemy, sources of disruption and unnecessary noise. Those stuck in the past could not accept breaking time, using the drum set as both color resource and time center. The structural and emotional differences essential to bebop, the need for virtuosity, and the ability to think quickly and perform appropriately intimidated them. The demands of the music were strange and often devastating; a feeling of hostility built up in them. The basic reasons were quite clear. The new music could ultimately challenge their earning ability and position in the drum hierarchy.

2.

From Swing to Bop
The Visionaries

Jo Jones and Sid Catlett set the stage for modern drumming. They had in common a visionary approach to music. By example, they showed that the drums in jazz could be more expressive. They helped sweep away, to some extent, drums' connection with militarism, indicating the instrument could be a source of smooth, interesting pulsation, color, sense, and substance.

Jones and Catlett were not solely accountable for Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, Shelly Manne and Roy Haynes, drummers who personified modernism. There were others who moved things along as well, opening the way to the contrapuntal character and liberating impulses of modern drumming. Roy Eldridge talked about Chick Webb's playing. "He was the first drummer I ever heard shoot bombs. Chick did a whole bunch of things before anyone else," the legendary trumpeter told me with typical enthusiasm. But Jones and Catlett conceptually suggested what was possible.

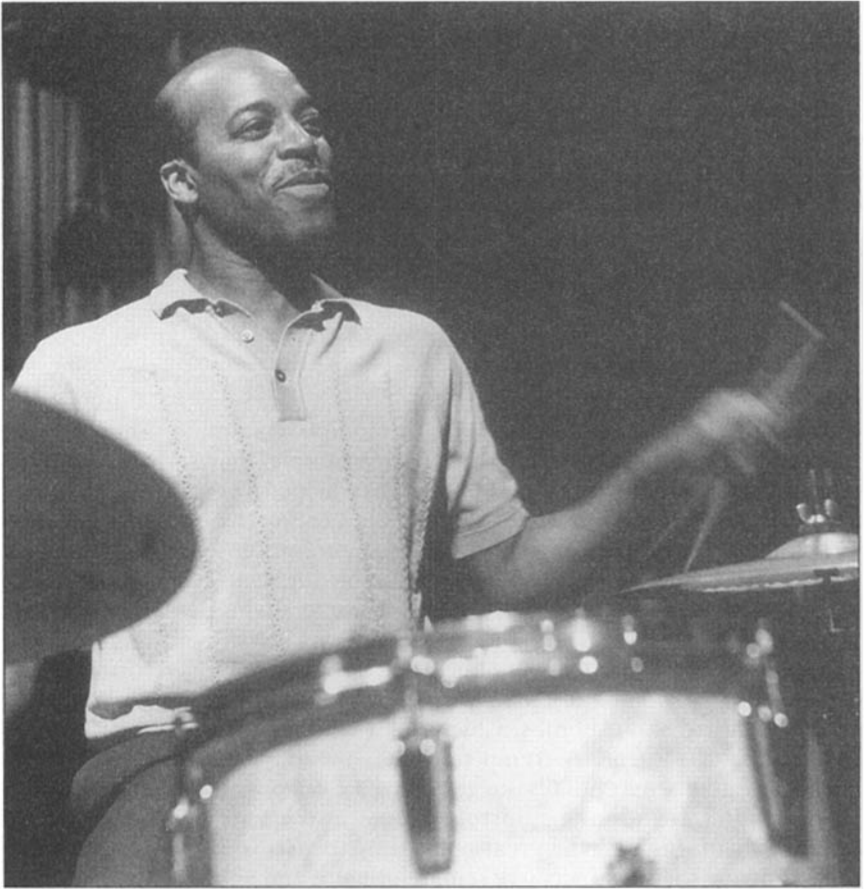
They didn't abandon jazz history or the instrument's tradition. They added to them. Like all the great ones, they focused on telling their own story, allowing their instincts free rein, relating to and enhancing the music. Back through time, the gifted and enlightened atop the drummer's throne invented and added to the techniques and language for the instrument, edging toward the decisive emancipation proclamation of the mid-1940s.

Jo Jones (1911–1985)

Jo Jones had the seeds of the future within him, and they blossomed and came to maturity as he did. You could hear so much in his performances, in person and on recordings—everything from the great tap dancers and the carnival performers to the memorable drummers over the years. He was a living history of American popular music.

The nature of Jones's playing had more than a little to do with physical environment and the bands with which he played—prior to joining Basie in 1934. Atmosphere and the company he kept certainly cannot be underestimated when determining how this handsome young man became Jo Jones.

In the Midwest and Southwest, where Jones's activity was centered during the pre-Basie years, the rhythm was looser and lighter—freer than in other parts of the country. The beat danced along. The rhythmic line straightened out, ultimately becoming a rolling 4/4 in the Basie band. There was, as well, more than a suggestion of embroidery of the time. The rhythmic techniques and "feel" of bebop, it would seem, have a connection with the heartland.



Jo Jones, vintage 1959, rehearsing for a TV show, which also included such excellent players as Buck Clayton (trumpet), Ben Webster (tenor saxophone), Vic Dickenson (trombone), Hank Jones (piano), George Duvivier (bass), and the Ahmad Jamal Trio. © *Chuck Stewart.*

Mel Lewis: Most of us who came up in the 1930s feel Jo was the original bebopper. Not Kenny Clarke. Jo was the kicker. He was playing the offbeat bass drum stuff and all that—way before everyone else. That's where I initially heard that kind of playing.

He was one of the first cats to play a ride cymbal—a top cymbal—and make it work as part of the music. He used to do it behind Pres. That was the beginning of that sort of thing. Jo knocked me out because I had never heard anyone do that before. It was a natural thing for him. He never bothered to really formally *learn* about drums. He just played them—sat down and did what he felt was right and appropriate.

Ed Shaughnessy: Max Roach has often told me about the many times he stood in the wings of a theater, as a young drummer, watching and listening to Jo with the Basie band. He was amazed when Jo took his foot off the bass drum pedal and played the hi-hat—almost like a top cymbal—blending with the

rest of the rhythm section. I'm sure we both agree that that was almost heresy at the time. But Jo was setting the foundation for a lighter, floating style that later was picked up by modern guys like Kenny Clarke, Max, and most of the other people associated with the bebop era.

CLIFF LEEMAN: **Jo invented patterns and came up with new, fresh ways to play the instrument. He even got involved with a sort of "independence," long before it became a factor. He played one rhythm in the left hand and another with the right, bringing additional interest to the time.**

Jo Jones's originality in the mid- and late 1930s and through his career generated the same sort of wide-ranging interest as Max Roach did ten years later. Roach, in many ways, was his musical son.

Jones made you want to *move.* His hi-hat work was peerless. He used the bass drum much as a dancer would, bringing into play supportive, surprising, uplifting accents and patterns. He literally invented sounds on cymbals and drums to enhance the expressiveness of what he was doing. When the band or a soloist left a space, he found telling things to do with his hands and/or feet, and always there was that persuasive undercurrent of time, bringing both stability and flow to the music.

Rarely, if ever, did Jones break in on anyone or anything; he was light, polite, *knowing*—very unlike the implacable, intrusive guy who is only concerned about himself, his solo or role in a band. His sensitivity would not permit this sort of musical behavior. Jones just laid down a rhythmic carpet of many colors, offering an open-ended invitation to his colleagues to build upon what he was doing and saying.

Love for music, dedication, and enviable natural talent made Jo Jones what he was—an innovative player who opened doors while satisfying his need to find ways to give expression to what was going on with the music and himself.

Sidney Catlett (1910–1951)

Much the same could be said for Sid Catlett.

Catlett had a need to remain fresh, to feed his mind and spirit. Because of this he got around a good deal. He felt it was his responsibility to be interested in other people and conscious of developments, particularly when it came to drums.

Open and receptive to the possibilities of each musical situation, he never became imprisoned in any one style. He was always dramatic, authoritative, comfortable, free.

The way Catlett plays on that May 11, 1945, Dizzy Gillespie Guild date, his only so-called bop recording session—including "Salt Peanuts" and "Hot House," "Shaw 'Nuff" and "Lover Man" (with Sarah Vaughan)—offers conclusive proof of his ability to immerse himself in a concept and be the very essence of relevancy.

He deals with blistering tempi and hard-to-play little arrangements. Combining straight-ahead swing and updated drum techniques, he remains very much in control while offering his own view of the music.

Catlett varies intensity, which allows—indeed—encourages the soloists to play boldly. "Salt Peanuts," "Shaw 'Nuff," and "Hot House" are rhyth-

Sid Catlett, the most adaptable drummer in jazz. This publicity shot was taken in the 1940s. ***The Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University.***

mically vital because of him. He is not at all unsure or intimidated by the nature of the music.

The way he masterfully worked with fast tempi and the hi-hat particularly impressed drummers coming up.

VERNEL FOURNIER: "Salt Peanuts," with Sid Catlett, was the first modern jazz record I heard at home in New Orleans. His sock cymbal solo shook me—and everybody down home. The tempo was unbelievable—for that period. And what he played was so clear!

What Catlett did was show us a new way. It was left to Max [Roach] to round it all out with his coordination of the bass drum and snare drum.

ED SHAUGHNESSY: He played the instrument masterfully and understood what was needed. Not limited in any way. Sidney was the most complete jazz drummer of his time. He and Jo Jones made the bop thing possible.

3.

Transitional Figures

Lou Fromm, who worked with the bands of Frankie Newton, Teddy Powell, Claude Thornhill, Boyd Raeburn, Harry James, Georgie Auld, Charlie Barnet, and Artie Shaw, and Billy Exiner, who emerged out of the 1930s to give the postwar Claude Thornhill band a contemporary rhythmic flavor, took what they had learned from Dave Tough and Jo Jones and turned left into modernism.

Their performances had the sense of color, dynamics, pacing, and development so typical of Tough and the linear quality, flow, looseness, and suggestiveness of Jones. Both captured some of Jones's flair on the hi-hat. They added to their recipe the top cymbal and polyrhythmic snare/bass drum ideas particular to modern pioneers Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, and Stan Levey.

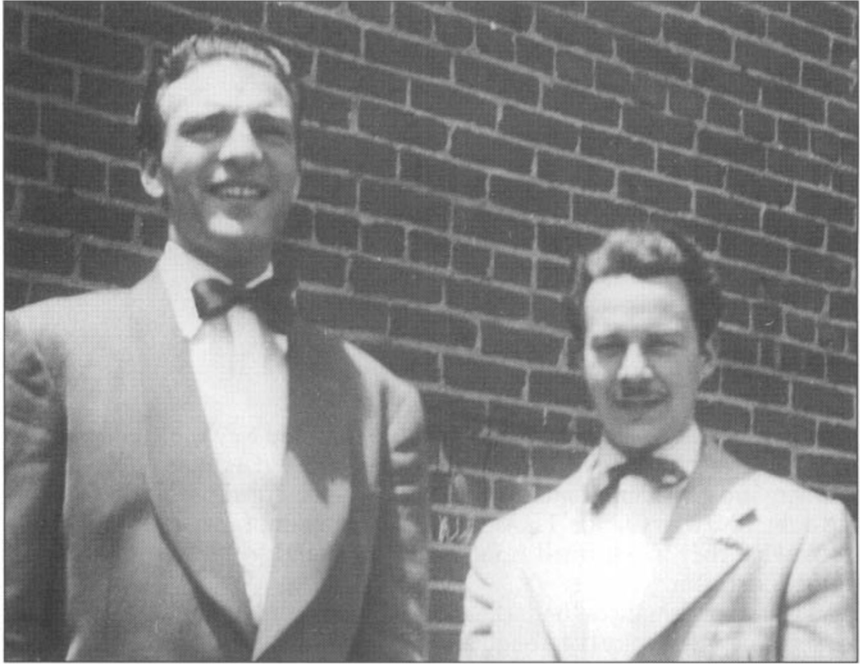
Lou Fromm (1919–??)

Lou Fromm had the best musical opportunities in the 1944–45 Shaw band. The always interesting clarinetist was becoming involved with the music of Gillespie and Parker. Several young musicians in the ensemble—e.g., pianist Dodo Marmarosa, guitarist Barney Kessel, and tenorist Herbie Steward—were responding positively and creatively to bebop. And the challenges collectively offered by the mix of veterans—e.g., trumpeter Roy Eldridge—and those new to the scene made the band a major experience for the drummer.

Fromm matured in this environment, playing the sort of limber, uplifting swing one associates with drummers on intimate terms with what jazz is all about. His performances were memorable for their heat, openness, sense of freedom, and the judicious manner in which he controlled and moved the band. Most important, Fromm made you *feel* and *pulsate*—whether you were in the audience or onstage with the band or Shaw's band-within-the-band, the Gramercy Five.

Try the Shaw recordings of "Bedford Drive" and "Little Jazz," both composed and arranged by Buster Harding and featuring Roy Eldridge. You'll get the best of Fromm and this edition of the Shaw band.

Artie Shaw: Lou worked very well with the band's rhythm section—Dodo Marmarosa [piano], Morey Rayman [bass], and Barney Kessel [guitar]. His



Lou Fromm (left) and trombonist Eddie Bert between stage shows at the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C., in 1943. Both were appearing with the Charlie Barnet band. © *Eddie Bert 2001.*

"feel" was nice. The sound he got from the drums was not obtrusive. He did what drummers are supposed to do in jazz: provide support, keep good time with sticks or brushes, play an occasional accent, a fill here and there, and *make the music move*. Let the guys who are playing solos say something.

JIM CHAPIN: Fromm was distinctive. He combined looseness and meticulousness in an attractive manner. During his best years in the 1940s, he was going in a contemporary direction, like Irv Kluger, Jackie Mills, and some others. But he never fully assimilated and adopted the modern style—though he was an early exponent of the left hand and suggested the possibilities of independence in his work. A curious thing—he was left-handed and played with the kit set up for a right-handed player. Stylistically, he was somewhere between Jo Jones and Max Roach.

Lou played great cymbals. He was also very swift—had fast hands. Musicians dug him, particularly the way he played time. He filled in for Dave Tough with Woody Herman's First Herd, and the guys loved his playing.

He was a good soloist as well. I remember an eight-bar solo he played on "Sans Culottes," an old Teddy Powell record. It set something of a precedent, showing what could be done with a fast single-stroke roll. Buddy [Rich] later played a solo based on that sort of idea on his live recording of "Love for Sale." [Ed. note—Rich initiated the whole idea with an unbelievable single-stroke roll, a two-bar break—the last of four two-bar bursts—on "Prosschai," an Artie Shaw 1939 recording.]

Lou Fromm had everything. But he became addicted to hard drugs and

never really lived up to what musicians sensed was possible. He was in prison several times. And as soon as he was released, he inevitably became an addict again.

AL EPSTEIN: Lou Fromm and I were roommates when we were with the Teddy Powell band. Teddy had a real good band at that time, and Lou helped make it that way. He was a dapper, wonderful guy. We had a lot of fun. But then he got strung out. . . .

Many musicians during that time just wanted to be part of their peer group. Drugs became common ground—a social scene for the most part. Rather than doing the family thing, they preferred being with one another. Generally the price for hanging out with the cats was doing what most of them did. And that's how people got hung up. Lou Fromm was more the rule than the exception.

There were numerous arrests, incidents of theft and forgery to support his habit, rehabilitation and failure. And lame excuses for the addiction—"for my health," "heroin allows me to play better." Clips from the *Los Angeles Times* from the mid- and late 1940s, when he was working with Harry James, document desperation. It was life on the dark side, for which there seemed no relief.

CHUBBY JACKSON: I was on the Charlie Barnet band with Lou Fromm. His personal scene was a mess. That whole way of life was entering the band business and destroying everything in sight. I remember like it was yesterday when Sonny Berman, a great trumpeter with Woody Herman's First Herd, died suddenly because of "stuff." Sonny and I had been very friendly. My mother and I went to New Haven to express our condolence to his mother. I just fell to pieces. That's no way to live or die.

Lou Fromm disappeared after the late 1940s. Extensive research, here and abroad, including appeals for information in music magazines and on the Internet—courtesy of bassist-writer Bill Crow—turned up nothing but false leads.

Composer, arranger, and former baritone saxophonist Manny Albam said Fromm—a friend and colleague harking back to the 1940s and the Georgie Auld band—left music, educated himself, and became an engineer of some sort. I have no evidence of this.

It is almost certain that by now Fromm has passed—because of his drug problems, illness, or old age. He was a man of ability. But he found it impossible to follow through. Unfortunately, he is but a footnote in the history of the music—an unhappy comment on the effect of the drug plague of the 1940s.

BILLY EXINER (1910–1983)

Billy Exiner was highly individual in a number of ways. He was unusually open to life and music and their infinite possibilities. Uniformly optimistic, he pushed aside all that was negative, no matter what the situation. He was, in addition, kind and caring, deeply interested in his friends, and as involved

Billy Exiner, "the best ballad drummer of all," performing with the Claude Thornhill band in 1947. *Hope Exiner d'Amore Collection.*

with his family as was possible for one who spent most of each year on the road. Many considered the diminutive drummer a saintly sage.

"Music and drums meant absolutely everything to him," his daughter Star remembers. "He played night and day when he was active and continued to work out on a pad in retirement—even when illness made it almost impossible for him to function."

Musicians recall how welcoming Exiner was when jazz began to change in the 1940s. He sought to move inside bebop and make it work for *him*. As time passed, his rapport with those who thought and played in the new way grew.

The manner in which he approached the drum set made clear how he thought about music. The hi-hat, his cymbals, snare, tom-toms, and the bass drum were his paints; sticks and brushes and his feet, his paintbrushes. He was fundamentally a colorist. He blended with the sound and enhanced the overall effect of every band that employed him.

Exiner did his most important work with the post–World War II Claude Thornhill ensemble, which played richly scored ballads and meaningful modern jazz. Even pianist Thornhill, who like Exiner was from an earlier generation, responded to bop and made some surprising changes in his orchestra's approach to music.

On the modern jazz tunes, most of them stemming from Charlie Parker and arranged by Gil Evans, Exiner gave every indication that he was attempting to reach for the essential elements of the Max Roach style and revamp them in a manner that was appropriate to his own view of music

and drums. On ballads, he was unforgettable, magnifying or subduing the colors, *managing* the orchestra's sound, bringing balance and unusual quality to each ballad performance.

Like Dave Tough, Exiner never truly became a bopper. He was not aggressive, as were many of the innovative bop drummers, and he favored soft as opposed to loud and ever-evolving flow to breaking time.

Exiner couldn't turn away entirely from old habits, particularly smooth, steady pulsation. But he deserves great credit for his interest in contemporary ideas and meeting them more than halfway. Over the years, Exiner developed his own approach to time, rhythm section performance, drum tuning, and execution of ideas. His drums had "a sound." And his performances were easily identified by the fluidity he brought to them. Exiner's ideal was the time feel of the Basie band and of Jo Jones. He combined the essentially unimpeded flow of Basie swing with the contributory, contrapuntal, yet linear rhythmic ideas that Kenny Clarke and Max Roach brought to music.

By following his instincts, which generally were sharp and thoroughly reliable, Exiner matured into a player who defied easy stylistic categorization. One thing is quite clear: he developed *naturally,* making excellent use of what he felt, heard, and assimilated during his formative years (the 1930s) and what he conceived during his most important period (the 1940s).

On 52nd Street in 1936, Exiner worked at the Onyx Club with Lana Webster—a lady tenor player—and listened closely to guitarist Teddy Bunn, jazz violinist Stuff Smith, and particularly the John Kirby band, with the endlessly inventive drummer O'Neil Spencer at its center. Inordinately graceful and convincing, particularly with brushes, Spencer made a major impression on the young drummer.

Exiner tried to develop a bed of underlying, quietly stirring sound that brought the rhythm section together, thus inspiring section colleagues and, in the larger sense, the band. He experimented with his concept in the 1930s and 1940s with the Will Hudson band and the Hudson-DeLange ensemble, with Mal Hallett, Jan Savitt's Top Hatters, the Sunset Royals, the Basie-influenced Georgie Auld band, and the Harry James orchestra. Exiner concentrated on this idea for the rest of his life.

GENE DINOVI: By chance—and it seemed that was the way things worked in those days [the 1940s]—Billy met and played with Joe Shulman [bass] and Barry Galbraith [guitar]. Gil Evans became aware of them and brought them into the Thornhill band. This rhythm section became an integral part of some of the most beautiful sounds ever created for a dance orchestra.

What made Billy Exiner really distinctive was the consistent artfulness and sensitivity of his performances. He made *sense* while many other drummers dealt with pulsation poorly and dropped bombs and used accents in an indiscriminate, unknowing manner, negating *musicality*.

At the heart of Exiner's success as a drummer and musician was one undeniable fact: he never forgot that time is of the essence and that commentary should add to the overall story of the music. He did everything possible to achieve his goals. For example, to enhance the rhythmic flow he cut off the tips of his sticks. This helped him produce a "soft," ingratiating, singing sound from his hi-hat and cymbals—a pleasing, persuasive, flowing feeling.

I met Exiner in 1947. I was spending a day at Glen Island beach in New Rochelle, New York. At about three in the afternoon, I heard this mellifluous music, coming from the famed Glen Island Casino. It was the Claude Thornhill band rehearsing.

During one of the breaks, a friend and I made our way to the Casino and introduced ourselves to Exiner. We went downstairs to the band room. He had a big practice pad set up there. We talked and compared notes. Being a teenager, and because of my involvement with study, execution, speed, and Buddy Rich, there was more than a little that was "young" and superficial about what I discussed with him. For all that, he was kind and very understanding. Before returning to the bandstand, he offered some good advice, without in any way being condescending.

"*Listen to* and *interpret* music—be concerned with time. Get into those things. They're what drumming is all about," he said, adding: "Technique is important but only a small part of what a drummer must have in order to *play*."

Exiner wanted to enhance his technical ability, to develop "chops," but ultimately the other elements so crucial to his concept of playing took precedence. Again, like Dave Tough, whom he physically resembled, Exiner bypassed and transcended the compulsive need of most drummers to be technical. He played in a gently soulful, intelligent, subtle, simple, and straightforward manner.

Exiner thought of himself as an *accompanist*, one of three or four musicians providing impetus, inspiration, and even comfort to others. He was the antithesis of the "star" musician. He came to know exactly what to do in the rhythm section because he spent many of his waking hours practicing and playing with a section. His objective: to get to the core meaning of rhythm, primary and subsidiary coloration, and to project, with his colleagues, an ever-unfolding, balanced thrust. Ideally, the section would simultaneously be heard as a unit and as contributing individuals.

Listen to the Thornhill Columbia recordings, both the ballads and the Gil Evans treatment of material associated with Charlie Parker—e.g. "Anthropology," "Yardbird Suite." Exiner doesn't *seem* to be doing anything significant. He and his rhythm partners glide along easily, seldom giving any indication of strain.

The Dave Tough analogy continues. Exiner plays the role of guide, shaping the arrangements, paying special heed to major and minor details. He adds a "kick," a color, an idea growing out of the music, while playing time. The character actor of the rhythm section and, by extension, the band, he is expressive without ever intruding. Consistently he reveals a special flair for dropping in compatible, fitting, sometimes quirky sounds and ideas where they have maximum effect.

LEE KONITZ: Billy was one of the great ballad drummers. He made all that stuff that Gil Evans wrote for Claude's band sound pretty smooth. He was a key part of what always felt like a *real* rhythm section to me: swing oriented, four-to-the-bar, with the guitar and everything. Dear old Claude, Joe Shulman, Barry Galbraith, and Billy—all in a Basie groove.

It was always very nice to listen to and play with. I remember one night I came to the microphone to play a solo and just stood there for thirty-two bars, listening to how nice the rhythm section sounded.