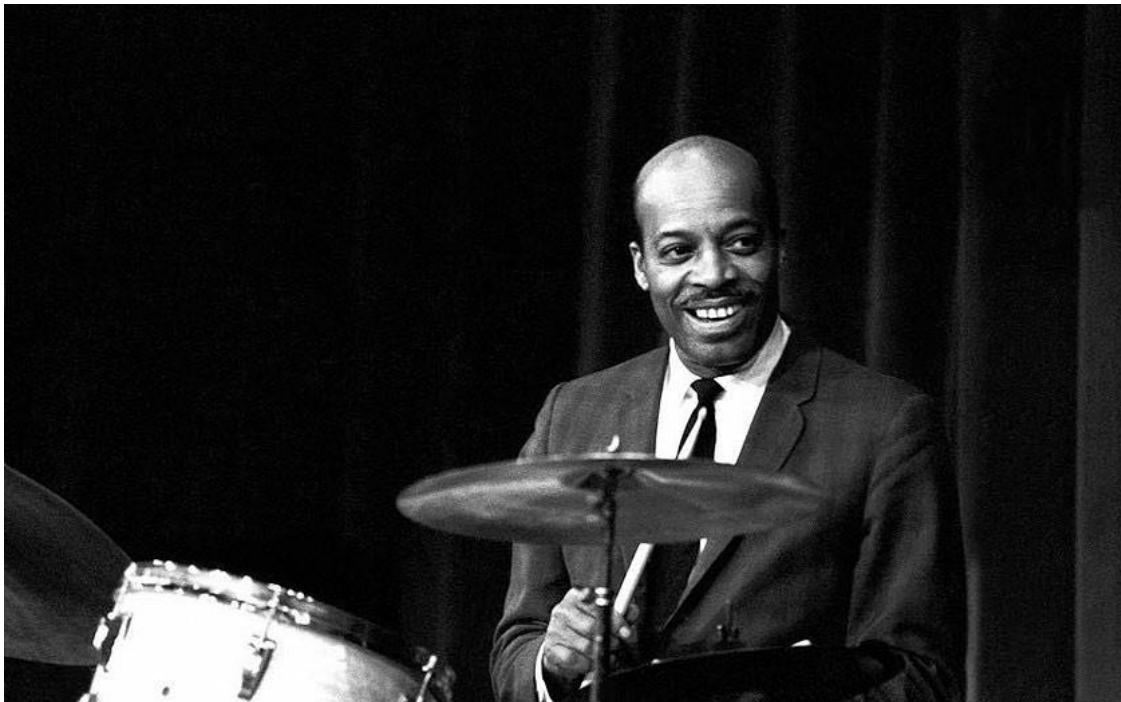


BEAT ME DADDY, 8 TO THE BAR: THE RHYTHM BUSINESS IN JAZZ

by Ian Muldoon*

“Drums should be *played*, even caressed, but never *banged*.”

-Philosophy of drumming attributed to Jonathan David Samuel (Jo) Jones (7/10/11 – 3/9/85)



Jo Jones: drums should never be “banged”... PHOTO CREDIT JAN PERSSON



**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child’s ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

“The universal language of man isn’t music. It’s rhythm. That’s the one thing that people all over the world understand. The drum. The beat: boom, boom, boom. The person who sits behind the drum set gives us the foundation, the heartbeat of jazz.”

-Foreststorn "Chico" Hamilton, (20/9/21 – 25/11/13)



Chico Hamilton: the universal language of man is rhythm...

“Without music life would be a mistake.”

-Friedrich Nietzsche



Friedrich Nietzsche: without music life would be a mistake...

Some African Americans have claimed that “white” jazz musicians had no rhythm, at least no rhythm like “black” musicians, and they couldn’t “swing” like black musicians. In any case, the story went, rhythm was the black jazz man’s business so just leave it alone and let the black man have at least ONE thing he could musically call his own. Louis Jordan (a favourite of John Coltrane), Jimmy Lunceford, Cab Calloway and Chick Webb, it was said, could swing as opposed to the white man’s version epitomised by Glenn Miller - a tight band true, but those with the attitude “honkys don’t swing” conveniently forget the brilliance of Miller’s white drummer Ray McKinley who was loose and a swinger. Consider as one example *Louis Armstrong With Tommy Dorsey And His Orchestra*: Armstrong, trumpet, vocal; George Thow & Toots Camarata, trumpets; Bobby Byrne, Joe Yukl & Don Mattison, trombones; Jimmy Dorsey, clarinet, alto sax; Jack Stacey, clarinet, alto sax, baritone sax; Fud Livingston & Skeets Herfurt, clarinet, tenor sax; Bobby Van Eps, piano; Roc Hillman, guitar; Slim Taft, bass; and Ray McKinley, drums; and their recording on 7/8/36 of *Swing That Music* (Armstrong/Gerlach) with the lyric:

*To play in a band
When they swing that music
Oh I'm as happy as can be
When they swing that music for me*



Ray McKinley: he was loose and a swinger... PHOTO CREDIT WILLIAM P GOTTlieb

Armstrong and McKinley take the lead, and the music is lifted mainly by their contributions. Improvisation is not the be all and end all of this music! “....everything he (Armstrong) did with both trumpet and voice *swung*, establishing the rhythmic

feeling that some feel is ultimately his biggest contribution, since that swing feeling defined much of the most lasting music of the 20th century”.*

A common cry has been that African American music has been appropriated by “whites” who have made a fortune out of it. There is much evidence in rock music that this may be the case - Bo Diddley as opposed to the Yardbirds for example. But ruthless market forces - what is saleable, who has the money to buy, who has the most commercial appeal - are not concerned with the origins of the music, or the artistic qualities inherent in one piece over another. If the white English rock band the Yardbirds recording of Bo Diddley’s *I’m A Man* outsells the original by a factor of five, that’s business.



Bo Diddley: If the Yardbirds’ recording of his “I’m A Man” outsells the original by a factor of five, that’s business...

In jazz these matters are more complicated and there are contradictions, but an infamous example of this very issue occurred in print following the 1936 “Swing Concert” featuring 17 bands including Armstrong’s, which concluded the event. At this time *Downbeat* magazine sometimes featured racist cartoons about black musicians, and ran a readers’ poll on the 1936 Swing Concert to vote on the “best swing band”. The most amassed votes were for Tommy Dorsey and Gene Krupa; Armstrong lost to Beiderbecke in the trumpet category; the best swing band was Benny Goodman, with 3,534 votes, followed by Casa Loma with 2,102. Armstrong got 38 votes.**

Some controversies probably reached their passionate height in the immediate postWW11 period when bebop hit the scene. There were at least two major artistic or stylistic conflicts about the music at that time.

*Ricky Riccardi, *Heart Full of Rhythm: The Big Band Years of Louis Armstrong*, OUP, NY, 2020, p 5. In 1936 Armstrong was billed as “The King of Swing” and was a sensation touring across the USA (*ibid*, Riccardi, p 183)

***ibid*, Riccardi, p 185.

The first was between the swing and bebop movements and the mouldy figs. In print, the mouldy figs' most significant writer was Rudy Blesh in his 1946 work *Shining Trumpets*. Blesh "argued that Armstrong 'inherited' a 'responsibility' to what Blesh referred to as 'true jazz'." Blesh lamented "His grasp of what jazz means, the sort of group effort which it must represent, unfortunately failed to match his genius." But Armstrong felt no allegiance to "true jazz" which, in Blesh's limited definition, solely referred to small group New Orleans polyphonic ensembles. (ibid; Riccardi, p 7). Thus the amazing big band work Armstrong did in the 1930s is not "jazz", according to Blesh and his devotees.



SHINING TRUMPETS A HISTORY OF JAZZ

RUDI BLESCH

Bebop was represented by the intellectually astute, politically aware, technically brilliant and musically original African American musicians labelled but not self-identifying as the "bebop" movement, which included pre-eminently Charlie Christian, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, J J Johnson, Charles Mingus and Max Roach.

The mouldy figs were mainly involved with the British and British Commonwealth jazz scene, who saw swing and bebop as aberrations and a breakaway from the "purity" of New Orleans collective improvisations without the use of musical scores. Traditional jazz (so-called) enjoyed a revival at this time especially in Britain, and was played and promoted mainly by non-African Americans. The most significant American "white" "traditional" jazz bands at this time were probably Eddie Condon's and Turk Murphy's. But the former, in particular, not only had some of the finest musicians of the swing era in its various combinations - Cliff Leeman and George Wettling the drummers among them, Walter Page who had been Basie's bassist was on board as well - but really swung.



Eddie Condon's groups included some of the finest musicians of the swing era, including drummers Cliff Leeman (left) and George Wettling (below)...



In short, the classic New Orleans retrograde “classic jazz” revival bands, the mouldy figs that some British jazz “purists” revered, were doomed, if not to extinction then to serious marginalisation.

The second major conflict was between the West Coast or cool sound and the hard-bop movement. The first might be typified on an alto saxophone by the thin melodic wanderings of Lee Konitz against the passionate urgency of Jackie McLean. Bebop with its speed, convoluted harmonic and melodic explorations, seemed to distant the music from the involvement of listeners: dance gave way to look and listen and pay attention to how clever we are, how cool, how hip, how politically aware, compared to the entertaining Uncle Tom personas of the Calloways, the Armstrongs, the Luncefords.



The conflict between the West Coast or cool sound and the hard-bop movement might be typified on an alto saxophone by the thin melodic wanderings of Lee Konitz (above) against the passionate urgency of Jackie McLean (below)... KONITZ PHOTO CREDIT FRANS SCHELLEKENS; McLEAN PHOTO CREDIT FRANCIS WOLFF



The hard-bop movement of Art Blakey was intended to bring dance and movement and listener involvement back into the equation. Drummers like Blakey and Max Roach provided polyrhythmic interplay with their soloists - Clifford Brown, Lee Morgan, Wayne Shorter, Freddie Hubbard. So it was that bop could swing too, eminently in Horace Silver's various aggregations.



Drummers like Art Blakey (above, here pictured with L-R, Wayne Shorter & Lee Morgan) and Max Roach (below) provided polyrhythmic interplay with their soloists...BLAKEY PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST; ROACH PHOTO COURTESY TWITTER



The notion that “bebop” was anti-swing, or anti-dance, or anti-rhythm was a simplistic attitude contradicted famously by Thelonious Monk who would sometimes get up and dance during performances of his own group, and

whose whole style was based on a variety of rhythmic explorations that made rhythm more interesting, more emotionally moving and involving, and more dramatic - the rousing climax of swing arrangements gave way to the building of tension using surprise and space.



Thelonious Monk (above) would sometimes get up and dance during performances of his own group...

It was also contradicted by the work of Dizzy Gillespie, whose angled trumpet was, prophetically, initially caused by someone dancing at a party who knocked his trumpet over and bent it. Gillespie decided to leave it that way and it became a signature instrument of his. And the bebop “revolution” might better be called a brilliant evolution as the music and rhythm in particular didn’t disappear or indeed radically change, but became more interesting and just as involving and propulsive as it was in the Swing Era. Gillespie was especially involved in developing Latin rhythms by listening to percussionist Chano Pozo and pulling the rhythms to pieces so to speak, and using them in his music. *Manteca* (Gillespie/Pozo) and *Tin Tin Deo* (Gillespie/Pozo) are two famous examples of their collaborations. Juan Tizol (*Caravan*) and Antonio Carlos Jobim (*Desafinado*) were also sources for his big band music.



Dizzy Gillespie's angled trumpet (see above) was initially caused by someone dancing at a party who knocked his trumpet over and bent it... Gillespie was especially involved in developing Latin rhythms by listening to percussionist Chano Pozo (below, pictured with Gillespie)... GILLESPIE PHOTO COURTESY PARIS MATCH; POZO PHOTO COURTESY NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS



The West Coast sound was one generated particularly by (white) alumni of the various Stan Kenton orchestras: Pepper Adams, baritone sax; Bob Cooper, tenor sax and oboe; Stan Getz, tenor sax; Richie Kamuca, tenor sax; Lennie Niehaus, alto sax; Jack Sheldon, trumpet and vocals; and Art Pepper, alto sax and clarinet, among them. Pianist Dave Brubeck with alto saxophonist Paul Desmond perhaps exemplified the West Coast sound, especially with its nod to European music. Brubeck often spoke of the influence of Darius Milhaud and Arnold Schoenberg in his musical education. In contrast, Art Blakey's music celebrated its African connections. George Shearing had Shelley Manne and Oscar Pettiford in his first trio - imagine the interconnectivity in that band! The swing! This bespectacled British white dude, and the white West Coast drummer and one of the great bassists of all

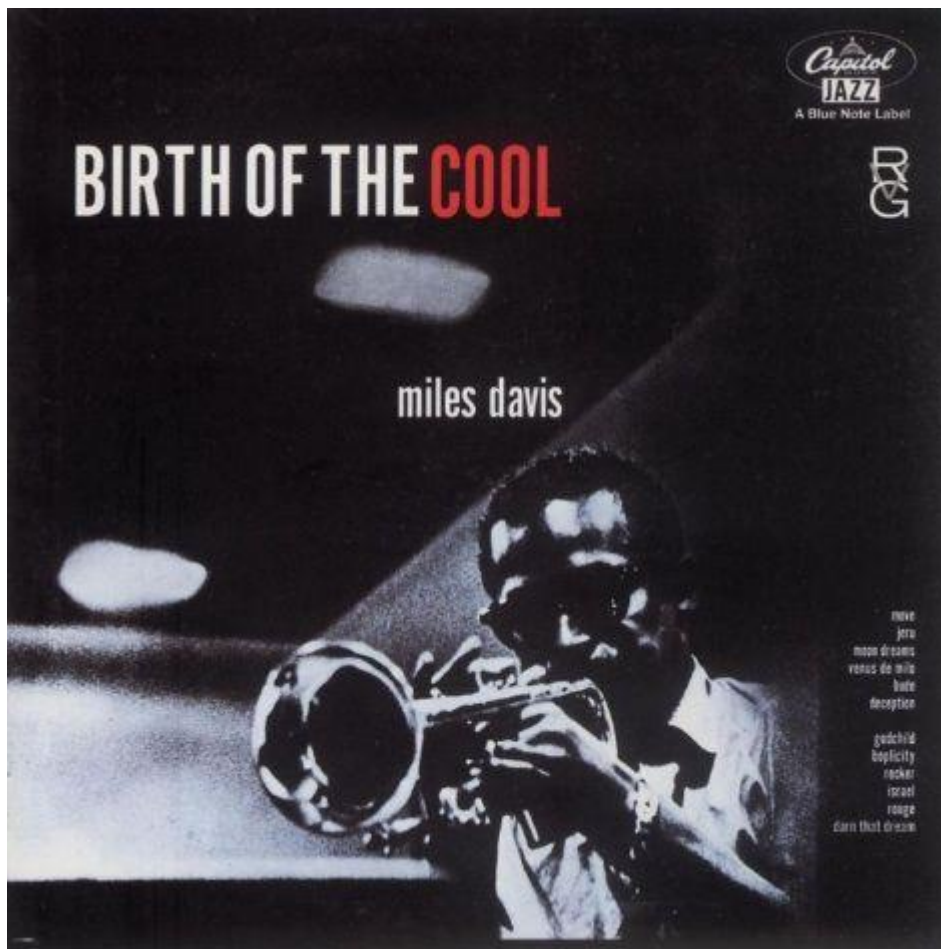
time (not just swing bassist) Oscar Pettiford, and they cooked at the Hickory House 52nd Street, New York. So much for the West versus East, and so much for black versus white. It was confusing! Especially so with Brubeck and Davis.



*George Shearing (above) had Shelley Manne (below) and Oscar Pettiford (far below) in his first trio - imagine the interconnectivity in that band! The swing!...MANNE & PETTIFORD
PHOTO CREDITS WILLIAM P GOTTLIEB*



(White) Brubeck's music really swung. (Black) Miles Davis was rapt by the music of (White) Gil Evans and (White) Lee Konitz and (White) Gerry Mulligan and produced an album known as *Birth of the Cool*.



Thelonious Monk was both a bebop original and one who was one of the greatest rhythmic players in the history of the music, especially when it came to introducing drama into rhythm by his use of space. His composition *Blue Monk* swings, even at the slowest tempo. Frankie Dunlop, long time drummer with Monk, relates this experience early in his tenure with Monk in 1960 at the Jazz Gallery NY:

We were in the back room and Monk said, 'You want to solo and play fast all the time. All drummers are that way. When you're playing fast, soloing, and throwing your sticks, you think you're really playing. In your estimation, that's the hardest. Well, you know, it's really harder to play slow than it is to play fast, and to swing and create something while you're doing it.' Monk finished talking to me, and we went up to the stand. Monk had his hat on. The place was packed. He started off the tune with an extra-slow tempo. I wondered what was going on. Charlie Rouse came in and played the ensemble; Monk jumped off the piano and started dancing during Charlie's solo. He danced over to me and said, 'Okay. Get to me now. Swing it, pal.' I was wondering if I was doing it. I had to concentrate so hard on the music that I couldn't look at the audience. I couldn't look at the door. I couldn't even look to see

what time it was. I had to swing. I thought, "Oh, my God." I was playing slow, which was the hardest thing for me. Monk would dance up to me and say, 'Okay Frankie, come on now. Let me see you swing now. Shit. I told you it ain't easy to swing when you're playing slow. I told you that, didn't I.' (Frankie Dunlop: Monk's Drummer by Steve H Siegel).



Frankie Dunlop (left): he created an ideal balance of precision and openness...

“With this unit (Monk's band) Dunlop made his defining mark. Wielding crisp yet fluid technique in the service of a forward moving, swinging pocket, Dunlop created an ideal balance of precision and openness. His quirky, unexpectedly placed fills served as both swinging links and responsive commentary to Monk’s angular and playfully fragmented phrases. And he intuitively understood Monk’s idiosyncratic swing feel, which sometimes straddled a bouncing 2 and a hard-swinging 4.” (Jeff Porter of *Modern Drummer*). Monk also influenced horn players, like John Coltrane.

A sterling example of a beautiful melody swung to brilliance is *Stardust* (Carmichael) recorded on 2/10/39 by Benny Goodman, clarinet; Lionel Hampton, vibraphone; Charlie Christian, guitar; Artie Bernstein, bass; and Nick Fatool, drums. To listen to the solos of Hampton and Christian is to be enveloped in the sweet groove that emanates from their playing, putting aside the bass and drums or the comping of Goodman, and apart from the melodic and improvisational power of their invention. Christian is credited with almost as much influence as Monk in the bebop movement evolving at this time. Monk’s influence extended to all instruments as the following comments reveal.

Coltrane's learning of *Trinkle, Tinkle* (Monk) whilst a member of Monk's Quartet for a five-month stint at the Five Spot in 1957, "so revolutionised Coltrane's rhythmic and phrasing style that it remained with him until the end of his life" (Stanley Crouch). The drama of Sonny Rollins was seated in his rushing, lagging, or floating over the beat - "he seemed to disengage from, expand, or contract pulse at will. The sense of rhythmic liberation is enormous. Technically it inherits features of Parker's displacements and Monk's spaces, and in any case, Rollins' playing is a dramatic synthesis of all the best features of the swing and bop heritage".*



John Coltrane's learning of Monk's "Trinkle, Tinkle" revolutionised his rhythmic and phrasing style, while Sonny Rollins' playing (below) is a dramatic synthesis of all the best features of the swing and bop heritage...



*John Litweiler, *"The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958"*, Da Capo, New York, 1984, p20). Nor were other bebop compositions "swingless".

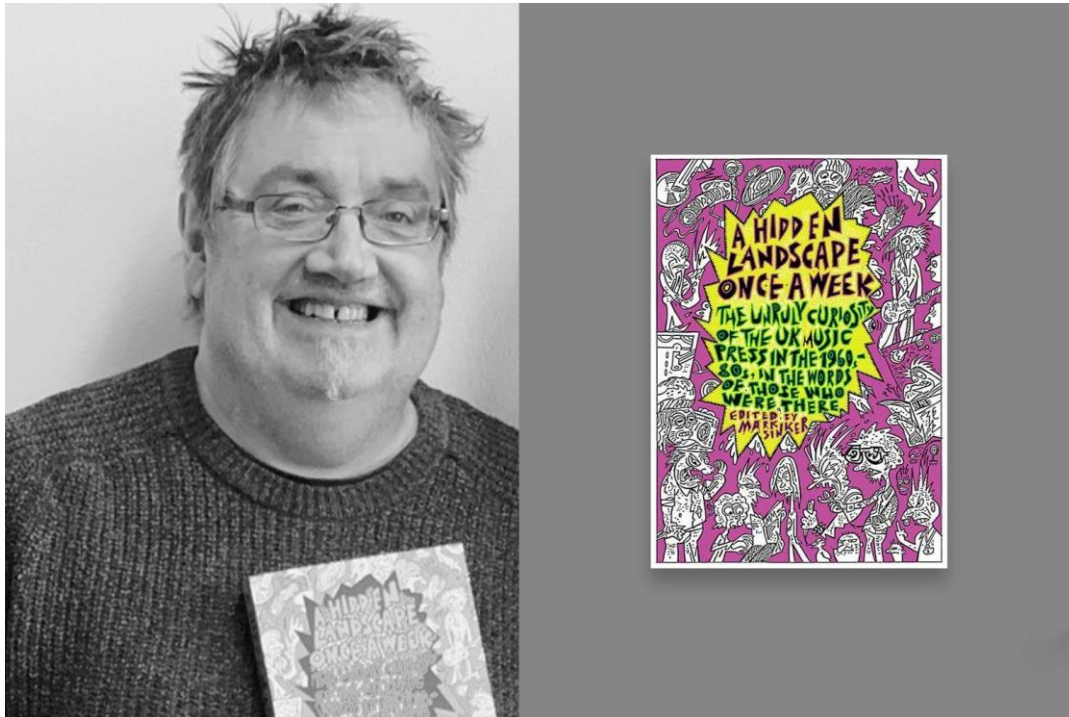
Bebop innovator Bud Powell's composition *Celia*, is given a powerful swing by Phineas Newborn on his *Here Is Phineas* (Atlantic, 1956), and by Gerald Clayton on his *Happening: Live At The Village Vanguard* (Blue Note, 2020) in which Joe Sanders, bass; and Marcus Gilmore, drums; really get in the groove, so to speak, and *swing*.



Marcus Gilmore: he and Joe Sanders (bass) really get in the groove, so to speak, and swing...

Nevertheless, rhythm or swing or “rock” in bebop or otherwise, have been considered the lowly bastard children of music, simplistic and basic, and of little real importance compared to improvisation or to the glory of melody or harmony or structure, or themes. One could hardly compare primitive bluesmen like Robert Johnson let alone “Negroes” banging away in the jungle to the wonders of Western culture, Mozart, Wagner, Puccini et al. Exceptionalism is not something the good citizens of the USA invented; the Europeans are masters at that particular attitude. Africa is perhaps still seen as the “Dark” continent - mysterious, unknown, primitive, backward, chaotic and so on. And racism still bubbles away - here's the composer Steve Reich talking about African American drummers:

In his recent book, “A Hidden Landscape Once a Week”, Mark Sinker reported his conversation with the photographer and writer, Val Wilmer, about when she interviewed Steve Reich, who had recently completed his landmark piece “Drumming”, based on drum patterns he heard in Ghana. Talking about an African American musician of mutual acquaintance, Reich said “he’s one of the only blacks you can talk to,” before adding “blacks are getting ridiculous in the States now”. Wilmer was shocked and enraged. “Wouldn’t you become politicised?” she concluded. The wider pressures on black composers in 1970s America can never be doubted.*



Mark Sinker & his book “A Hidden Landscape Once a Week”...

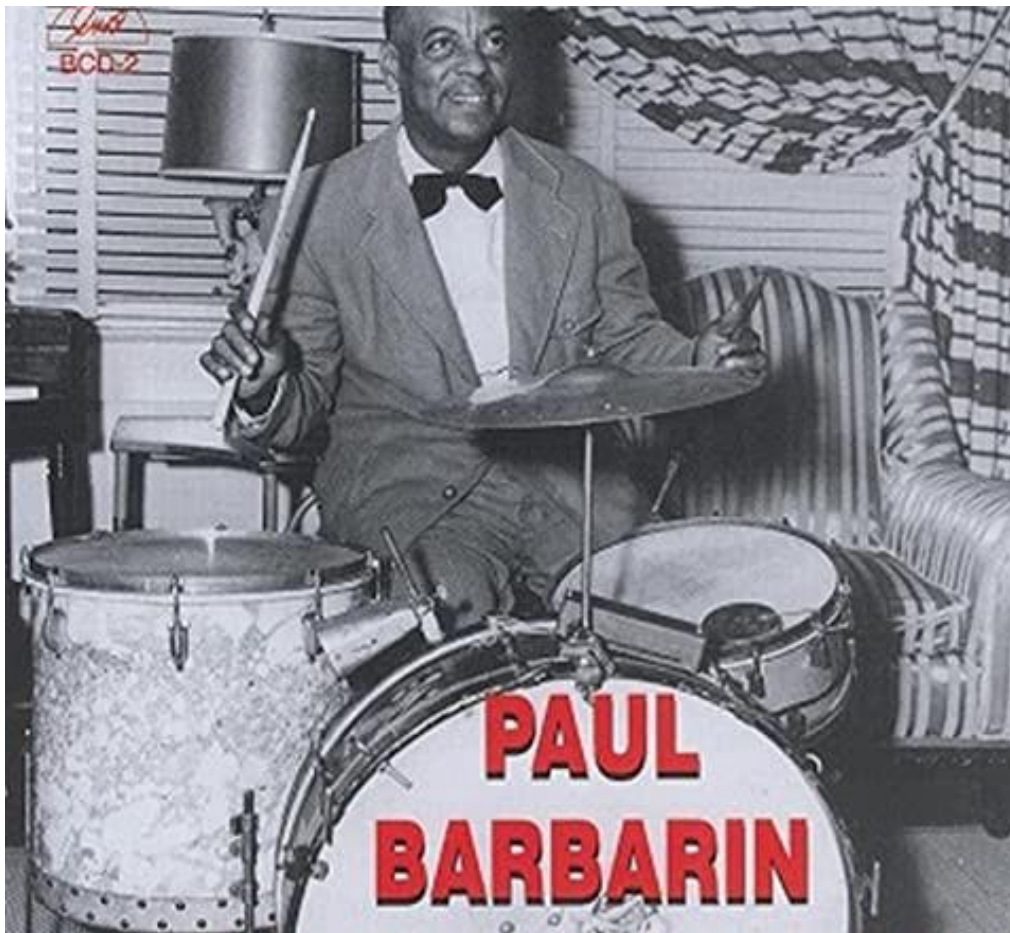
Yet comparisons have been made between cultures:

*Einstein was also a musician who played the violin and piano and whose admiration for Mozart inspired his theoretical work. “Einstein used mathematical rigor,” writes Alexander, as much as he used “creativity and intuition. He was an improviser at heart, just like his hero, Mozart.” [Stephon] Alexander [in his book “The Jazz of Physics”] has followed suit, seeing in the 1967 “Coltrane Mandala” the idea that “improvisation is a characteristic of both music and physics.” Coltrane “was a musical innovator, with physics at his fingertips,” and “Einstein was an innovator in physics, with music at his fingertips.***

*Quoted in the Guardian 7/9/20.

**Josh Jones, “The Secret Link Between Jazz and Physics: How Einstein & Coltrane Shared Improvisation and Intuition in Common”, Music, Physics, Science, TED Talks | July 9th, 2016).

If you've read this far I believe I have an obligation to declare my interest in this contract between reader and writer. I have five anthems - my first is *Rhythm Saved The World* (Cahn/Chaplin) recorded by Louis Armstrong on 18th January 1936 in New York. Louis Armstrong is my preferred listening over any classical music which is, let's face it, dead - but it won't lie down. Paul Barbarin was the drummer on *Rhythm Saved The World*. He died on 17/2/69 while playing snare drums during a Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans.



Paul Barbarin: the drummer on Louis Armstrong's "Rhythm Saved The World"...

My second anthem is Duke Ellington and the song he recorded in 1932, *It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* (Ellington/Mills) which in 2008 was inducted into the Grammy Hall Of Fame. The question may be: was the subtext of this song "African American jazz musicians can swing but others can't" (at least like us)? Maybe that was the subtext, maybe it wasn't. But the absurdity of suggesting that 'white folk can't swing' was put paid to by Bing Crosby scatting with instruments on the Ellington recording of *St Louis Blues* (Handy) recorded the same year. Indeed, of all popular singers, Bing Crosby's sense of rhythm was his road to success - he had no range, a mediocre tone - in short, an everyman's voice that Joe Blow could try to emulate whilst having a shower. But as for rhythm - amongst popular singers he was untouchable.



My second anthem, recorded in 1932, “It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)”...

My third anthem is *Swing, Brother, Swing* (Raymond/Bishop/Williams) recorded by Billie Holiday with Count Basie and His Orchestra at the Savoy Ballroom, New York City, 30/6/37, featuring the All Star Rhythm Section of Basie, piano; Freddie Greene, guitar; Walter Page, bass; and Jo Jones, drums. Notable for Billie Holiday singing way behind the beat, which is driven and powerfully evident in the chunk-chunk-chunk of Freddie Greene, and by the three cowbell hits by Jones at the start of the second chorus. If you want to yell after listening to this 1'52' taste of heaven, go ahead!



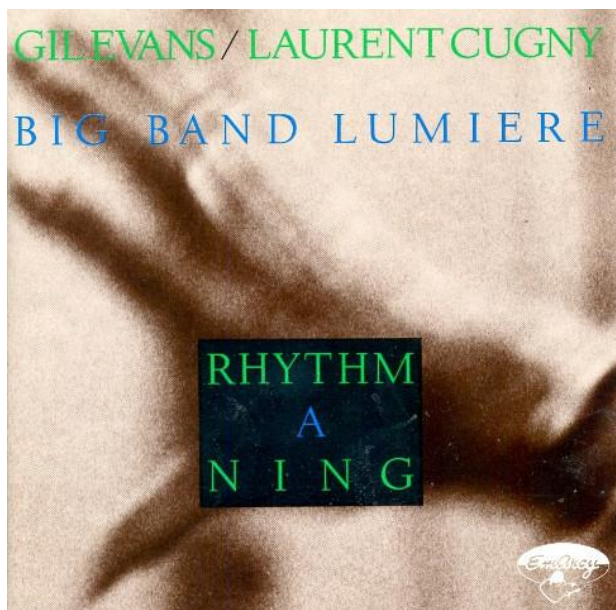
Billie Holiday & Count Basie: together on my third anthem, “Swing, Brother, Swing”...

My fourth anthem is *Crazy Rhythm* (Meyer/Wolfe) recorded by Anthony Braxton, alto saxophone; Kevin O'Neil, guitar; Kevin Norton, percussion; and Andy Eulau, bass; on 18/11/2003 at the Roma Jazz Festival, Rome, Italy the audience being witness to 16'50" of up-tempo swinging magic. Braxton is a saxophonist in the tradition of Lee Konitz, Paul Desmond and Jimmy Giuffre, and this quartet to my ear shows off his genius to best advantage, by not rehashing the past, but reinventing it with flair and pastiche that references some of the greatest musicians in the music, backed by a rhythm section to die for.



My fourth anthem is "*Crazy Rhythm*", recorded by Anthony Braxton (above), alto saxophone...

My fifth anthem is *Rhythm-A-Ning* (Monk) recorded 26/11/87 by Big Band Lumiere led by Gil Evans (piano, electric piano, arrangement) and Laurent Cugny (keyboards) from the Emarcy double CD *Gil Evans/Laurent Cugny*. Cugny's programme notes make the following remarks on a composition *Parabola* (Alain Shorter) which could apply in more general terms to the magnificent body of work of Gil Evans: "What makes this arrangement so particular is that there is no slot reserved for a solo. It's the rhythm section (and the percussion) in particular that assumes the role of soloist whilst the rest of the orchestra plays the written score - somewhat in the style of music inaugurated by Miles Davis Quintet with *Nefertiti* (Shorter)".



I've chosen those pieces not just for their obvious titles to hammer home my theme, but to provide evidence that some of the most memorable works in the music, some of the best works, have rhythm at their heart, as their very foundation (forgive the pun). And in the beginning, in the musical world, it was African American drummers who forged the way.



Chick Webb: Gene Krupa said he learned practically everything from him ... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ A HISTORY OF AMERICA'S MUSIC



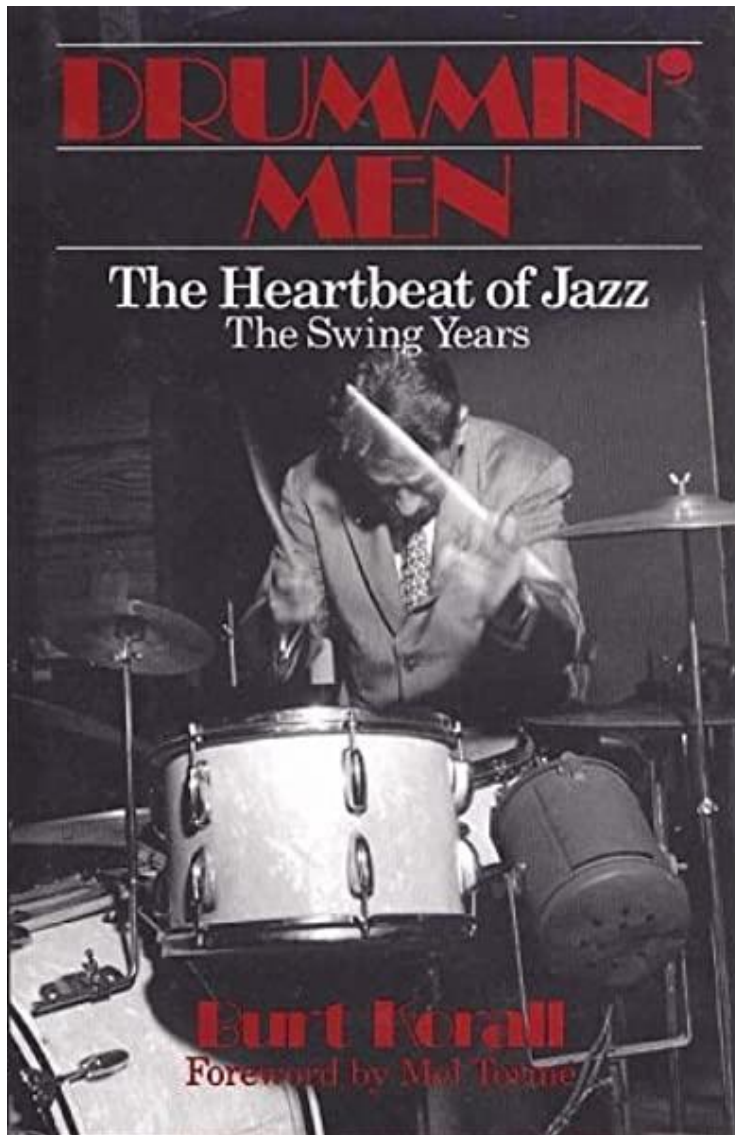
Gene Krupa: for him the drums were strictly a rhythm instrument...

The black drummers like Paul Barbarin, Baby Dodds and Chick Webb set the pace and led the way for the likes of Gene Krupa: “When I heard Chick (Webb) for the first time at the Dunbar Palace uptown he gave me an entirely different picture of jazz drums. I had admired Baby and Zutty; Cuba Austin, the drummer with McKinney’s Cotton Pickers, had flash and some good ideas. But Chick taught me more than anyone. I learned practically *everything* from him”.* But for Krupa the drums were strictly a rhythm instrument and the innovations of the new players Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, or Shelly Manne were not for him.

From the black drummers “came a seemingly endless flow of ideas and energy. They played with an unusual sense of freedom. With enviable cool, these canny gentlemen of rhythm gave lessons by merely *playing*. Not only did the great ones know how to lay down the ‘time’, they had a natural flair for adorning the beat, bringing to it expressive subtleties that both supported and inspired their colleagues. Just exactly how did they go about all this? By reaching into the jazz and blues tradition to which they had more immediate access than anyone else. In a most imaginative way,

*Quoted in Burt Korall, “Drummin’ Men”, Schirmer, NY, p 74).

they mingled the sound and rhythmic qualities of the comparatively primitive drum set: snare drum, bass drum, one or two mounted cymbals, a wood-block, perhaps a Chinese tom-tom tuned by punching holes in it. To the dancing pulse, the drummers added unexpected colours and other surprises - a sweep here, a roll there, a tick, a whack, or cymbal pattern down the line - to help the music breathe, define its rhythm, and come alive." (*Drummin' Men*, *ibid*; p 49).



But even amongst musicians it was not uncommon to hear drummers treated indifferently: "How many in your band Charlie?" one musical colleague might ask. "Twelve musicians and a drummer" might be the common reply. And Roy Haynes relates the joke at Ludwig (drum manufacturer) which tells the story of a meeting being arranged which was put this way: "All the musicians should be there by gam and drummers can come too."

And an excellent popular example of the attitude and prejudice (if you will) towards rhythm generally is a song *Mama, I Wanna Make Rhythm* (Jerome /Byron /Kent) from the film *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round* (1937) recorded by Cab Calloway & His

Cotton Club Orchestra. Notice the tom-tom is “primitive”, the scat would be seen as nonsense and the whole message is that rhythm is opposed to, indeed is not, “music”. It’s worth quoting the lyrics in full:

*Yasha was a prodigy since he was a kid of three
He could play a rhapsody as good as they come
But as strange as it may be Yasha hated melody
He had a yen for tympani, he longed to play a drum
When his mother made him practice on the fiddle
Everyday, he'd stop right in the middle
And he'd say
Mama, I wanna make rhythm
Don't wanta make music
Just wanna go zoozi, zah, zah, zoozi
Ooh, cah, dee, doodle, oodle, aah, doo
Mama, I wanna get hotcha
I wanta make boombah
I wanna go gah, gah
Za, rah, kah, zat, zow, ooh, dee, lah
I've got no desire to carry a Stradivarius
But there's no limit
Of primitive tom-tom in my tum-tum
Mama, I wanna make rhythm
Don't wanta make music
Just wanna go wookee ah kay akaya kaya
Yag a yag a yag a yag*



“Mama, I Wanna Make Rhythm” was recorded by Cab Calloway (above) & His Cotton Club Orchestra....

And who was labelled and promoted as the King of Swing? It's Yasha (Hebrew for 'salvation') a white guy. Benjamin David Goodman, the ninth child of David Goodman and Dora Grisinsky Goodman, Russian Jewish immigrants. Jazz musicians however knew that drummer Chick Webb was the real King and Louis Armstrong probably the true "King".



Jazz musicians knew that drummer Chick Webb was the real King and Louis Armstrong (above) was probably the true "King"...

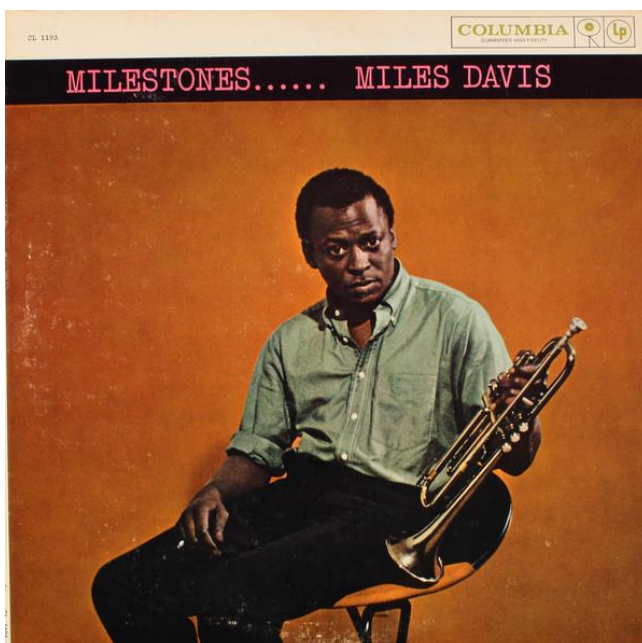
In short, the subject of rhythm is clouded by political, sociological, and cultural issues. It has been a topic riddled with stupid statements. To say Gerry Mulligan doesn't swing, or Brad Mehldau lacks rhythmic nuance or Jack Teagarden couldn't swing like Kid Ory, or Europeans just can't do it (Django Reinhardt?), or *Roly Poly* (Rose/Wills) by Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys doesn't swing, or George Shearing as an Englishman no less, is swingless, is to say something stupid.

Rhythmic masters like Lloyd Swanton decry their own substantial artistry even to the extent of naming one document *Simple* (Rufus, 1994).



Rhythmic masters like Lloyd Swanton (above) decry their own substantial artistry...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKOWN

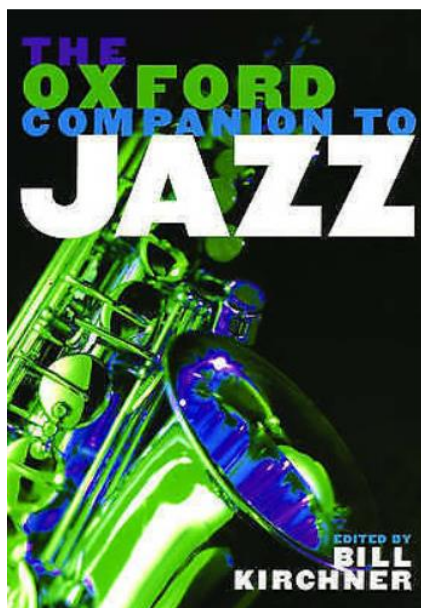
Rhythm is a strange and wonderful thing. Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* has its eternal rhythmic charms (Paul Chambers! Cobb's cymbal splash!) but his album *Milestones* with the "spring" drumming of Philly Joe Jones may be more enjoyable. Wallace Roney agrees and considers it one of the greatest albums in jazz history.



The repetition and minimalist rhythms of the Necks have their hypnotic appeal - to an international audience for over 20 years - just as do the interesting infectious rhythms of *The House* (Keller) or the swinging *2010* (Keller) on that album full of rhythmic variety *Angels and Rascals* (ABC, 2005).

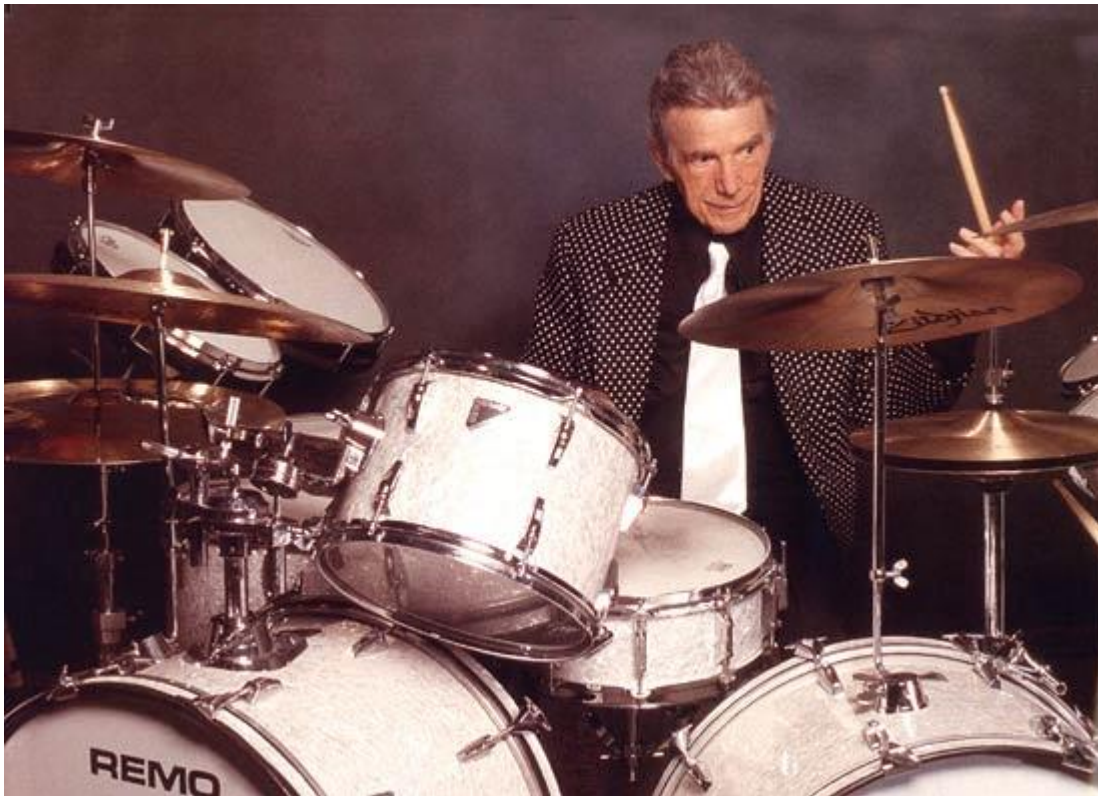


And in improvisation “truly the most crucial elements are rhythm and time... cascades of strange notes are excusable if a soloist is rhythmically interesting and the pulse is solid, but four hours of harmonic perfection will fall on deaf ears if solos are rhythmically drab or the time is inconsistent. The concept of swinging and playing with good time are elusive not only because they differ with each player. Rhythm occurs in real time, in contrast to harmony or melody, which retain their identity when slowed to a crawl or isolated for analysis”.*



*David Demsey, in “*The Oxford Companion To Jazz*”, ed Bill Kirchner, OUP, 2000, NY, pp 791/2).

In a 1936 *Downbeat* interview Duke Ellington spoke of his composing and arranging method: "I always try to get a lift in my music - that part of rhythm that causes a bouncing, buoyant, terpsichorean urge." And Louie Bellson interviewed with Max Roach, Elvin Jones, and Roy Haynes in November 1998 explained: "I feel that drummers are the tone of life. We are rhythm, we are timing, we are pacing. Everything in life is based on rhythm: the way you talk; the way you walk; the way you express yourself on an instrument."



Louie Bellson: everything in life is based on rhythm...

In contrast, the electronic drumming machine in modern pop music including the MFB Tanzbär is the antithesis of jazz rhythm - indeed, not just anti-jazz but anti-music. Rhythm in the greatest of musics known as jazz music is distinguished by the wonders of rhythm and its finest practitioners: Lester Young who began as a drummer; Bill Evans who began as a swing pianist and when practising at the Navy School of Music in Washington DC in 1951 sounded like George Shearing, Bud Powell, and Teddy Wilson rolled into one; Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Keith Jarrett, Chico Hamilton, Gil Evans, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Cecil Taylor, Django Reinhardt, Charlie Christian, Art Tatum, Art Blakey, Oscar Peterson - are some of its most distinguished artists. An interesting reveal between "classical" performers and jazz is the document *Kronos Quartet Music of Bill Evans* (Savoy Jazz, 2004), where the plodding harmonies of Kronos sit weirdly with the sweet bass sounds and rhythms of Eddie Gomez, whilst the guitar rhythms and harmonies of Jim Hall are sparkling and revelatory on *Turn Out The Stars* (Evans).

The song from the Marx Brothers film *A Day At The Races* (1937) called *All God's Chillun Got Rhythm* (Jurmann/Kahn/Bronisław Kaper) probably suggests an image of the dancing, happy “Negro” (unsophisticated, innocent and uneducated) not that far removed from African village life, who has the ability to swing (musically not much else) which others do not have. On the other hand, the original title of the song was *All God's Chillun' Got Wings*, which was a symbolic reference perhaps to the suffering African diaspora slave traffic.



Popular music so-called, blossomed in the soil of jazz rhythm. 127 million units of recorded music were sold in the USA in 1941 mainly attributable to the popularity of swing music. In my view, rhythm is the most important element in music. Perhaps it's better to rephrase that: rhythm is the most influential element in music. *It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* was characterized by Gunther Schuller as "a prophetic piece and a prophetic title".*

But rhythm and “swing” seem simpler than harmony and melody or improvisation that may have been the deep concern of Mozart. However, rhythm is far more intricate and complex and difficult than it seems. Consider a few simple comparisons. The Ted Heath Orchestra with a collection of extremely talented musicians was contemporaneous with the Count Basie Big Band. If you listen to both you will see how clunky, mechanical, and stolid the former sounds compared to Basie. Or listen to Jose Iturbi's attempts at boogie woogie and then listen to James P

*For readers interested in a musician's academic viewpoint on the topic see “The swing era: the development of jazz, 1930-1945” by Gunther Schuller, OUP, 1991.

Johnson. To many listeners boogie woogie is simple pianism compared to most classical compositions, but trying to play it to get the infectious rhythms down is far more difficult than at first sight, as Jose Iturbi's efforts proved. In this regard, Mr Iturbi may have had a tin ear, as he seemed quite pleased with his boogie woogie efforts (smug fellow!).



Jose Iturbi at the piano: he may have had a tin ear... PHOTO CREDIT EDWARD STEICHEN

Another interesting incidence is the comparison between two white bands playing the same song where one is unable to swing whilst the other is truly in the pocket giving the lie to the “all black chillun got rhythm but honkies don’t”. An instance of this is the simple hit song *Fever* (Cooley/Blackwell).

In her original hit of 1958 Ms Peggy Lee is supported by Joe Mondragon on bass, and Shelly Manne playing a very limited drum set which in part he plays with fingers alone, whilst the finger snaps are provided either by the singer herself, or by Howard Roberts, the guitarist for the date. Another version of this song happened in August 1981 on BBC2 where she is accompanied by a drummer and a bassist performing the same song. The BBC version is like the support is provided by machines in comparison. It is clunky and embarrassingly heavy-handed. Manne's use of fingers is a reminder of Indian percussion.



Peggy Lee: In her 1958 original hit of “Fever”, Shelly Manne (below) is playing a very limited drum set which in part he plays with fingers alone...



In any consideration of rhythm in the jazz context, the influence of the great South Asian culture of India on jazz must be noted, and not just for the complexities of its development of percussion, but also the rich melodic inventiveness that characterises Indian music in its amazing variety. But I shan't be venturing down that particular rhythmic river in this essay.

Rhythm is a strange and wonderful thing, yet it is also a fundamental element of life itself (cf circadian rhythm). And life itself, nature, is a marvel of balance between competing elements. In humans where intellectual activity is pursued to the neglect of the body, then the balance is upset and health suffers. Where physical activity is pursued without the modifying element of knowledge, disaster looms. In the arts similar principles may apply. However architecturally beautiful a house may be, if its “feeling” or amenity for human activity is not appropriate, then it fails as a dwelling. The Bauhaus movement, or extreme examples of it, seem inimical to human accommodation. In music Mozart’s rhythms are a strong part of his music’s appeal. And in the most beautiful of music called “jazz”, celebrating difference with a common humanity is its *raison d’être*. Thus, a foundation of rhythm however simple or complex, is provided to the improvising artist upon which he or she tells their story. The coming together of the many rhythms of Africa with the instrumentation, and harmonic developments of European musics together with the melodic advances of Indian and European musics, is the great advance that music has made under jazz.



Mozart: rhythms are a strong part of his music’s appeal...

The genius of Count Basie rested mainly on his superb rhythmic artistry. If as one example we reference *Good Morning Blues* (Rushing/Basie/Durham) 1937,

we see revealed the judicious plinking; the spacing; the bass, guitar and drums, like a whispering engine of delight grooving away in the background; the timing; the phrasing; then the responding to the vocal of Jimmy Rushing, not just the fills but the melodic answer to his plaintive message; then the improvising by the trumpet but the sense that right there, right now, Basie is communicating to the instrumentalist: “Go for it brother, but remember when you have finished your fine doodling, your filigrees, your high notes of pleasure and melody, when you have shown what you’ve got to offer in all your fine inventiveness, remember Daddy Count is here to take you home!”



Count Basie (left) with singer Jimmy Rushing: Daddy Count is here to take you home... PHOTO CREDIT GARY WAGNER

Count Basie playing *Good Morning Blues* may be seen as simple, beautiful and full of feelings, whilst Charlie Parker in full flight on *Anthropology*(Gillespie/Parker) or *Bird Gets The Worm*, (Parker) whose musical gyrations have been called scribble-scabulous (cf *New Yorker*, 29/8/20 Richard Brody) may be seen as a thing of wonder, whilst the beauty and feeling of Basie never seems to lose its charms and attraction.

Billie Holiday singing *I Cover The Waterfront* (Green/Heyman) which has four octave jumps in the melody in seven bars of music, and the interpretation by Lloyd Swanton on his document *Yonder* (Bugle, 2013) is an interesting comparison too. Holiday recorded it with Teddy Wilson (1941) and Duke Ellington (1945) and undoubtedly it resonated powerfully at the time with WW2 soldiers as their

women (figuratively) waited at the docks looking for love. Holiday swings and milks the words for everything she can, and gives them an unintended power. The origins of the song related to a newspaper reporter whose “beat” was the coast looking for scandals and scoops. Swanton’s version, more true to the original meaning, has an air of swagger, cheekiness, and satire about it through the trombone solo of James Greening over a complex bed of elaborate rhythms created by bass (Swanton); percussion (Hevia); drums (Stuart); guitar (Pease); and accordion (Daley). Holiday’s “simple” version packed with feelings is the one that resonates, whilst Swanton’s is the one to admire for its cleverness.



Billie Holiday (left): her version of “I Cover The Waterfront” is the one that resonates, whilst the version by Lloyd Swanton (below) is the one to admire for its cleverness...



A good example of a standard which has really done the rounds in a variety of complex interpretations is *All The Things You Are* (Kern/Hammerstein11). Dizzy

Gillespie recorded it with Charlie Parker (1945); Dave Brubeck (1974) recorded it with Anthony Braxton and Lee Konitz digging polytonal elements; and Brad Mehldau (1999) winged it at a breathtaking 7/4 interpretation over 14 brilliant minutes. James Muller in his version on *Kaboom* (2006) goes for rhythmic power and he and his cohorts James Penman, acoustic bass and Bill Stewart, drums, nail it superbly in a conclusion to the programme of seven originals. Its relative straightforward surging swing make it a version to return to with pleasure.



James Muller: in his version of “All The Things You Are” on “Kaboom” (2006) he goes for rhythmic power...PHOTO CREDIT JOE GLAYSHER

Rhythm may appear simple or simplistic but it has a power to engage, enlist, and move the listener much more dramatically than even the most bewitching Tchaikovsky melodies or Wagnerian harmonies. Lloyd Swanton’s document *Gondola* (2006) which has a programme of six originals - five by the bass playing leader and producer, and one by Fabian Hevia the percussionist - is a good example of the use of rhythm in a pianoless septet. Even where the tempo is funereal, as in *Oaxaca* (Swanton), the bass (in particular) whether plucked or arco, has a power to increase the effectiveness of the soloist. Or in *Penumbra* (Swanton) -

unrelated to *Penumbra* (Crispell) *Live in San Francisco* 1989 - which opens with a 90-second percussion and drums statement, bass and guitar enter, hand whistling punctuate, the melody is stated, a solo guitar follows, an expressive wide-ranging trombone solo, a chorus statement is made and then behind the extended quite beautiful saxophone solo, the bass and drums respond, enhance, lift, move and punctuate the music - sometimes with a cymbal splash - to a satisfying collective beauty.



But beauty - the beauty of the Basie aggregation featuring Lester Young or the finest of the Miles Davis small groups - came about through a synergetic pulse or beat, that drove the music to the greatest art. It's when this music called jazz drifts too far from the power of rhythm - perhaps in taking on the structural blandishments of European experimentation as Anthony Braxton has attempted - it loses its compelling feeling to move one, in every sense, not just toe tapping. And rhythm is not confined to the instruments normally called rhythm instruments like the drums and bass as Philly Joe Jones confides: "...Miles had this uncanny sense of time and rhythm, real different from anybody I've ever met. And he often said my sense of time is strange and so between the two of us having the strange senses of time, we just seem to get together with the sense of time and I could never lose him and he could never lose me. I say this, I'll say it this way - as much as I like to play the *melody* in things, on the drums I could get with Miles and go into *anything* just like he does with me. He never stays with the drummer, I goes way out but I know where he's at, I know what he's doin' and what he's doin' is impressing the people, and with Miles I could play some drum cliches without having to stick close to the melody with the drums to let him know the amount of time that I had, I had to be playing and I'd come out right and it would bring him right back where *one* was. It was always beautiful. The greatest experience of my life was with Miles...."*

**Conversations in Jazz, The Ralph J Gleason Interviews, T Gleason, ed, Yale University Press, p 188/9).*



Philly Joe Jones: The greatest experience of my life was with Miles... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Miles Davis: in my life there is music, and then there is music that is so deeply imbedded in one's being - so to speak - it echoes, bubbles away, and has become seemingly part of one's own rhythmic synergy with breathing, and dreaming. Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and Miles Davis are central to this feeling.



Miles Davis: music that is deeply imbedded in one's being...

Some comments on one of the rhythm sections of one of the Davis bands provides an insight into its synergetic pulse:

*The propulsion that Paul Chambers gave the band was phenomenal. His tone was clear and resonant, his note choices intelligent, and his swing powerful and steady. As a bassist, he could solo with the kind of phrasing, and content that horn players used... With Philly Joe Jones on drums and Red Garland on piano, the rhythm section became a swinging affair, steady but pliant at the same time. On medium and up-tempo tunes, Jones and Garland regularly played in unison, improvising syncopated accents that added to the fiery sound of the band. The kind of strongly rhythmic comping that Jones and Garland supplied (aided no doubt by Garland's ability to play in locked chords) helped to give the quintet a bigger sound... it was as if a big band were playing shout choruses behind the soloist... In big bands, the rhythmic accents are normally set and even written into the arrangements, but Philly Joe and Red were able to create equally tight figures on the fly. The improvised nature of their rhythmic counterpoint ensured that none of the suppleness or flexibility of the small combo was sacrificed to achieve the big band features.**



Miles Davis, pictured with Red Garland (piano), Paul Chambers (bass), & Philly Joe Jones (drums)... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

**Farah Jasmine Griffin and Salim Washington "Clawing at the Limits of Cool", St Martins Press, NY, 2008, pp21/2).*

When devotees of this music talk about “those moments”, the musical moments that burst into one’s consciousness like an electric shock - the trumpet of Cootie Williams say, the guitar of Charlie Christian, or works like *Parker’s Mood* (Parker) or *Ida Lupino* (Bley) - then the opening track to the Davis album *Milestones*, called *Dr Jekyll* (McLean) is often spoken of. It is a brilliant example of the blues (in the solos) meeting bebop (the head):

*Philly Joe accents the many abrupt stops and syncopated rhythms and adds to the sense of forward motion that this band created so well. Garland punctuates the pause at the beginning of the form, leaving space for the drama of the horns and drums, quietly comping to bridge statements together. We can hear how Garland, following Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk’s lead, is able to use the piano as a percussive as well as harmonic and melodic instrument. The members of the band all ride over the steady, clear pulse provided by Chambers. Even though the pace is very fast, his notes ring clear and full-bodied, making it easy to hear each one. While matching the ferocity of Jones’s ride cymbal, Paul Chambers manages to situate each bass note with exquisite care for both its sonic resonance and its intelligent placement with the harmonic line. With its bubbling excitement and clean execution, the performance of this song announces that this is a band to be reckoned with - a group of master musicians all at the top of their game, their sounds perfectly blended for maximum impact.**

One feels grateful to have lived to hear this music.



Miles Davis (left) pictured with bassist Paul Chambers who, in “Dr Jekyll”, manages to situate each bass note with exquisite care for both its sonic resonance and its intelligent placement with the harmonic line... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

*Griffin/Washington, *ibid*, p192.

Tony Williams, another Davis drummer, reckoned you can have a terrible band and a great drummer and it will be a good band but, even with great horn players if the bass player and drummer aren't happening, you've got a terrible band. Anthony Braxton has a more complex understanding of rhythm, which depends on a musician's and listener's "understanding":

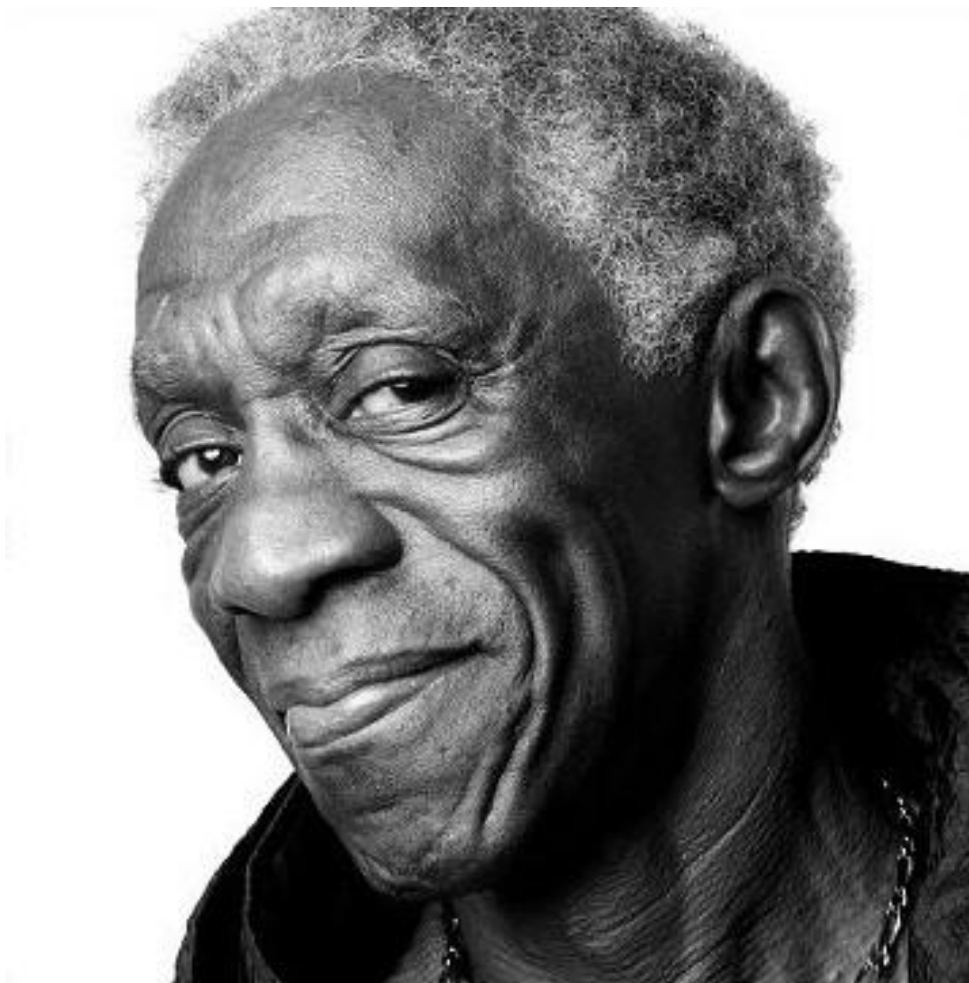
*We've come to view 'swing' as when you have a certain kind of empirical rhythm. If it's done right, it has 'swing'. That's how it's been defined in the annals of the jazz commentary. But I disagree with what's really happening with that, because there's nothing that happens that doesn't swing. Everybody has a rhythm and the reality of every rhythm cannot be seated in only its empirical dynamics. You have post-Anton Webern creativity that swings. There's no music that doesn't meet the criteria of 'swing' if its rhythmic pulse is really understood.**



Tony Williams (right), pictured with Max Roach... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

**Downbeat interview, February 1982.*

In his very wide definition of 'swing' Braxton is correct. But his brilliant Anthony Braxton Standards (Quartet) of 2003 or that of 9 Standards (Quartet) 1993 may be infinitely more enjoyable because of their 'empirical' swing than much of his most ambitious work. In literature we may marvel at *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce (if we finish it!) but we'll reread Tolstoy or Dickens or Dostoevsky or Helen Garner or James Baldwin or Shirley Hazzard because they *move* us, as well as inform our intelligence including our emotional intelligence. Art Blakey has strong views about rhythm: "You can't separate modern jazz from rock or from rhythm and blues - you can't separate it. Because that's where it all started, and that's where it came from - that's where I learned to keep rhythm - in church. Because they'd be in there singing and shouting and swinging *all* the time, no instruments but their hands and their mouth and their feet."



Art Blakey: you can't separate modern jazz from rock or from rhythm and blues - you can't separate it...PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

**"Reading Jazz - A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, And Criticism from 1919 to Now", ed Robert Gottlieb, Pantheon, NY, p 211.*

The interconnectivity in the creation of this music is part of its wonder - Jo Jones said that bassist Walter Page taught him how to drum.

The ability of horn players - Young, Parker, Davis - to harness that power to greater levels, makes the art. Lester Young was a drummer before he took up the saxophones: alto, soprano, clarinet, tenor and baritone. He played with Walter Page's Blue Devils and spent six months with King Oliver and shared ideas with drummer Roy Haynes with whom he worked from 1947-1949. Lester Young started recording when he was 27 and it's useful to recall that Armstrong, Hawkins, Eldridge, Tatum, Teddy Wilson, Benny Carter and Benny Goodman too all started recording in their twenties - some even in their teens. Walter Page taught Jo Jones how to drum.



Bassist Walter Page: Jo Jones said that Page taught him how to drum...

The lyrical, melodic European trumpeter Tomasz Stanko on his *Dark Eyes* (ECM, 2009) is supported by a quartet of young players, Alexi Tuomarila, piano; Jakob Bro, guitar; Anders Christensen bassist; and Olavi Louhivuori, drums, who display rhythmic power on the tempo-shifting Stanko original *The Dark Eyes of Martha Hirsch*, and provide considerable swing to the second half of the piece, making it a highlight of that album and comes as joyous relief after the blue tonality, elegance and melodic beauty and ruminations of other works in the programme.



The Tomasz Quintet album “Dark Eyes”...

Lester Young was born in Woodville, Mississippi 27/8/09. He was raised in and around New Orleans, and was based in Minneapolis for a number of years whilst spending more and more time in Kansas City. He played with Walter Page’s Blue Devils and was with King Oliver for six months in 1933. That year he “won” a cutting contest with Coleman Hawkins, which went from midnight to dawn, and became a part of the jazz legend of saxophone playing. In 1934 Young began playing with Count Basie, Walter Page and Joe Jones. So it is that “linkage” and interactive musical communication during the creative act creates a synergy, and especially a synergy of rhythm.



*Bassist Walter Page’s Blue Devils at the Ritz Ballroom, Oklahoma City in 1931...
PHOTO COURTESY THE BIG BAND YEARS*



Coleman Hawkins (left) and Lester Young (right), who was said to have won the famous “cutting contest” in 1933...

Young was indefatigable in his drive to play the best he could, but the challenge for him, and others, was to be meaningful in a three-minute performance to take advantage of opportunities in the booming recording industry. The wonder of that Basie rhythm section and the recordings from 1936-1940 in particular, were the outcome of thousands of hours of playing, listening, practising, listening, and studying and focus. Jo Jones mastered to the greatest level the sock cymbal. Young concentrated on the tenor saxophone. Basie who played with Bennie Moten at venues with only one piano meant Moten played the bass part and Basie the treble, which perhaps led Basie to the drama of space and judicious plinking which he developed into an art in itself. Page began as a drummer, became skilled on tuba and bass saxophone, but took up the bass when ordered to do so by his music teacher at school. He established the primacy of four beats to the bar on the double bass, and played with great power.



Gunther Schuller: he notes that the bass functions simultaneously on several levels...

Gunther Schuller notes: “For the bass functions simultaneously on several levels: as a rhythm instrument; as a pitch instrument delineating the harmonic progression; and, since the days of Walter Page, as a melodic or contrapuntal instrument”.* Page was a musician who concentrated on the double bass but in one of only two recordings of his Blue Devils he starts on tuba, then switches to string bass and finally plays the baritone saxophone, all very well. This “engine room” of swing produced some of the finest jazz and Jo Jones was an essential to its power.



Chico Hamilton: he was first impressed by Ellington’s drummer Sonny Greer but when he heard Jo Jones he marvelled at the difference...

Chico Hamilton, whom I revere as one of the greats, like Jo Jones, or Max Roach, got a tremendous amount of music out of a limited number of tools. One instance as evidence is his use of mallets alone on the masterpiece *Blue Sands* (Collette) from his 1955 album *Spectacular*. Hamilton was first impressed by Ellington’s drummer Sonny Greer but when he heard Jo Jones he marvelled at the difference:

(Sonny) played DJUN-DJUN, DJUN-DJUN, DJUN-DJUN, DJUN, DJA-DJUN, DJUN-DJUN, DJUN-DJUN, CHOO-CHI-TU, that kind of a thing. Now, the Ellington band swung in that groove. Whereas with the Basie band, Jo Jones did DIT-DI-DANG, DIT-DI-DANG, DIT-DI-CHANG, DIT-DA, DIT-DA, and he swung

*Schuller, Gunther, “Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development”, New York: OUP, 1986, p 297).

*that band with a completely different feeling than what Ellington had..... in Swing, you keep a steady beat going on the sock cymbal, which is the side cymbal, or even the top cymbal – DING, DI-DI-DING, DI-DI-DING. You keep that going. DING, DI-DI-DING, DI-DI-DING, and every once in a while you might do something with your left hand. But in playing Bop the way Art Blakey played, he kept something going, DING, DI-DI-DING, but meantime, man, he'd dance between his left hand and his right foot. DE-DUM, DE-DUM, DE-DUM, BOP!! CHITTI-TI-TI-BUM, CHITTI-TI-TI-BUM. Just dancing all the way through, keeping time, and the band was hitting... It worked! I'd never had no idea of this style of playing. I was just flabbergasted.**



When Chico Hamilton heard Art Blakey (above), he was flabbergasted...

From recordings Jo Jones performances reveal “...attention to detail. Never a fussy drummer, he was precise and organised. He knew the value of space, intuition, and surprise. His firm, delicious time underreported the band was a natural phenomenon; he just allowed it to flow, adding what seemed right to him. His commentary behind soloists, and highly selective accenting during sectional and

**From interview, source unknown.*

ensemble performances, reveal inner direction and a facility for self-editing that cuts away the extraneous before it surfaces. Jones's playing never cluttered the rhythmic and melodic lines. His solos grew out of the music itself. His technical limitations were frequently an asset. He said what had to be said, in an original manner".*



Jo Jones: he knew the value of space, intuition, and surprise...

Jo Jones may be the pre-eminent example of less is more in drumming. But also an example of the lesson that in music it's not so much how much equipment you have, it's how you use what you've got. In this regard, it should be noted that the "high hat", a waist high cymbal in the beginning normally 10", 11" or 12" in diameter was developed in the early 1930s - Jones adopted a 13" high hat which was unusually large for the day. It could make "sock" sounds, or "chick" sounds or "swish" sounds. Cliff Leeman, an outstanding drummer in his own right, comments:

*Jo was the first person I ever heard keep time on a closed high-hat while developing counterpoint-in-rhythm with his left hand on the high-hat stand....the feeling of variation he brought to high-hat playing - how he changed the accents and the feel of the dotted eighth and sixteenth rhythm without interrupting the flow. His little kick beats on the bass drum behind Basie's piano - so unusual for the time. The way he tuned his drums, to intervals, also was a plus....he kept time with his right heel on the floor, combining this sound with what he did on the high-hat. Frequently, he would take his foot off the base drum pedal and use the clicking of the right heel on the floor, alone, as an extra bit of colour.***

*Burt Korall, "Drummin' Men", Schirmer, NY, p 155.

***ibid*, Korall, p 141.

At one of the last Newport Jazz Festivals, organiser and promoter George Wein decided to give all the top drummers of the day a chance to show their stuff. Buddy Rich, Mel Lewis, Elvin Jones, Roy Haynes were all there and all played impressively, showing off their creativity. Jo Jones fronted with a high hat and a pair of sticks and he “broke everybody up” - related by attendee Louis Bellson.



Three drummers, L-R, Buddy Rich, Jo Jones, Gene Krupa... PHOTO COURTESY DRUMMERWORLD

The synergetic pulse between Basie (piano), Page (bass), Greene (guitar) and Jones (drums) was the heartbeat of the Basie big band. It was the end result of talents worked on relentlessly for years; of deep listening and learning; of a passion to play; and a generosity of spirit - the synergetic pulse is the common humanity made manifest in this music. And when we look at the great small groups - not just big bands like Basie - we see the finest examples of the music with that synergetic pulse at its heart made into art for the ages - Goodman (Hampton, Wilson, Krupa); Monk (Rouse, Ore, Dunlop); Jarrett (Peacock, DeJohnette); Peterson (Brown, Thigpen et al); Evans (LaFaro, Motian); Mingus (Hanna, Richmond); Jamal (Crosby, Fournier); Parker (Lewis, Potter, Roach); William Parker (Drake); Hampton (Reuss, Taylor, Krupa, Cole, Greer); Blakey (Walton, Workman et al); Holland (Nelson, Kilson et al); Manne (Paich, Mondragan et al); Armstrong (St Cyr, Hardin, Briggs, Dodds and Kyle, Shaw, Deems - cf *Mack the Knife* (Weill/Brecht)); Brubeck (Wright/Morello); The Necks (Abrahams, Buck, Swanton) and the “chamber groups” of the George Shearing Quintet (Hyams, Elliott, Tjader, Best, Wayne, Thielemans); the Modern Jazz Quartet (Lewis, Jackson, Heath, Kay) and the Chico Hamilton Quintets. Of these chamber groups, Chico Hamilton’s was the most inventive, explorative, and perhaps the most artistically enduring.

Chico Hamilton recorded first with Slim Gaillard, toured with Lionel Hampton, worked with Count Basie and recorded with Lester Young, then famously with the Gerry Mulligan pianoless quartet, but the leadership of his own groups which featured Buddy Collette, Eric Dolphy, Carson Smith, Jim Hall, Fred Katz, Charles



Chico Hamilton on drums with L-R, Gerry Mulligan (baritone sax), unidentified bassist and Chet Baker (trumpet)... PHOTO COURTESY DRUMMERWORLD

Lloyd, Gabor Szabo, Larry Coryell, Arthur Blythe, Steve Turre, Steve Potts and Eric Person, cemented his legacy as one of the greats, not just as a master of rhythm and leading percussionist. His Trio and Quintet recordings between 1953 and 1962 are amongst the finest in jazz. Consider just one example from hundreds, the *Concerto of Themes From Soundtrack Of Sweet Smell Of Success* (Hamilton) with leader Hamilton on drums with flautist Paul Horn, bassist Carson Smith, cellist Fred Katz, guitarist John Pisano.



It opens with the cello of Katz, with Hamilton punctuating the melody with cymbal splashes, mallet runs, then the bass and guitar join in contrapuntal improvisations. The flute then solos. An impressionistic overview of a New York city street perhaps? The masterful percussive effects include clattering clip clopping of footsteps interspersed with traffic sounds overlaid with flute. A quiet guitar solo - an island of calm. Gentle swinging interlude of bass taking a melodic line, then walking, joined by the up-tempo flute and guitar in conversation backed by the grooving drums.... all in all 17 minutes of colour, melodic invention, a brilliant city soundscape of a wide variety of rhythms from a great musician - his mastery of brushes and control of dynamics in itself is a wonder to hear.

Historically, the advances that the Basie rhythm section introduced into the music are justifiably legendary, and the series of recorded numbers made on the Columbia, Okeh and Vocalion labels with Lester Young between 1936 and 1940, are worth listening to from time to time as benchmarks in the rhythmic synergy so vital to jazz. The initial starting point may be a song like *Lady Be Good* (Gershwin/Gershwin) but as their famous recording of 9/11/36 shows, the melodic bass lines of Walter Page, backed by the percussive piano of Basie, then the walking bass, and the four beats to the bar piano accompanying the Young solo, the descending bass lines on to the jam ending, is reinvented to make it music for the ages.



Jo Jones (left) pictured with Count Basie: the advances that the Basie rhythm section introduced into the music are justifiably legendary... PHOTO COURTESY DRUMMERWORLD

And the future of rhythm in jazz? Two hints: the first is the Downbeat Jazz Artist of 2020, who also produced the 2020 Jazz Album of the Year and the 2020 Jazz Group of the Year, drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, the first female instrumentalist to win

the Downbeat Annual Critics Poll. For evidence of her music, see the album dedicated to three rhythm masters: Charles Mingus, Duke Ellington and Max Roach called *Money Jungle: Provocation in Blue* (Concord) 2013.



Drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, Downbeat Jazz Artist of 2020...

A second hint: listen to the document *Old New* by the Tomeka Reid Quartet (Cuneiform) 2019 with Reid on cello, Mary Halvorson, guitar; Jason Roebke, bass; and Tomas Fujiwara, drums; with all compositions by Reid, and relish the rhythmic delights of march figures, guitar/cello harmonies, dance rhythms, swing, interwoven polyphonic patterns of rhythm between all instruments, guitar percussive plinks, and seductive melodies in a magnificent program of music that demands a revisit as soon as one has finished listening. One's heart sings with joy that the music is so alive and well, and in such accomplished and committed hands.

Please allow Louis Armstrong the last word from one of his own compositions:

*Let the great think I'm small
I can laugh at them all
Cause I've got a heart full of rhythm*



Louis Armstrong: I've got a heart full of rhythm...