

The Drummer's Complete Vocabulary

as taught by
Alan Dawson

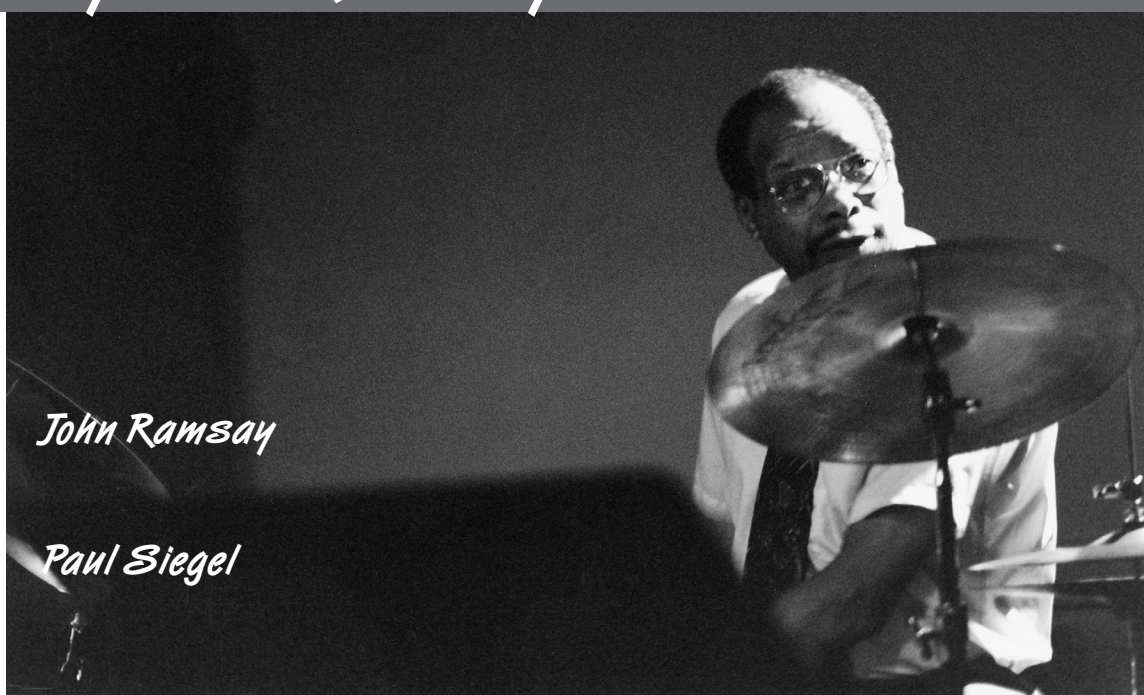
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Contents

<i>About the Author</i>	v
<i>Introduction</i>	vi
<i>George Alan Dawson</i>	viii
<i>Discography</i>	xi
1 The Rudiments	1
The American Rudiments	1
The Swiss Rudiments	4
New Innovations	6
Chopsbuilders	8
The Rudimental Ritual	11
Gary's Flams and Arvin's Diddles	22, 23
2 Four-Way Coordination	25
The First Three Ways	25, 26
Filling In Triplets	27
Eight Triplet Ways	30
Advanced Four-Way Coordination	31
Triplet Partial	31
Odd-Time Blues	32
Even Eighth-Note Ideas	34
Jazz Mambo	34
Samba	35
The Kirby Special	36
Cut-Time Rock	36
The ParaBossa and RuffBossa	37
"Oleo"	40
Excerpts from Ted Reed's <i>Syncopation</i>	41
3 Single-Stroke Roll Exercises	45
Mixing Singles and Doubles	46
Doubles, Paradiddles, and Singles	47
4 Soloing	48
Soloing Over an AABA Tune	48
Solo Ideas	49
Boston Eights	59
"Blues for Lester"	62
Trading	66



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About the Author

John Ramsay has been playing and studying the drums for the past 36 years. In addition to studying with Alan Dawson, he has studied with Max Roach, Art Blakey, Ed Soph, and Bob Moses. He is currently studying piano with Charlie Banacos, whose students have included Danilo Perez, John Scofield, Michael Brecker, Billy Pierce, Red Rodney, Mike Stern, Larry Goldings, and countless others.

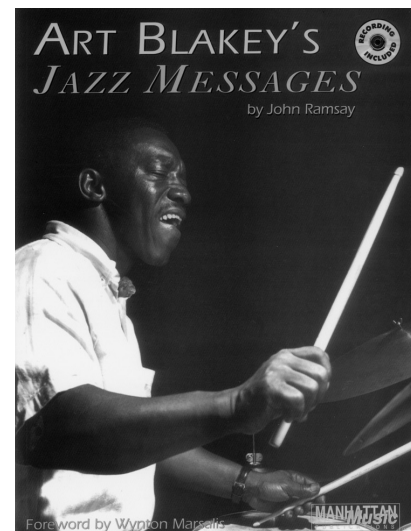
For the past four years, John has traveled to Havana, Cuba, where he studied drumset timbales and tumbadoras (congas) at the National School for the Arts with Enrique Pla (of Irakare), José Eladio Amat, and Jose Miguel. In addition, while in Cuba he attended seminars with famed Cuban pianist Chucho Valdez and percussionist Jose Luis “Changuito” Quintana.

Most recently, John has traveled to Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, performing with Donald Harrison, Billy Pierce, and Mick Goodrick. He has taught and conducted clinics in Paris, France; Rome, Italy; Helsinki, Finland; Athens, Greece;

Tel Aviv, Israel; and Heek, Germany, as well as toured the Baltic countries. He is in his fifteenth year of teaching at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts.

John is featured with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers Big Band, on the Blue Note Record compact disc titled *The History of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers*, and the 1980 Timeless Records release *Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers Big Band Live in Montreux and Northsea*. In addition to the Blakey Big Band—which included Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Kevin and Robin Eubanks, James Williams, and Billy Pierce—John has performed with Sonny Stitt, James Moody, Terrence Blanchard, Wallace Roney, Donald Brown, Kenny Baron, Cecil McBee, Eartha Kitt, Gregory Hines, John Hicks, Walter Booker, Dave Liebman, Harvey Schwartz, and the Clifford Jordan Big Band. John endorses Sabian cymbals, Drum Workshop drums, Calato Regal Tip drumsticks, and Toca Percussion.

John is also the author of the drum book, *Art Blakey's Jazz Messages*, available from Warner Bros. Publications.



Introduction

I was a skinny kid from the hills of northwestern Massachusetts, growing up two miles from the Vermont border. It was in the 1960s that I discovered the drums. I knew very early that this was what I wanted to do for a living, and so I did what many kids of the '60s did—I joined a rock band! Since I was lucky enough to join an already established working band (whose drummer had just quit), I had an immediate induction into the world of getting paid to play.

For the next 10 years I played the music of the Kinks, Led Zeppelin, Grand Funk Railroad, the Beatles, Traffic, the Spencer David Group, Jimi Hendrix, and others. I was a self-taught rock drummer.

The group became the center of my life. We lived for the group and for the music. We bought a van, a P.A. system, and a wardrobe, and we played colleges, night clubs, and high schools. Life was good; we were happy; everybody in my home town knew my name. It was the '60s: "Peace & Love," and "Tune in, Turn on, and Drop Out." We were the epitome of the counterculture—"rock stars"!

But the '60s ended and reality set in. Like with most groups, personality conflicts arose, and economic pressures came to the forefront. People grew weary of long road trips in crowded vans, tired of carrying Hammond B-3 organs up fire escapes, tired of lifting Marshall amplifiers as big as refrigerators, and yes, even tired of carrying around those two 24-inch bass drums. The band broke up. This would become a recurring theme for me—the band always broke up. I finally got the message: If I was going to survive as a musician, I would have to learn other skills, other styles, and I'd have to learn to read music. In other words, I needed a formal education. But where was a kid from western

Massachusetts going to find this special training?

This was the '70s, and the music was changing; there was this new thing called "fusion" with awesome drummers like Billy Cobham and Tony Williams. I had heard that Max Roach was teaching at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, which was not far from where I lived. I had to seek him out; I was thirsty for drum knowledge. If fusion was a melding of jazz and rock, I thought I'd better find out what this jazz thing was all about.

Max Roach—a living legend! There he was—living and teaching in Amherst, the town I was born in. To my disappointment, I discovered that Max didn't teach private lessons. He directed a small group ensemble and a percussion ensemble but gave no lessons. I needed more.

I had heard about this guy named Alan Dawson. He taught at the famous Berklee College of Music and had taught some famous drummers like Tony Williams, Harvey Mason, and others. Maybe he could make me famous, too! Boston was about 100 miles away from where I lived, but I didn't care; I figured it would be well worth the trip.

I found Alan at Berklee on the second floor of the 1140 Boylston Street building, where I have been teaching now for 15 years. It was 1971, and Alan had been teaching at Berklee for about 18 years. When I knocked on his door that fateful day, I was met by a friendly, smiling gentleman. When I asked if he accepted outside students, he informed me that I had come at a good time because in a few months, he would be leaving Berklee to start his own private teaching practice at his home in Lexington. This was the beginning of a relationship that would last until the time of his death in 1996.

I began studying with Alan in 1972, driving 180 miles round-trip for my lessons in Lexington.

I would study on and off with Alan for the next seven years. In 1982, I began teaching at Berklee, and at that time, I went back to Alan for some “graduate work.” There was always something to learn from a master drummer like Alan.

I remember one of my earliest lessons with Alan. I asked him for an assessment of my abilities (since I had been playing professionally for 10 years). He said that although I was a proficient drummer, I was really a beginner—I couldn’t read music, I didn’t know many rudiments, and I knew little about four-way coordination. He told me the truth. That’s one of the things I’ll always cherish about Alan. He had a way of telling you the truth about yourself that wasn’t hurtful, but made you want to work harder to become a better drummer. If you hadn’t practiced enough, he knew it, and he would let you know by telling you that you’d be working on the same material until your next lesson. You couldn’t cut corners with Alan.

Alan knew more than 80 rudiments (American, Swiss, New Innovations, and Chopsbuilders), and he gave you three a week to work on. If you couldn’t play those satisfactorily, you didn’t get the next three—and you wanted those next three because after you learned them all, you got to learn the Rudimental Ritual. This was an application of all the rudiments played in 4- and 8-bar phrases over a Bossa Nova foot ostinato. The Rudimental Ritual was one of the things that led me to view Alan as a genius of playing and teaching the drums.

Another stroke of genius was the way he created more than 40 ways to interpret Ted Reed’s eight pages of syncopation exercises, using different combinations of four-way coordination. Everything about his teaching was original and extremely creative, like the way he applied George Stone’s

Stick Control to the drumset while singing the melody to various standard song forms (AABA, ABAC, ABAB, etc.), and then soloing over the tune while still singing aloud.

You might have the impression that Alan was more than just a teacher to me—and you’d be right. He was a role model in the truest sense of the word. He showed me by example that you could be a musician and have control over your career and life by being educated and having true knowledge about your craft. He showed me that if you had real skills, you could make choices about when and where you played, and who you played with, and equally important, how much you got paid! He showed me that if you wanted to be a musician, you didn’t have to be a scuffling, starving artist type. He was a model of confidence, dignity, and integrity for all drummers who knew him.

Were it not for Alan Dawson, I probably would not be where I am today, which is a pretty good place to be for a kid from the hills of western Mass.

Thank you, Alan.



John Ramsay
Associate Professor
Berklee College of Music



Lesson 2

Single ratamacue

LLR L R L RR L R L R

Double ratamacue

LLR LLR L R L RR L RR L R L R

Triple ratamacue

LLR LLR LLR L R L RR L RR L RR L R L R

Lesson 3



Drag paradiddle #1

R LLR L R R L RR L R L L

Drag paradiddle #2

R LLR LLR L R R L RR L RR L R L L

Lesson 25

R LLR L R LLR L L RR L R L RR L R

Lesson 4

Flam

L R L R
R L R L
L R R L

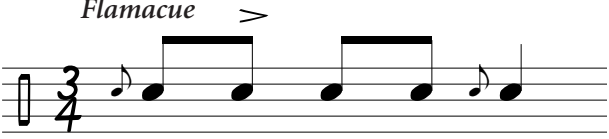
Flam tap


L R R R L L


Flam accent

L R L R R L R L

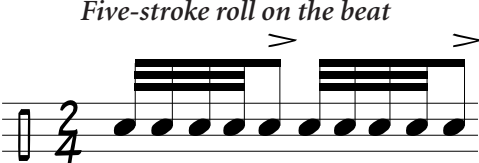
Lesson 5


Flamacue 
 L R L R L L R
 R L R L R R L

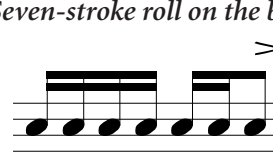
Flam paradiddle 
 L R L R R R L R L L


Flamadiddlediddle 
 L R L R R L L R L R R L L R R

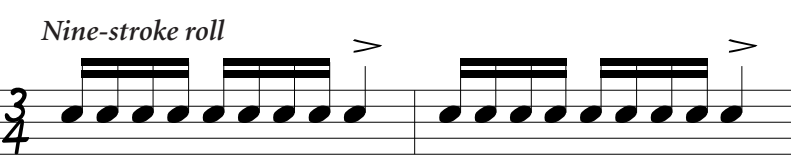
Lesson 6

Five-stroke roll on the beat 
 R R L L R L L R R L


Five-stroke roll off the beat 
 R R L L R L L R R L R R L L


Seven-stroke roll on the beat 
 R R L L R R L L L R R L L R


Seven-stroke roll off the beat 
 L L R R L L R L L R R L L R R L L R R

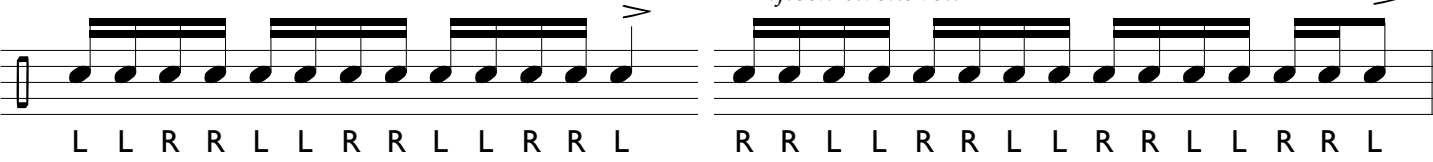
Nine-stroke roll 
 R R L L R R L L R L L R R L L R R L

Lesson 7

Ten-stroke roll 
 R R L L R R L L R L L R R L L R R L L R

Eleven-stroke roll 
 R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R

Thirteen-stroke roll 
 R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R

Fifteen-stroke roll 
 L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R