

Written for Modern Drummer Magazine's Education Forum

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Do you feel it is important for your students to study jazz drumming? And if so, what methods do you employ to get your students, especially younger ones, interested in this style of music?

I believe it is very important for all drum students to study jazz and jazz drumming, just as I believe it is important for drummers to listen to, study, learn, and respect all styles of music and drumming. Although there are many more, here are my top ten reasons to study and learn jazz drumming:

1) More Influences: The greater number, and more diverse, the influences that we can draw from as musicians, the more we're able to develop our own unique drumming voice and style of play. Jazz offers an incredibly wide array of music and drumming styles and great drumming artists.

2) History of the Drums: The modern drumset has over 100 years of history of great music and great players, and many of the early pioneers of the instrument were jazz drummers. Studying how and what those drummers did is important to understanding how drums and drumming have evolved and where we and drums might be headed. It can be argued that early jazz, especially in New Orleans, gave rise to blues, which in turn was a major influence in early rock. Listening to jazz, blues, and early rock drummers you can hear and learn how drumming developed.

3) Increased vocabulary: The roles of the limbs, sounds (cymbals and drums), and the role of the drummer are all different in jazz than they are in many other styles. Learning these roles expands your musical and drumming vocabulary increasing the performance skills you can draw from while playing any style. This different drumming vocabulary includes the highly syncopated figures and rhythms that the left hand and the bass drum often play, especially while accompanying soloists; the rhythms and volume of the bass drum, as well as the role of that instrument; the dominance of the ride cymbal and the importance and feel of the ride cymbal time patterns.

4) Technique: The degree of rhythmic and volume inter-dependence between all four limbs required to be proficient in playing jazz is very high. Although this technique may not be totally unique to jazz, some of the rhythmic vocabulary and phrasing occurs here more frequently. Learning how to do this helps to develop stronger overall drumming technique, and inter-connectedness of the limbs.

5) Listening: One of the critical skills for a drummer in any style is listening to the music that's being played around you. Drumming is an aural skill as much, and possibly more than even a physical one. Jazz is often compared to a complicated and integrated conversation between any number of musicians. In order to play jazz well, a drummer needs to develop hyper-sensitive listening skills to what is going on around them at all times, and know how to speak and respond, act and react. This is an advanced musical skill that will help raise your aural awareness in every style you play.

6) Melodic Sense: Learning jazz music and drumming helps to develop a strong sense of melody and form, which is beneficial in soloing, playing fills, accompanying, and creating drum parts in almost every style. Hearing and playing with a more melodic

sense as well as an understanding and adherence to song form helps to increase your musicality.

7) Phrasing: This goes hand-in-hand with a Melodic Sense. Many, if not most, jazz melodies contain phrases that are long and extend over the bar line. You can hear examples of these in almost every jazz recording and performance, especially during solos. Studying, learning, and incorporating longer phrases into your playing, learned thru jazz, helps to make your drumming more creative and interesting – to you, your band mates, and the listening audience.

8) Tempo and Volume Variation: Jazz features a tremendously wide range of tempos that can vary from as low as 40 to more than 400 beats-per-minute, and volumes of songs and arrangements that will vary from very soft (acoustic trio) to very loud (big band). In order to play jazz well you need to learn to play at tempos and volumes throughout these ranges and adapt the 'what you play' and the 'how you play' to these variations. Learning how to adapt to playing and communicating through a wide variety of tempos and volume expands your technique, vocabulary, ears, and musicality.

9) Life Skills: Of course, we play drums because we love it; but, the world doesn't need another drummer. What it does need are creative, problem solving, critical thinkers, who can help to transform society, and maybe even music. I don't want to get too philosophical here, but learning to play any music that requires a high degree of improvisation, spontaneity, and listening develops skills that are transferrable into other areas of life and business. The following are just a few of the life skills heightened by learning to play jazz well:

- * Working effectively as a member of a team
- * Improvising and thinking creatively, spontaneously, and imaginatively
- * Entrepreneurial thinking
- * A willingness to experiment and take calculated risks
- * Adaptability
- * Self-reliance
- * Self-confidence
- * Synthesis skills (combining different ideas and theories)
- * Self-awareness (knowing your role and respecting others)
- * Empowerment (enabling your own voice and contribution)
- * Resourcefulness and problem-solving (modifying, altering, and adjusting)
- * A sense of being an originator (playing, designing, and building unique parts)
- * Collaboration (working with others to produce something different or unique)

10) Respect and Acceptance: playing jazz well is a high form of a democracy, where everyone's voice is equally heard and valued. This helps to develop a respect for others, acceptance of their ideas and their voice, and a tolerance for our differences.

As for getting students interested in jazz, that varies between students and depends on the individual. There are lots of ways to get students of all ages interested in jazz, but I've had better results when I have them watch video clips on-line, DVDs, or getting them to attend live performances. For me, these tend to be more effective than just having them listen to the music, look at drum books, or assign them exercises. In short, make the music and the drummers come to life and have them see and feel the excitement in the music. I can't get them all to love the music, but I can get them all to appreciate it, better understand it, and learn from it. Good luck and have fun!