

The Star-Ledger



TIM FARRELL/THE STAR-LEDGER

"I feel blessed," says the appropriately named Billy Drummond, a drummer who leads trios in Madison and Manhattan this weekend and next.

Drums' steady beat captured Drummond at ripe old age of 7

JAZZ

Billy Drummond

When: Friday and Saturday, 6:30 and 8:45 p.m.

Where: Shanghai Jazz, 24 Main St., Madison

How much: No music charge. \$20 minimum at tables on Friday, \$30 on Saturday, \$10 at the bar both nights. Call (973) 822-2899 or visit www.shanghaijazz.com.

What else: Drummond appears Sept. 22-23, 7:30 and 9:15 p.m., at The Kitano, 66 Park Ave. at 38th Street, New York; \$20 music charge, \$10 minimum; (212) 885-7000; www.kitano.com.

BY ZAN STEWART
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

With his crisp, clear sound, and ease of articulation, Billy Drummond is a master drummer who makes his set sing. No wonder greats like Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard, and Joe Henderson have sought his services.

Drummond's fascination with drums started early. His father was a onetime amateur drummer who played jazz records around the house. Seeing Buddy Rich on television made that ace his first drum hero.

Then around age 7, when Drummond heard the album "Max Roach and Clifford Brown" (GNP), Roach "killed" him.

"The clarity of his playing, the melodicism, the tone of his drums,

his drum solos — he really got to me," says Drummond, 47, a native of Newport News, Va., who lives in West Orange.

Drummond leads trios Friday and Saturday at Shanghai Jazz in Madison, and Sept. 22-23 at The Kitano in New York. The influence of Roach, particularly in terms of sound, has been primary in Drummond's rise to prominence.

"I especially like the sound of the drums, the way a cymbal beat sounds — that ding-a-ding that's like the center of the universe — the way swinging sounds on the drum set," he says. "The sound is the whole thing. That's why we like people like Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins — it's that instantly recognizable sound."

"I've kind of got my own sound — a full, pretty sound — an amalgamate of all the people I've heard, and copied. Your sound develops from that," he goes on.

The cymbal beat has special significance to Drummond. "It's so personal, hitting a wooden stick on a brass plate," he says. "That becomes such a beautiful thing."

Drummond appears at Shanghai Jazz with pianist Xavier Davis, another West Orange resident, and bassist Gary Wang. He says his role will be to suggest tempos and feelings for songs, not to showcase the drums.

"I just want the three of us to

play music together, and the drum solos will come out when they're appropriate," he says. "And when there is one, I try to make it as coherent as possible, with a beginning, middle and end."

Drummond — whose albums as a leader include "The Gift" and "Dubai" (both Criss Cross) and who has appeared on more than 100 others as sideman — said the trio might play songs such as the standard "How Am I to Know" or the jazz classic "Nardis."

At The Kitano, Drummond — an adjunct professor of music at both the Juilliard School and New York University — will team with two distinguished colleagues: bassist Eddie Gomez and pianist Larry Willis. The two, who were classmates at the High School of Music and Art in New York, have variously played with Woody Shaw, Bill Evans and Jackie McLean.

"These are two giants whose playing I love," says Drummond. "I've been playing with them (in different contexts), but they haven't worked together too much, so this should be really nice. We're going to play Larry's tunes, then go into Rudy Van Gelder's (in Englewood Cliffs) to make a record for High Note in early October."

"I've been able to play with some of the baddest cats around," he says. "I feel blessed."