

Table of Contents

About the Author	7
Acknowledgements	9
Preface	10
From Santa Fe, NM to Bowie, MD	12
Bowie High School	18
The Bowie High School Starliners	20
Swing-In VI featuring Louie Bellson	22
The Rehearsal and Performance	24
Post Concert	31
My Senior Year of High School	34
From Bowie, MD to Los Angeles, CA	39
The Start of a Very Special Friendship	43
The Cal State University Northridge Years	46
My First Published Composition	61
TRN Music Publishing	68
Alfred Music and My First Book	69
The Louie Bellson/Dave Black Series for Jazz Ensemble	76
“In Roy’s Corner” and Sammy Nestico	81
Pearl Bailey and a New Home	85
The 1991 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Anaheim, CA	88
Louie’s Second Marriage	90
Louie’s 75 th Birthday Party	93
The Passing of an Icon and My Dear Friend	96
Giving Back	99

About the Author

Dave Black received his Bachelor of Music in percussion performance from California State University, Northridge. A prolific composer and arranger, more than 60 of his compositions/arrangements have been published/recorded by several of the major music publishers. Many have been used as source/background music on numerous TV shows and movies, including the film *Drumline*. He is the recipient of numerous awards and commissions, including 26 consecutive ASCAP Popular Composer Awards, two GRAMMY participation/nomination certificates, the Percussive

Arts Society President's Industry Award, a *Modern Drummer* Readers Poll Award, two *Drum!* magazine Drummie! Awards, and a certified Gold Record award for the sale of more than 750,000 copies of *Alfred's Drum Method, Book 1*. As one of the biggest-selling percussion authors in the world, he is the author and/or co-author of over 30 books with combined sales totaling two and a half million copies.



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family (Mom, Dad, Shelley, Stephen and Cynthia) for not only their love and support over the years, but for putting up with the endless hours of practice time during my junior and high school years.

To Rikki Carignan, Mike Bloch, and Gavin Carignan for their encouragement, support, and editorial suggestions.

To Rob Wallis and Joe Bergamini, thanks for your many years of friendship and support.

To Matt Koprowski, for doing such a beautiful job on both the cover and interior design/layout.

And to the late Louie Bellson, who I owe so, so much.

Preface

In addition to the love and support we get from our immediate family members (parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends), some of us are blessed with the help and guidance from extraordinary mentors that include our teachers, friends, and colleagues who not only embraced us, but helped open doors, gave us confidence and support, and provided ideas and/or alternate career choices we may never have considered on our own. These amazing mentors went the extra mile by taking us under their wings and guiding us in directions we never thought possible.

This is my personal story of how an extraordinary man and musician by the name of Louie Bellson, came into my life as a high school student in Bowie, Maryland, and changed it forever.

Referred to by jazz critic Leonard Feather as “one of the most phenomenal drummers in history,” Louie played with such greats as Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, Benny Goodman,

Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Oscar Peterson, and Norman Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic. He pioneered the two bass drum setup and was one of the pioneer clinicians, giving selflessly to the music education community. He also authored a number of books on drums and percussion.

He was also a prolific composer/arranger, whose compositions and arrangements spanned a broad spectrum of music from jazz to symphonic works.

The title of this book, *His Time Was the Greatest*, has a double meaning in that the word "time" can refer not only to a period of time in history, but also the feel, and steadiness of playing a piece of music. Louie possessed both!

From Santa Fe, NM to Bowie, MD

My family lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico where I attended Kearney Elementary School from the first through the sixth grade. I was drawn to music from a very early age, and knew I wanted to be a musician by the time I was in the second grade. I remember going to the plaza in the center of town each year to watch the annual parade which, of course, included a marching band with a drumline. When that percussion section passed by, it was exhilarating, and so I knew then that I wanted to play drums and percussion.

The problem was that we couldn't afford a student snare drum kit and a pair of sticks at that time. So, I had to compromise and start on guitar, which I purchased at our local music store with the \$26 I received from my first holy communion. I studied guitar privately for about two years with a teacher by the name of Ernie Sanchez, who lived three doors down from our house.

Thankfully, during the summer before starting the 5th grade, my parents were able to purchase a used snare drum so I could join the elementary school band. Looking back, I'm thankful I started on guitar, as it introduced me to melody, harmony, and chords early on, tools that would become vital once I studied theory and composition later in my life.

I joined the school concert band for the last two years of elementary school, and it was so much fun. In fact, I still have my copy of *Easy Steps to the Band* which was the band method the school used. Playing in the band was a great experience, and solidified my goal to pursue not only music, but drums and percussion in both the junior high and high school music programs.

Because my dad was in the military, we moved from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Bowie, Maryland, a suburb outside of Washington, D.C., in 1972. Located in Prince George's County, and easily accessible to Washington, D.C., Annapolis, and Baltimore, the Bowie school system had an excellent music program, with access to both wonderful musicians and bands throughout the state.

I attended Belair Junior High, which had a great music program. Cleme Weems was the director of the beginning and intermediate concert bands and was one of the most dedicated and hard-working band directors I've ever met, in addition to being a