## Peter Erskine

The Drum Museum - Hungary

## **Nick Angelini**

A Wilhelm Scream & Wail City Drums

From Paula Cole to Robert Plant, T Bone Burnett and beyond...

# Shane Gaalaas The A's, B'z & C's of Rock

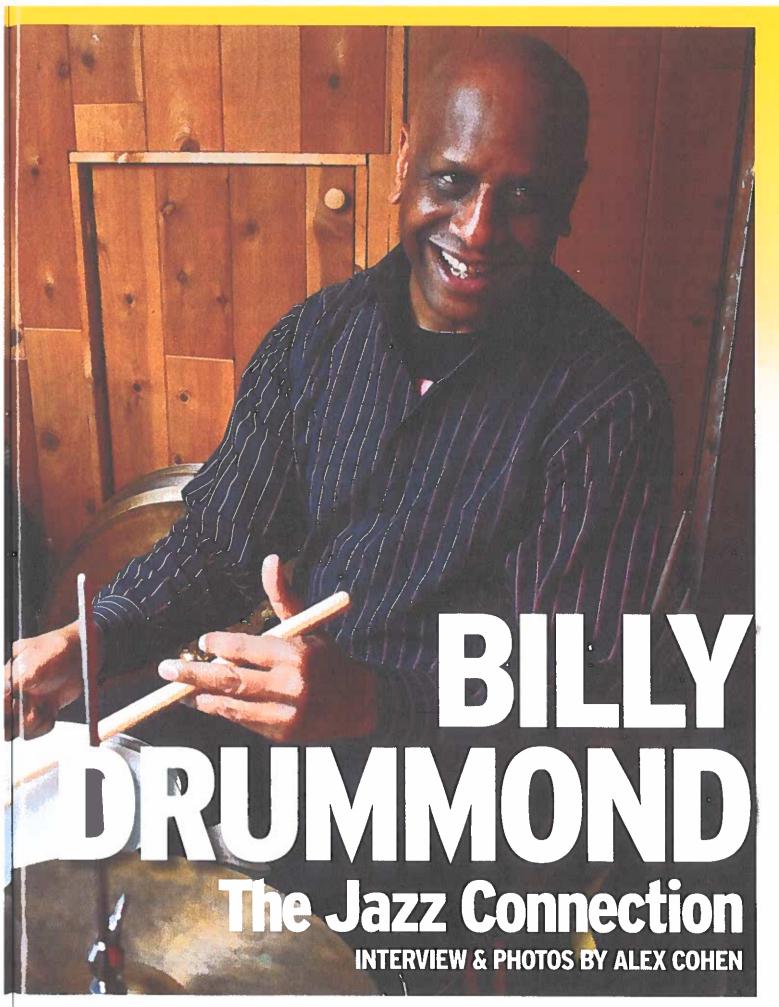
# Billy Drummond The Jazz Connection

# Adam Christgau

Sia, Tegan & Sara, Miley Cyrus, Troye Sivan

**WristGrips Wrist Protection** Griffin Goldsmith's Keycussion Alan Dawson "Rudimental Ritual"





AC: How did you start playing drums? How were you introduced to music, what was your background like, and did you grow up in a musical family?

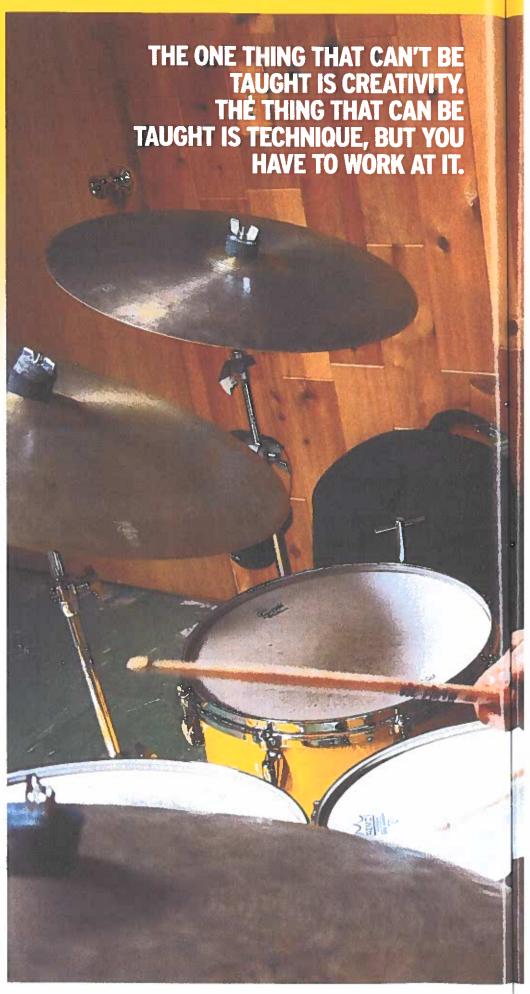
BD: I started playing due to the influence of my father who was a drummer. He was a jazz drummer, but he had stopped playing the drums by the time I was born. He had a really great record collection, though, and I still have a lot of his records. It was a collection of great jazz records, and he was always talking to me about different drummers and his contemporaries. He was born in the mid-twenties, so his contemporaries were Max Roach, Art Blakey, Big Sid Catlett, Philly Joe Jones, and people of that nature, although Big Sid and Chick Webb were his main influences. So, I just naturally gravitated towards the drums, and once I got a drum, I had a little bit of natural ability, thank god, and I was able to naturally play.

#### AC: Was your first drum a snare drum?

BD: My grandmother gave me a wooden snare drum with wood hoops and claw lugs. Then when I was six, I got my first drum set. It was a plastic set, and I ripped through that one quickly, then they gave me a drum set that was made out of passable material. I didn't come from a well-to-do family, so my parents couldn't afford a professional drum set. I learned how to read, because in fourth grade, you could join the school band, and I worked on material like the Haskell W. Harr book and the Ludwig drum method.

#### AC: Did you have a teacher then?

BD: I didn't have a teacher then. I just had a band director who could kind of play every instrument. He taught me how to read, not with private lessons. but just in band class, and I was already starting to play drum set on my own with other kids in my neighborhood, My neighborhood was blessed with a lot of talented kids that played music, and one family that lived right around the corner from me was the Wooten brothers. We were all best friends at that time. and Roy is Victor's brother, and he's a drummer. So, there were other guys in the neighborhood who all played music; not necessarily jazz, but stuff like Kool and The Gang, James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, and Graham Central Station. Then at home, my dad was



046 BILLY DRUMMOND drumheadmag.com

playing Miles, Jimmy Smith, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, and Horace Silver. I was getting it there, and then my sister was into Motown, the Beatles, Roberta Flack, and Hendrix, so there was a lot of music in my life constantly. That really helped diversify me as a musician to this day.

I still listen to a lot of different kinds of music, but what I ended up choosing, as my music of choice, was jazz. Later on, I did get a rudimental, classical teacher named Wynn Winfree who taught out of books by Wilcoxon, Anthony J. Cirone, Fred Albright. He was a great teacher, and really helped me with that stuff. At this time, I was in junior high and high school, so I was auditioning and getting into all-state band and all-city concert bands.

### AC: So, you were mostly playing classical percussion there?

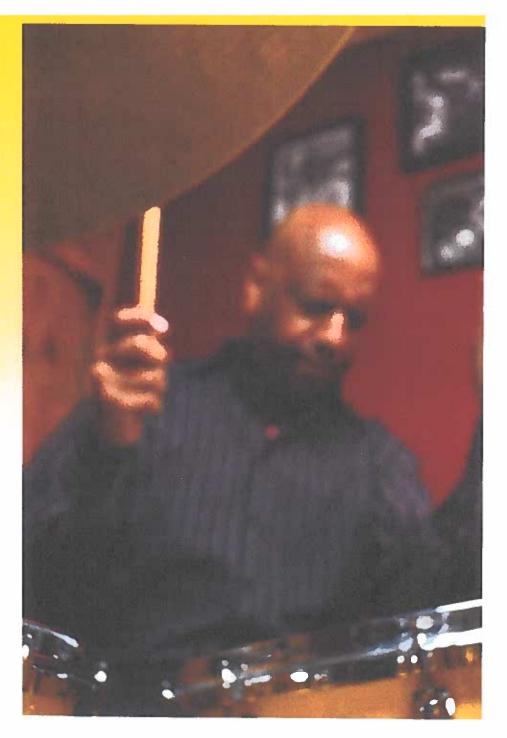
BD: Yes, I was playing classical percussion, and I'll be forever indebted to Wynn for enabling me to get a scholarship for classical percussion. Overall, I was in a really good, well-rounded environment from my beginnings of playing the drum set on my own.

#### AC: Where did you grow up?

BD: I grew up in Newport News, Virginia. I'm encapsulating everything here, but you know, this is me from age four to eighteen. You go through a lot of different experiences and meet a lot of different people. And at that point in time, the music was constantly changing and evolving, because, like I said, we were into James Brown, Kool and The Gang, and Sly and The Family Stone, but then Hendrix was happening, and then fusion started. and then Mahavishnu and Return to Forever. At the same time, one of my friends brought over Four & More by Miles Davis, and then my head was completely turned around by Tony Williams. That led me to Elvin Jones and Jack DeJohnette, and then I'm off to the races.

### AC: Did you continue to mostly study classical percussion in college?

BD: Yeah, I went to a school called Shenandoah Conservatory of Music in Winchester. I started off as a classical percussion major, then they introduced



a jazz program, and I became the first jazz student. Oddly enough there wasn't a jazz drum-set teacher there. The only teacher was strictly a classical guy named Thomas Bates, but he was great. He didn't play drum set, so I was basically on my own.

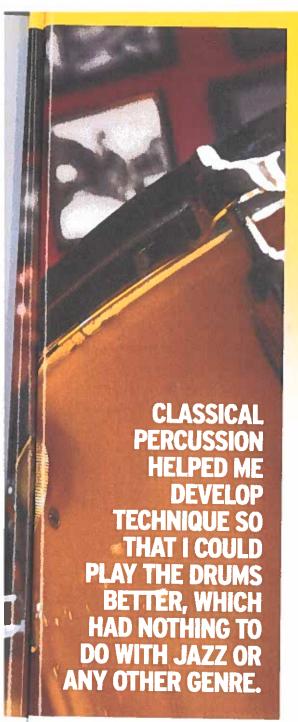
I took jazz piano and some jazz theory, and then I was the drummer in the jazz ensemble, and so I was split between that and classical. I was kind of a guinea pig for the school's program. At that time, around 1979 or 1980, jazz

was looked down upon at the school,

and the only real jazz schools that people knew about were North Texas State and Berklee. There weren't too many other jazz programs at the time, and they were just starting to become possibilities.

AC: I think if you told Julliard back then that they'd have a Jazz program now which you would be teaching at, they would never have believed you.

BD: Yeah, you were talking about really staunch, conservative views on music education, and at that time, if it



wasn't European classical music, then it wasn't considered a legitimate form of music to be studied.

AC: Would you say that your training in classical percussion and theory help with your ability to hear forms and nuances within songs?

BD: Oh absolutely. But honestly, I'd been playing the drums all my life as a self-taught drummer playing in bands, so I already understood playing form. The classical percussion helped me develop technique so that I could play

the drums better, which had nothing to do with jazz or any other genre. And that's what we were talking about before where we were saying there's a lack of preparedness amongst students now because the primary education system has done so many cuts to music programs. So, if you don't have that opportunity to cultivate the ability to just play an instrument well, having nothing to do with the genre of music. just being able to play. So, my question is always, "Can you play a 5-stroke roll? Can you play a paradiddle? Do you know the rudiments? Do you have hands enough to control doubles and singles?" That's the kind of education that's lacking sometimes. I don't want to generalize, but I see a lot of that, and a lot of younger prospective students don't realize that every great jazz drummer, or every great rock drummer, or every great drummer in general can just play the drums well. They have an understanding of how to PLAY the instrument. That's an important aspect in any genre you play, and you have to play the instrument well so that you can do what you need to do as a musical partner in a band situation. For example, sound, the ability to keep time, being able to understand form, being able to control your dynamics: that's all very important, and that's what I got from working on classical technique. That's the thing about all these great drummers that we love; the one thing that can't be taught is creativity. The thing that can be taught is technique, but you have to work at it. If you don't practice it, you're not going to get it. You know that!

The amazing thing about most of the drummers we all like is their audacious imagination and then the ability to facilitate whatever ideas they might have. That's really incredible.

AC: There wasn't one drummer in particular that completely changed your world?

BD: Not one. There were so many at different stages, and even with, you revisit people who might have been a dominating force in your life 20 years ago.

#### AC: Top three?

BD: I can't choose, otherwise I'll kick myself looking back on this interview.

At any given day, the first record that I put on is my top person right then. I always tell people that my first drumming idol was Buddy Rich. Why? Because when I was a little kid, he was the only drummer on TV. Max Roach wasn't on TV, Philly Joe Jones wasn't on TV. Art Blakey wasn't on TV. Elvin Jones wasn't on TV. So, when you're a little kid. you gravitate towards whatever is most spectacular and most obvious, and Buddy Rich was one of those people. He was on "The Tonight Show," "The Merv Griffin Show," "The Mike Douglas Show," "The Muppets." "Playboy After Dark," "Hollywood Palace"-all those variety shows in the '60s that featured musical acts. And he was an entertainer; he comes from Vaudeville, and in the early 1900s if you wanted to be entertained, you had to go watch live people do something. And that's what he was; he was an entertainer, but also a great, great drummer.

AC: When you were in high school, that was when Coltrane became big, Weather Report was coming out, Miles was really exploding...

BD: Well yeah, we're talking about the early '70s, where there was a lot going on musically. In jazz you had McCoy Tyner and Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams Lifetime, Weather Report, Mahavishnu, and all the ECM stuff, plus you had Parliament Funkadelic, Earth Wind and Fire, and Zeppelin. Coltrane had happened, Miles' '60's quintet had happened, Ornette had happened. Cream had happened, and all these branches were coming from those trees. There was a lot of crosspollination, and it was all new, fresh, and exciting. Back then, you didn't know what the next record was going to be. There was no Internet, and there was no preliminary listening before the record appeared in the store. So were all these post Elvin Jones/ Tony Williams drummers like Jack DeJohnette, Lenny White, Alphonse Mouzon, Sonship Theus, Eric Gravatt and many others. All these guys were the younger generation, and influencing me at the same time. Plus, at that time, Art Blakey, Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, and Roy Havnes were all very much alive and still playing at the top of their game. It was

like giants were walking the earth, and the guys who were influencing you and the guys who influenced them were all at the top of their game. It was a really special period to be in as a young, developing musician and drummer.

AC: Absolutely. Now, after college, when did you decide to move to New York and pursue a career there?

BD: After college, I stayed down in Virginia for five or six years and played in a Top 40 band. Basically, I was playing jazz gigs on my nights off, and we were the house band in a couple of nightclubs, so we played five nights a week. We were called The Squares, oddly enough, and we played at a club in one city for two or three years, and then we were down at Virginia Beach for two or three years until I split. We learned two songs off the radio every week, and I sang a bit.

#### AC: I want to see that.

BD: There's supposedly some video somewhere! So, on my nights off I was playing jazz gigs, and then I was coming to New York to hang out, because at the time, they had an airline called People's Express, and the flights were \$23 one-way from Virginia to Newark; \$50 and I could come to New York and stay at a hotel or with some friends, and that's how I befriended AI Foster. I'd come up here and see him play, and then hang with him—he was very encouraging to me to move to New York.

Prior to that, Art Blakey had encouraged me to move as well. I went to see him play and we hung out after the show while he was eating. I stayed behind while the rest of the band split, and I was talking to him and asking him drum questions and stuff, and so he asks, "Where do you live?" and I said, "Virginia," and he goes, "Why?" I said, "Well, that's where I live, I'm from there, and when I got out of school I moved back with my parents before I got my own place." And he said, "If you want to play the drums, you got to move to New York." And I said, "Uh... Okay..." Honestly, I wanted to anyway. and then when I met AI, he said, "Man, you keep coming up here, why don't you just move up here." He let me sit in with Joe Henderson at the Vanguard, and that was it.

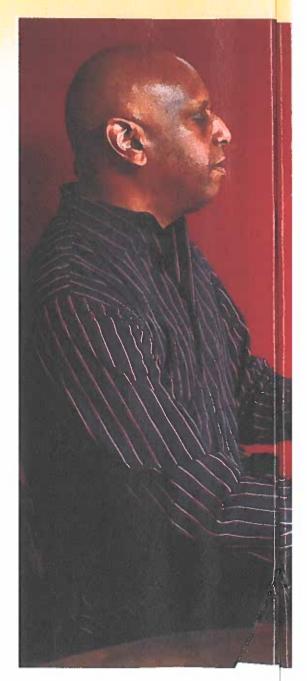
AC: What were your first real gigs here? Who did you connect with first? BD: Well, my first real gig when I was here was with a band called OTB [Out of The Blue], which was put together by Blue Note Records. The original drummer was Ralph Peterson, Jr., a great drummer, great friend of mine, and a great musician. He's a wonderful guy. That band had Steve Wilson, Kenny Davis, Michael Mossman, and Ralph Bowen in it. By the time I got to town, things were changing in the personnel because those guys had been together for a year or two, and individually, some of them had started to branch out and do their own thing, including Ralph. So, I was coerced into subbing for Ralph while he was doing his leader work, and I ended up being in the band. That was my first exposure to travelling to Europe and Japan, My first year with them was incredible, and I had only been in New York for two weeks when I got the gig. I was kind of just thrown to the wolves very early on, and you know, quite honestly. I probably wasn't ready, but fortunately I got ready on the job. It helped me to grow quickly. And also, there were a lot of musicians my age that were also just getting to New York at the time.

AC: What year was this?

BD: 1987-88. I was playing with all my friends and we were all in the same boat. We were trying to get out there, and at that time, there were a lot of opportunities to play the guys who were our idols. Being in that band enabled me to travel and be exposed to all these other great musicians, and other great musicians were exposed to me. When I first went to the Mt. Fuji Jazz Festival, it was like a drummer's paradise for someone like me. I was riding on the bus with Roy Haynes, Art Blakey, Tony Williams, Victor Lewis, Lewis Nash, Kenny Washington, Ralph Peterson, Cindy Blackman, Clifford Barbaro, and I might be leaving somebody out. I'd see Roy Haynes at 2 PM, and then I'd see Art Blakey, and then I'd see Tony, and then I'd see my contemporaries who had much more experience than me; drummers like Kenny Washington, Lewis Nash, Ralph, and Victor Lewis, who's a bit older. Those guys were already

serious, bad dudes, and they were my friends too, so I was very fortunate to be around them.

After that, I joined Horace Silver's band, which was huge for me. Then I joined Joe Henderson's band, I joined Bobby Hutcherson's band, and then Buster Williams' band, and boom boom, boom, boom, boom. And in all those different situations, you grow because you're forced to rub shoulders with all these people who are way, way better musicians than you are. You learn just by keeping your mouth shut and trying to watch, then maybe asking some questions and listening to any suggestions they might have for



you. That was the real school, and it still is.

I recently got off the road with Ron Carter, and that was an amazing learning experience to be able to play with him. I've played with him over the years, but this was his ensemble, and so it was a whole different experience. So, thirty-some-odd years later, I still have these great opportunities and experiences to play with these people who have basically changed the way people play music, and that's a great thing to be able to do. I'm hopeful I can continue doing it, but I don't see too much of it happening anymore, because there are not many people

left of that caliber. The opportunities for a young musician to do that now are diminishing, so my advice to them is always play with someone way better more experienced than you, and I promise you'll learn something.

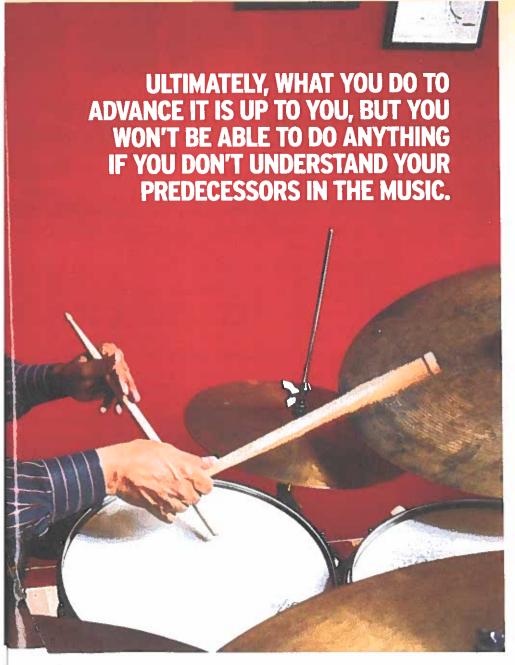
AC: Now, when it comes to practicing, because I know having studied with you and from others who have as well, you're very much into the vocabulary and transcription of the greats. Was that part of your practice growing up; were you into transcribing and learning solos by your idols?

BD: No, transcribing was not my thing. I've never transcribed one solo. But

that doesn't mean I didn't cop. I didn't steal, and I didn't borrow verbatim what somebody did by listening and just trying to play what I heard. That's the way I did it. Some people need to see it, and some people need to be meticulous about it and write it out and play what they've written out-I wasn't one of those people. So, what ended up happening was that I was going for what I thought it sounded like, and a lot of the time, the way I was playing it might not have been the way that they played it in terms of stickings and such. In some instances what would happen is that I'd be doing it 'wrong', but it would give me my own interpretation, and that could be a good thing, because then you start developing your own vocabulary based on what you stole and did wrong. Now, my good friend, and one of my mentors, is Kenny Washington. He's into getting the stickings exactly like Max, Philly Joe Jones, or whoever it is, and he's a real stickler, excuse the pun, of the stickings. I remember talking to him about a pattern and he goes, "No man, that's not right, he did it like this," and I go, "Well, I guess I've been doing it this way for 30 years. It's too late to change now!" In fact, I have the stickings over there on that piece of paper on the music stand. I'm trying to relearn some of the things that I play with the correct sticking, but it's very difficult to change after playing the drums for fiftysomething years. But I'm trying. I see the virtues of it, and I see the virtues of interpretation, because you are who you are, you have to be who you are, and your sound is who you are.

AC: I always found that you have a very distinct voice while playing straight-ahead jazz, which is rare, because I've always thought that these days people are just 'copping' a lot when playing straight-ahead. I feel like you 'cop', but as you said earlier, really create your own voice with it at the same time.

BD: Yeah, I didn't do that purposely. I wasn't like, "I gotta sound like me." When you're developing, you just want to play. That's what I was doing, but inadvertently, this happened. But also, another part of it was growing up in an environment where no one was saying: "You have to listen to this and only this." As you know, there a



lot of little cliques now in the New York jazz scene, where guys don't really deal with each other, and when I was growing up, there wasn't any of that division.

AC: You're a much more free thinker that way, and I know from going to jazz school, it was very much: "You should listen to this and interpret it this way" and you'd have the cliques, but I've always found you had a very openminded approach to jazz, and that's really cool.

BD: Well yeah, because you can like whatever you like, and don't go by what somebody else tells you. Be your own person, and think, "Let me see what this is. Oh, Art Ensemble of Chicago. Let me see if I like any of that. Let me see if I like any of Hank Mobley. Let me see if I like any of Jan Garbarek. Let me see if I like Tony Williams Lifetime." Don't let someone tell you, "That's jive, don't listen to that." That's bullshit." It might be bullshit to them, but there might be something there that you identify with, and that's my whole idea behind it. There are so many different flavors because there are so many different people. How can you say somebody is better than somebody else when you're talking about creativity and art? If someone says, "This guy's better than this guy," well, then why do you say that? Put Tony Williams with Count Basie's band of the late '50s: is he going to be better than Sonny Payne? I don't know. But put Sonny Payne with Tony Williams Lifetime, and is he going to better? [Laughs]

#### AC: Good point.

BD: It's all good, and you take what you want to take from all of it. To me it's like, "I'll take a little bit of that, I'll take a little bit of that, I'll take a lot of that, I'll take a lot of that, not so much of that, but there's some pieces of that I really like." I found that that mentality allowed me to fit into all these different musical situations. I never dreamed I'd be playing with Andrew Hill, or Carla Bley, or Sonny Rollins or Freddy Hubbard, or Bobby Hutcherson, or Steve Kuhn, or Stanley Cowell. All these people, they're all different, but they're all under the same umbrella because of the way the music business sets

everything up. Yet, they're all very different in their approaches to music, and if I wasn't aware of those different approaches, I wouldn't be able to play with them. I know that when I play with Andrew Hill, it's a totally different musical mentality than if I play with Steve Kuhn.

AC: In terms of the approach and vocabulary?

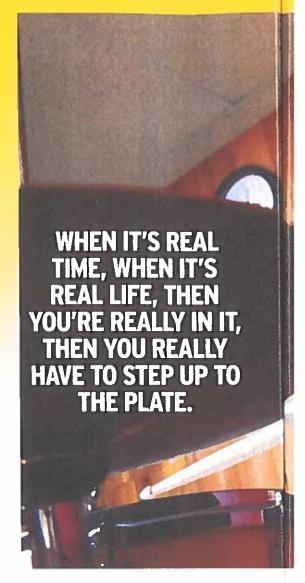
BD: It's a different approach and vocabulary, but also a musical understanding of where that person is by having listened to their recorded output. You listen to what you like, and I actually like both Hank Jones and Andrew Hill. The vocabulary is different, and you have to tweak your own so that it fits that person's musical vision. Playing with Horace Silver is not like playing with Andrew Hill, so if you don't have the understanding of Horace Silver's music from, let's say, Art Blakey and Louis Hayes, Roy Brooks and Roger Humphries, Alvin Queen and Billy Cobham, you won't understand the different perspectives. All those drummers could probably switch on various gigs. but they'd play with the sensibilities of that bandleader's music, and an understanding of their vision. I just wanted to be one of those drummers.

AC: Going back to what you said about the learning experiences, was there one particular experience that you found transformative, one where you got either your ass handed to you or it opened doors and light just went on?

BD: Not one; there were many. Probably almost every time I get put into a new musical situation. And that's what it should be. I hope that I learn something every time I get a chance to play with somebody. I hope that I learn something, and then I hope that I'm going to be able to apply it the next time. Like just recently working with Ron Carter, I learned so much.

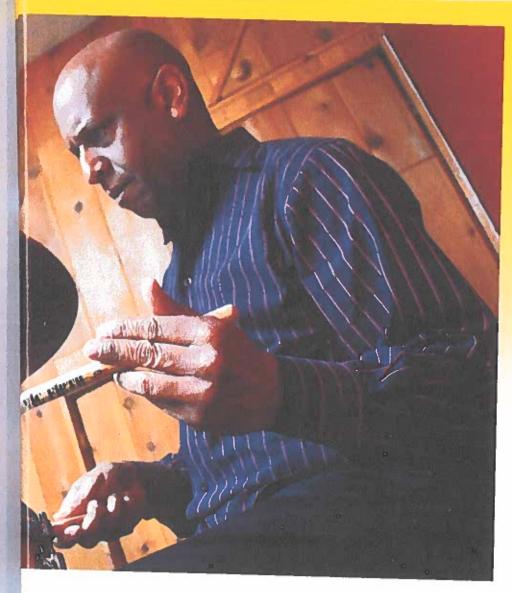
### AC: What were some of the things you learned?

BD: I learned about him, and about what he wanted, and I learned what I needed to do to give him what he wanted. That happens with almost everybody. Like when I joined Carla



Bley: I had never in my wildest dreams expected to play with her. And, that happens with everybody. I never expected to play with Andrew Hill, or Buster Williams, or Joe Henderson. But I liked them all, and I owned records from all of them, so that helped prepare me, unbeknownst to me, to play with them. So, when I did, at least I had that on my side, but there was so much more that I had to learn. When it's real time, when it's real life, then you're really in it, then you really have to step up to the plate. Then it's about a musical sensibility and sensitivity, and being able to adapt to whatever that situation is. And that means being open-minded enough to want to learn. I want to please this person, and I want to make this person's music come to life with my personal interpretation as best I can. And so that's the answer to your question: Every time I play with

O52 BiLLY DRUMMOND drumheadmag.com



someone, the light comes on. And that should always be the case even if you never want to do it again.

#### AC: Being a perpetual student?

BD: Right. Basically, even if you decide, "I don't really like this, I don't want to do this, and I'd rather spend my time doing something I enjoy." That happens. I'm sure it happens for you, where you're in situations where you took the gig because you're not doing anything, it pays some money and you want to check this out. And you just go do it and you realize, "That's not something I want to devote any time to." Then you get into situations where you realize that this is going to be good if I can get my shit together enough to make it work.

AC: And because you've always had an open mind, how does that translate

when teaching at a place like Julliard, which is pretty straight ahead and conservative?

BD: Well, I don't know if that's the right way to describe it, but my teaching hasn't been influenced by anyone's else's doctrine necessarily. I still try to be as honest as I can in my teaching, and it's not like I'm trying to get students to play like me and I'm not trying to get students to play like anything or anyone in particular. I just want them to play well so that when they get out there, they can play a gig. I try to turn them on to as much music as I can. I can't give them what I don't have, so if somebody wants to come to me and talk about the stuff that you do, I'll say, "Man, I've got a good friend named Alex Cohen. Call him!"

AC: If someone came to me and said, "I want to learn the deepest

jazz vocabulary," I'd say, "Here's Billy Drummond's number!"

BD: And that's it. I try to just be honest with my students. They're in school and they have questions and I answer them with as much honesty and professionalism as I can. And then I try and say, "Hey man, check this out," to show them something new. It's not about, "You must like this," it's more like, "Here's some information. See what you can take from it, see what you can use, and then we can talk about it some more in depth." I can tell someone what I got from it and turn them onto that, and hopefully, they'll get something from it, and interpret it their way. Hopefully at the university level, they're in a position to start looking at things from that perspective.

Now sometimes we have to get to the nuts and bolts stuff, like what we were talking about: just being able to play the instrument. And honestly, everybody at every stage of development can still work on that kind of stuff; we're never too experienced to not want to perfect something as basic as a roll. I remember spending a whole break with Elvin Jones up in his dressing room. His wife served us lemonade and cacao, and it was me and Elvin Jones for like an hour. It was my first time seeing him, and I remember asking him all these drum nerdy questions like, "Why did you leave Gretsch drums" and "Where did you get your old Ks from?" One of the things I asked him was, "What do you practice, and what do you currently work on?" And he said, "I'm still trying to get my roll together. I really want to be able to play a good clean roll." I was thinking, "Man, all those records, your rolls are incredible." With Trane and all those Blue Note Records... So, here's Elvin Jones, considered one of the greatest drummers of all time, talking about working on something rudimentary. And that's something that I believe, if you're a drummer, you should be able to do. I mean, you're going to have to do that at some point in your career even if it's the end of the tune. You have to do a roll! I can put on Frank Arsenault's rudimental thing of him playing a long roll, and then put on Art Blakey playing a long roll. I can play Buddy Rich playing a long roll. I can play Tony playing a long roll.

I can play Louis Bellson playing a long roll. They can all do it, and it would be slightly different. And probably one guy would look at the other and say, "Man, how do you do it like that?" And then he would look at the other guy and say, "How do you do it like that?" And so, when you're talking about the top of the heap players, and I love all of their rolls, maybe Elvin felt that his wasn't the way he wanted it to be. Maybe he was looking at Philly Joe Jones' roll and saying, "I want it to be like that" or "I want it to be like Art Blakey's." Or maybe Steve Gadd, who has a great press roll, wants it to sound more like Billy Cobham's.

AC: I've always seen your approach as: Having one eye in the past but you constantly staying in the present, as far as vocabulary goes, and I think it's a good attitude for a jazz musician to have, because jazz is constantly evolving.

BD: Well if you want to play jazz drums, you're not going to be able to make any advancements unless you know the fundamental vocabulary, and that means studying the music and its drummers that have come before, because that is the original vocabulary. And ultimately, what you do to advance it is up to you, but you won't be able to do anything if you don't understand your predecessors in the music. If you get called to play a gig with Kenny Barron, well then, if you don't speak the language that Kenny Barron speaks from a drummer's point of view or a musician's point of view, then you're not going to be able to play with him. Same thing with Chris Potter: Chris Potter can go back and immediately play Bird tunes. When I first met him, he was playing with Red Rodney playing alto, and Red Rodney was calling him "the new Bird." He's a well-rounded musician, and he understands the vocabulary, as do many of these musicians today. Christian McBride, Dave Holland, John Scofield, Roy Hargrove...these guys, their scope is very, very wide. They don't just come out of nowhere. They've done a lot of preliminary hard, heavy lifting to get to where they are now. And their success is based off of an understanding of a vocabulary of past present, and they're part of the

future. Wouldn't you say?

AC: Of definitely.

BD: That's why it's very important to say, "Let's transcribe a Max Roach solo," so that you can understand how to play on a form, and so you can understand the melodicism of a four-piece drum set. You don't have to play like Max Roach, but you have to understand that's part of the vocabulary, and it's going to help you play the way you're going to end up playing. That's the perspective I see when I talk about understanding the vocabulary and the history; there's a lot there to be discovered that's not just a relic. I mean, how hip is Roy Haynes? He's still playing like he's from the future, and he's played with everybody since the mid '40s. He invented the way we play, and you can still go see him. And some of my students don't even do that, and it's like, "Man, you're in New York, you're a sophomore, you've been in New York a couple years, and you've never seen Roy Haynes?" That's Iudicrous. He invented the way you're trying to play the drums. That would be like if Henry Ford was still alive and he was doing a dissertation or a lecture on how he developed the combustion engine. That would be fascinating if you're an engineering student! You're not going to see Bird, you're not going to see Trane, you're not going to see Monk, you're not going to see Eric Dolphy, you're not going to see Bud Powell, you're not going to see Sarah Vaughn. They're all dead, but he was their drummer, and he's going to be your closest link to seeing all those people. You're not going to see Max, you're not going to see Art Blakey, you're not going to see Philly Joe, you're not going to see Tony, and you're not going to see Kenny Clarke. Roy is part of the seven drummers that invented modern jazz drumming, and he's the only one that's alive. That's it. He's left. Go see him. You're not going to see those other people, and no, YouTube is not good enough. You have to go see him while you can, because in 20 years, when he's not here, someone who's twenty years old is going to say, "Man, you saw Roy Haynes?! What was that like?!" And then you'll be able

you'll carry that experience with you for the rest of your life.

AC: I know I do. I remember seeing Roy Haynes play several times. BD: Yeah, when he's not here anymore, you're going to be the guy

AC: Same way I felt when I saw Hank Jones play.

people talk to about it!

BD: Yeah, you saw Bird's piano player. You saw Bird's drummer. You didn't see Bird, but you saw the guy that was standing next to him. You saw a guy who really invented playing the drums, and one of the seven guys in my opinion that really shaped modern jazz drumming. I mean, there have been other guys that have evolved from that school of course, but these guys, they're the origins of modern jazz drumming.

AC: Now this is coming from me as your student at NYU, but what do you still work on? Do you still practice?

BD: Oh yeah, I still practice. I work on all kinds of things that I have difficulty with, and things that I feel like I could play better. I try to practice brushes, I try to practice playing fast tempos, and I'm very conscientious of sound. I really want to get a good sound out of the instrument, and every drummer that I like has a sound that I'm drawn to. It's not just what they play, it's the sound they get. For example, Billy Higgins' sound and his touch: I try to emulate that. And that distinct sound is directly connected to the way that that person plays. That's kind of nuanced drummer shit: The average person wouldn't be able to hear Lewis Hayes play a ride cymbal and then hear Billy Higgins play a ride cymbal and know the difference. We would, because we're so in tune with that. That's the nuance and deeper type of stuff that I look into from drummers like Ed Blackwell or Pete LaRoca-it's their sound and personality that comes through once you get past the licks and phrases. You get deeper into the human part of it. Nobody sounds like Elvin Jones, even though we've all practiced our Elvin Jones licks. Nobody sounds like Billy Cobham. We all tried, but we never got it. You hear him, and it's like, "There it is!" You talk about Simon

054 BILLY DRUMMOND drumheadmag.com

to say, "It was boom boom" and



Phillips, Dennis Chambers; those guys are Billy Cobham devotees. But they've got their own sound by trying to sound like him. They've got their own interpretation of him. Now you hear people trying to play like Tony. Vinnie Colaiuta's trying to play Tony, but he doesn't sound like Tony. He's got his own sound, and that's the beautiful part. I saw him play with Sting, and it was incredible, man.

#### AC: He is indeed.

BD: That was my first time seeing him. I'd seen him on video, and I could hear little things and I'd think, "Oh, that's Tony," but it doesn't sound like Tony: It sounds like Vinnie.

AC: As someone who's very steeped in the tradition, are there any younger players that you like?

BD: Oh yeah, man. I like Marcus Gilmore, Kendrick, Scott, and Nasheet Waits. I like some of my former students, like Aaron Kimmel, Ulysses Owens, Pete Van Nostrand, Reggie Quinnerly, Carmen Intorre, and Jimmy Macbride. I like anybody that plays well and is really out there doing it. Those guys are younger than myself, but I love the guys my age as well. I love Carl Allen, Kenny Washington. and Lewis Nash. I love Tain, And I love the generation above them, like Victor Lewis, Adam Nussbaum, Al Foster, Billy Hart, Jack DeJohnette, and Lenny White. And even before them, Jimmy Cobb, Louis Hayes, and Papa Daddy Roy Haynes! I still like all the

guys I always like, and the girls too. I love Cindy Blackman and Terri Lynne, but I don't think of them as women drummers; I just think of them as great drummers. There's some music I'm not really exposed to, like the metal you showed me this morning, I was like, "I can get with that! I can definitely borrow something from that."

AC: Now that's something that's really cool to hear from a Julliard faculty member!

BD: I'm not divisive. I'm trying to be inclusive. I try to be honest, and if you don't like something, it's not about the category. It's not about the genre. I listen to Alison Krauss and Union Station, and that's got nothing to do with Bird and Bud Powell and Trane, but I like listening to it.

#### AC: It's good stuff.

BD: But I also like Roberta Flack and Billie Holiday. And I like Youn Su Nah. Bjork, Tula Vera, and Kendrick Lamar. It's all just good music. You have to live your time, and your time is now. There are a lot of drummers now that are informed by gospel music, rap, and hip-hop. That's because it's the product of their time. Philly Joe Jones didn't have that: he was influenced by what was around during his time, and that's why he sounded like he did. There's no rock 'n' roll influence in Philly Joe Jones' drumming, because there was no rock 'n' roll. When you hear someone like Elvin Jones, you hear no rock 'n' roll influence, because he wasn't from that

Dri	ıms	
Gre	etsch	
18"	x16"Kick	
12"	x8" Rack	
14"	x14" Floor	
14"	x5.5" Snare	
Сүі	nbals	
Zilo	ljian	
14"	K Hi-hats	
20"	K Ride	
22"	Ride	
20"	K Constantinople Bounce Ride	
He	ads	
Rer	no	
Coa	ited Ambassadors	TW-
Sti	cks	

Vic Firth

era. You hear Tony Williams, and you do hear a rock influence because he's from that era. He was 17 or 18 when the Beatles broke, so he was still very impressionable, and that's why he could go and do Lifetime. That's the way I see it. If you had come up in my time there was no speed metal, there were the beginnings. Where does that come from? Like in 73/74, what band would you say influenced the music that you play? Deep Purple? Black Sabbath?

AC: Yep, those are two good ones. BD: And what drummers?

AC: Billy Cobham definitely was one with double bass. Terry Bozzio was a big one, for sure. Simon Phillips as well. And arguably, Rufus Jones and Louie Bellson.

BD: Right because those were the experimental innovators of playing with two bass drums.

AC: I think the first blast beat ever was done by Art Blakey.

BD: Ah!

AC: I've heard Tony Williams on some videos do it faster than a lot of metal drummers can.

BD: There you go. One of Tony's biggest influences was Art Blakey, and without Tony there would be no Billy Cobham, and without Billy Cobham there'd be no you guys! Without Louie Bellson there'd be no Billy Cobham. You know? So it's all connected, and that's why I say go and check out as much as you can and take what you like and discard what you don't like, and that's going to help make up who you are, and you'll be better off and more well-rounded for it.

► WEBFOOT billydrummonddrums.com