Mike Clark

The Post-Bop Drum Book

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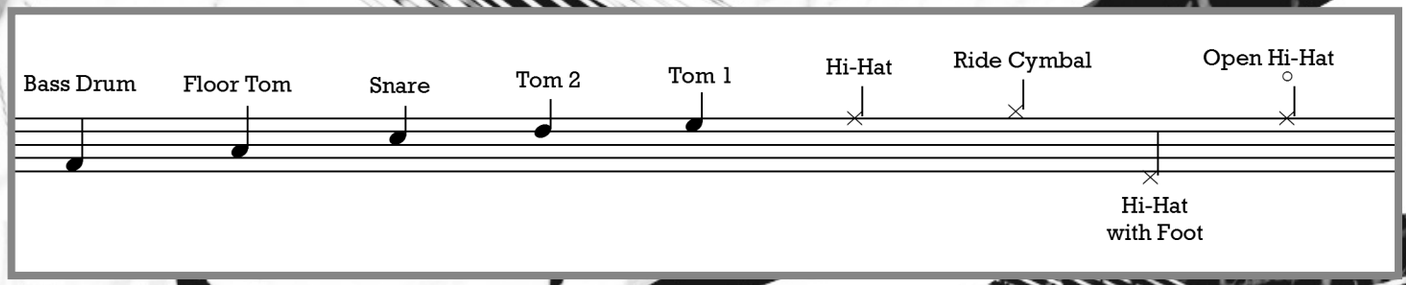
DRUM KEY



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"He's a great jazz drummer—and he hasn't lost any of the stuff that he brought from Oakland. So now he's totally free to do both, and he does. The solo he played on the album *Thrust*, on the song "Actual Proof," is one of the best drum solos on any of my albums. So many people have remarked about that solo, saying, 'Incredible.'"
-Herbie Hancock

While often referred to as the "Tony Williams of funk," Mike Clark is considered one of the foremost jazz drummers of the genre. He gained worldwide recognition as one of the instrument's important innovators while playing with Herbie Hancock in the early seventies. His incisive playing on Hancock's "Actual Proof" garnered him an international cult following and influenced generations of drummers.

Born in Sacramento, CA, Mike traveled around the country with his father, a former drummer himself and a union man for the railroad. His dad had a great appreciation for jazz and blues music, and Mike absorbed the music of America while riding the rails. He credits this exposure as forming the foundation for his ability to synthesize many different regional styles. From age 4, he was a prodigy, sitting in—and getting "house"—with bands in Texas and New Orleans. And by the time he reached his early twenties he was known as one of the founders of the distinctive East Bay Sound coming out of Oakland, California.

Mike has performed with such well-known jazz greats as Herbie Hancock, Christian McBride, Kenny Garrett, Chet Baker, John Scofield, Nicholas Payton, Tony Bennett, Wayne Shorter, Joe Henderson, Eddie Henderson, Lenny White, Bobby Hutcherson, Sonny Stitt, Harold Mabern, Woody Shaw, Vince Guaraldi, Donald Harrison, Stanley Clarke, Kenny Barron, Albert King, Robben Ford, Larry Coryell, Jack Wilkins, Fred Wesley, Maceo Parker, Charlie Hunter, Michael Wolff, Wallace Roney, Billy Childs, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Chris Potter, Bobby McFerrin, Rob Dixon, Nat Adderly, Oscar Brown Jr., and Gil Evans and his Orchestra.

His latest recordings include the critically-acclaimed *Indigo Blue: Live at the Iridium* with Christian McBride, Donald Harrison, Rob Dixon, Randy Brecker, and Antonio Farao on Ropeadope Records; *Retro Report* with Delbert Bump on Ropeadope; *Life Cycle* by Venture, a new band with Mark Sherman, Chase Baird and Felix Pastorious, also on Ropeadope; Eddie Henderson's Be Cool on the Smoke label; *Monk Time* by DSC (aka Dorsey, Skaff & Clark) with Leon Dorsey on bass, and Greg Skaff on guitar on Jazz Avenue 1. Rob Dixon's recording *Coast to Crossroads* with Charlie Hunter. 2020 releases include another Eddie Henderson recording, *Shuffle and Deal*, on the Smoke label, another Mike and Dorsey release with Harold Mabern, and the new Headhunters effort, *Speakers in the House*.

A popular clinician, Mike has led drum clinics and master classes at universities, music schools and band camps in the United States, South America, Europe, Russia, Japan and China.

For further information, see **www.drummermikeclark.com**

FOREWORD

I decided to write this book to explore the questions my students and others have brought me about my experience playing live acoustic music that is called jazz or, as my friend Nicholas Payton calls it, Black American Music (BAM). I chose to focus on my personal experience and experiments on the bandstand—my quest to find my own personal voice—rather than refer to famous drummers who have books out, or what I often see in other drumming studies.This book covers what I play and how that enables me to get to the soul/heart of the music quickly. Although "jazz" music is improvised, there is a real language and vocabulary based on jazz history. A crucial point that I emphasize is that the knowledge of and understanding of this history translates into a language that, expressed musically with others who share this knowledge, enables and elevates a musical conversation on a profound level. I will talk about phrasing, time-keeping, swinging, technique, and concepts concerning post-bop drumming. While I reach back into previous time periods in order to demonstrate how I reached these conclusions, the focus here is on post-bop drumming.

All great jazz drummers have vision and want to push the music forward while remaining in touch with the roots, and I will demonstrate how to tip your hat to history while offering fresh innovative contributions. I have been told my work on “Actual Proof” is a demonstration of this. I hope to serve the reader well—whether a student or a seasoned professional—and address some of the questions that I have been asked over the years.

PREFACE:

The Education of Mike Clark

My dad was a drummer, but he stopped playing in his twenties. He had a great collection of jazz records and played them constantly: Basie, Duke, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Krupa, Wynonie Harris, Louie Jordan, stuff like that. This was his party music and he always had friends over.

There was always a set of drums in the house. I had been hearing jazz, and jump blues, before I could walk or talk. I guess my brain internalized it. When I was about four years old, I went over to the drums, sat down and played and it all made sense. I played a Krupa-like tom-tom thing; my parents were shocked and overjoyed. My Dad said it sounded professional and swung, so that same night he took me to a club where a band he used to play with was working. I sat in and played “Sweet Georgia Brown,” took a solo and got house.

Later, in grade school, I joined the school bands and they put me in dance band right away, which was like a small big band. My Dad had me playing with his friends who had gigs and he got me in as kind of a novelty solo child drummer in night clubs in and around Sacramento. Within a year or so, we moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My father worked for the railroad and traveled a lot, so he would take me to clubs and concerts all over the country, and I met professional musicians and played with many of them, either sitting in, or as a child soloist.

He really loved Louis Prima and took me to many of Prima's shows and I met Bobby Morris and Paul Ferrara, both drummers that played with Louie Prima and The Wild Bunch. My Dad introduced me to them and they would show me different stickings and things—which I could play, even at that age. Older jazz musicians talked to me about the ride cymbal and how to comp for a soloist. I heard Barrett Deems, drummer with Louis Armstrong, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Louis Bellson—there were so many great drummers, especially in New Orleans and Texas.

I met drum great Paul Guerrero and he'd have me come to his gig at a club called The Chalet in Dallas and sit in. I also would sit in at The Famous Door in NOLA and played with trumpet players Mike Lala and Murphy Campo who both had groups at this club. I even played there with

Mac Rebbenack, aka Dr. John, when he played bass with Murphy. I sat in with Frogman Henry at The Court of Two Sisters, and got to know a drummer named Dick Johnson, who helped me meet people to play with. I once had a gig as a soloist with the Paul Neighbors Big Band at the Blue Room in the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. I would come in and play "Sing, Sing, Sing," "April in Paris," "Sweethearts on Parade," "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?" and "Sweet Georgia Brown." My Dad and I did this in many towns and states, all over the country, although he traveled mostly in the South.

Then, when I was about 11, my Dad brought home an Art Blakey record, not knowing who he was—he saw a drummer on the cover and picked it up. We played it and right away, I was forever hooked. This led me to Bird, Clifford Brown, Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, and all the rest of the bebop and post-bop greats. I immediately sought out young musicians around my age who were interested in bebop and started trying to play this style. I played to my records for years and sought out every chance to play with musicians at any age. By the time I was in junior high school, I was doing jazz gigs and playing live. By high school, I was a working musician. When I graduated, I played in road bands all around California, the West Coast, and Nevada. In Lake Tahoe, Reno, and Vegas, I did lounge bands and heard all the legends that were around there then, like Sonny Payne, Buddy Rich, Harry James, Sam Woodyard, and Vido Musso. I watched these guys every night!

Soon Vince Guaraldi hired me to play with him, which I did on and off for ten years. Through Vince, I met and played with Mose Allison, O.C. Smith, Joe Farrell, Chet Baker, Teddy Edwards, Jon Hendricks, Sonny Stitt, and many more. Around that time I was playing with my own organ group three nights a week plus Sunday sessions for about four years and was gaining lots of experience and learning how to play the music. I also played with Woody Shaw, Bobby Hutcherson, and Andrew Hill, and many artists from the East Coast called me.

I met Lenny White, and he was a huge influence on my playing, as were Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, and Jack DeJohnette. Prior to this I was into Art Blakey, Max Roach, Roy Haynes and Philly Joe Jones for bebop and Sonny Payne, Papa Joe Jones, Buddy Rich, and almost every big band drummer that was ever recorded. I later got into Billy Hart, Tootie Heath, Mickey Roker, Grady Tate, and pretty much anyone who played jazz. I listened to avant garde, post-bop, bebop everything. I loved John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Joe Henderson, Hampton Hawes, Bobby Hutcherson, Sonny Rollins, Clifford Brown, Wayne Shorter, Lee Morgan, Hank Mobley, Herbie Hancock, Jackie McClean, Grachan Monchur, Andrew Hill, Dizzy Gillespie, B.B. King, Albert King, Little Milton, Little Johnny Taylor—I can't name all the musicians who influenced me since that would take an entire book by itself. I would go out and hear each one of these guys on nights when I wasn't working and ask them questions or watch every move they made. I would buy them drinks and just talk to them, listening to every thing they said, observing how they dressed, how they walked, their swag. I listened to how the master drummers played the ride cymbal very carefully and how they interacted with the band; what kind of grease they were putting on things and how to achieve that.

Now I also, at one point, had played a lot of blues gigs with the likes of Albert King, Albert Collins, Jimmy Reed, Delbert McClinton, and Jimmy Hughes. I could play most of the James Brown-type beats without practicing them. I could hear it and play them immediately. I just had a knack for the funky thing, and because of that, I got a lot of calls to play funk and did some of that as well. In high school, I played with Bobby Freeman, a soul singer, with Sly Stone on guitar. I met Paul Jackson in the late ’60s, and we became great friends. We shared a house together in Oakland, did a ton of gigs, and we had our own way of communicating rhythm. Doing many organ trio gigs: playing “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy” or Horace Silver's more funky pieces, I started developing my signature funk beats. Night by night on the gig, they were pouring out. I never practiced them, it just happened on the gigs. I could really make the crowd dance and feel it. The organ players loved the beats and how they grooved, so I kept doing it. When Herbie heard me play he hired me to join Herbie Hancock and the Headhunters and the rest is history. The contribution I made on the piece “Actual Proof” drew on all of my jazz influences, especially, at that time Lenny White, Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Jack DeJohnette, Roy Haynes, Max Roach, and Philly Joe, all run through my personal blender and spread over my Oakland funk beats.

A few years after leaving Herbie Hancock's band I moved to New York. That opened my eyes and ears; New York is an education of itself. I re-learned what I thought I knew, East Coast style. I have been touring and recording ever since.

After a lifetime of playing, recording, and touring, I decided to write this book to share some of my musical adventures, insights, and streams of thought—my take—with the people coming up, just as the elders passed the information down to me. I have had the great fortune to play with the greatest jazz musicians alive. I always want to give back to show my deep appreciation for the wonderful life of creativity and swinging that I have had!

Finding Your Voice

Finding one's own unique voice is an important facet of being an artist. I started playing with Herbie Hancock when I was in my early twenties, and he emphasized the importance of having one's own style. I took that seriously, as I was still exploring my own. I tried to play like many of the greats when I was in grade school through high school. I took what I liked and discarded the rest. I listened to every drummer that I could find that played jazz, including ones I didn't particularly care for. I would get something from each person. From my main influences, I would try to play their ideas and licks—not the stickings, but the ideas, and put them together to fit my own sensibilities. We didn't transcribe in those days, at least I didn't, so I made up stickings that sounded close to what I was hearing. I also borrowed from the other musicians in the band; I was influenced by the feel and energy, a takeaway from all of what I was hearing.

Eventually I stopped copying, and started to develop my own style, or voice, if you will. I make up my own stickings and my own way of phrasing based on what went before me. It's a process but I do feel I now own my voice in the history of the music.

My Heroes (or Sitting at the Feet of the Masters)

Meeting my heroes changed my life! I was so fortunate to be born at a time when so many legends were alive and playing. I tried to get to know at least a little bit of each of them. I made it my mission to go out when I wasn't working to hear these people, every chance I got. I asked questions and everyone told me something priceless.

One night, when I was in Herbie Hancock's band, we went to hear Elvin Jones on our night off. Of course, I asked him about playing with John Coltrane. After a while, he invited Herbie and me to "Come sit next to the stage. I'm going to show you how I did it with John." We sat behind the curtain, right next to his hi-hat, and I witnessed the most dramatic drumming performance I have ever experienced.

I spoke with Tony Williams, Philly Joe, Sonny Payne, Art Blakey, Max Roach, Jack DeJohnette, Roy Haynes, Shelly Manne, Joe Chambers, Lenny White, Kenny Clarke, Louie Bellson, among many others. They were all very generous and kind enough to share some of their knowledge and wisdom; it was magic to me to hear them play and talk about their experiences, both musically and in daily life.

I tried to somehow glean some kind of understanding of what made them tick, even though I didn't know them personally. It was a great investment of my time and effort that rewarded me with invaluable lessons and experiences.

Heritage and Lineage

Jazz is not about how much chops you have; it's a language. In order to play jazz music with confidence and authority, one must seriously delve into its history. When you deepen your understanding of this language you enable a wider range of musicians to embrace your playing. This extrapolates into a broader horizon of people and experiences, both personally and professionally.

It's vital to know who did what, when, and why. If the ancestors were no longer with us physically, I tried to get to know these people through books; what was written by them or about them, and, of course, their recordings. I know many of the masters that are alive today, and try to understand them and their work. The more knowledge and understanding I have, the easier it becomes to cross cultures without feeling strange about it, and to speak the language, replete with dialects and the lexicon. Then I don't have to limit myself to restrictive "comfort zones." I can play with anyone and enjoy it, and allow them to do the same. From a trio to a big band, a great musical conversation can he had by all!

Telepathy

Once you know the language and history of the music and have developed your technique, you are liberated to respond to any musical conversation on both a visceral and metaphysical level. Playing underneath a soloist, this dialogue can become almost telepathic. You are free to dance and react like a boxer, making unconscious, split-second moves and decisions.

You'll discover almost instinctively the physical, intellectual, and emotional elements engaged simultaneously at the highest level—the purest expression in music I have ever encountered. When that is coupled with strong rhythm and hard swing, it's a thrill nothing compares to!!!

The Art of Listening

I cannot overemphasize how important listening is to everything that is being played, when playing with a band. To me, it's one of the most important things you can do. Develop your ear so you can hear every note being played around you as well as what you are doing.

When I am playing I hear the entire picture and add my contribution based on what I hear. I don't use others' input as a background to show how good I am. I listen to what is being said by all, whether they are soloing or comping—the entirety—then I play conversationally with what I am hearing and express my ideas within that context.

It's the same as having a conversation with people, you don't want to be the only voice, or the loudest; you want to be part of a group dialogue. This creates the most value for everyone, not just for me. Nothing is more boring to me than listening to a band and the drummer is playing everything he knows to show he is great. No music or back and forth can be achieved like that.

Creativity

Creativity is the skilled application of knowledge in new and exciting ways. To gain the skill you need to allow the caged bird to sing, to bring all of your power to the music, it is essential to build your foundation with knowledge. You need to study, listen to the masters, and play as much as you can with other musicians. Playing live with people is how you learn: how you hear what is working and what needs work. The more experience one gets, the more confidence grows.

So, along with your hands and feet interplay, and lots of real-time playing experience, knowing your history enriches your facility with the language of the music and that will naturally liberate and allow your creative spirit to assert itself and flow freely. When this happens, the riches and rewards are ultimate. Being able to contribute to the art form, to be an innovator, is the goal, and one of the highest causes you can make!

Tuning

I tune my snare and toms much like Max Roach did when he was playing with Clifford Brown. I have done that since high school and I can't seem to get away from it. I tune my bass drum more like the way Tony Williams tuned his while playing with Miles Davis; sort of in the middle leaning toward a high pitch. It varies according to the rooms that I am playing. Lenny White tunes his to a G. Most jazz drummers like a ring, not a thud, so I don't use any muffling at all. I never have a hole in the front on the bass drum. I use two Evans heads on all of my drums. The heads are white coated and ring nicely. I use an 18 inch bass drum, an 8 by 12 mounted tom tom, a 14 by 14 floor tom and a 5 1/2 inch wood snare. I don't use tape on any of my drums.

Stickings

If I like an idea that comes from another drummer, I incorporate the concept, according to how my feet and hands move naturally. I never play exactly what I heard someone else play, and I don't use other people's sticking; the sticking I use is homemade. I want to sound like me—I think it is paramount to have your own voice.

I do use a lot of paradiddle-type sticking, with doubles, singles, bass drum, and hi-hat interaction woven throughout. This allows me to shade and color; to season things. I use singles for energy bursts or to create tension or explosions. This follows the jazz drumming tradition, so my phrasing sounds authentic—as opposed to fusion drumming, which I feel too often sounds like it is being superimposed over a jazz piece.

An important note, though, as far as stickings go: none of this is a strict dictum. In the heat of the moment, I use whatever I need to get the sounds I want. If you allow your body to do what is natural, it always knows what to do.

Ice Cream Scoop

This is a cool move. It was shown to me by Sam Woodyard, the great drummer with Duke Ellington, when I was about 13. I still use it to this day. By turning your hand in a small clockwise motion, you can strike the cymbal from the side, somewhat like a knife cut, thereby picking the quarter note up and making it dance. You have to be flexible when you play with a band; you can't use one motion for everything.

Feathering

Feathering the bass drum means to play a very quiet four beats to the bar with your bass drum. When not punctuating or playing syncopated ideas on the bass drum, it can be a great idea to feather, which creates a fat feel and helps support the groove. It should be felt and not heard. Of course, that doesn't work in every situation, but it can be a useful tool in your bag of tricks.

The Backbeat

It means the same in jazz as it does in funk. It is an accent, or solid hit, on the two and four.

Cross-Sticking

Cross sticking is when you turn the stick around and play a beat on the rim of the snare. This is great for a backbeat on the two and four, or just on beat four when swinging. It is also great for bossa novas.

Brushes

I deliberately avoided talking about brushes in this book as there are so many books with patterns, drawings, etc., showing how to sweep with the brushes that it seemed redundant. However, I will say I love playing ballads with brushes and if it were up to me I would never double-time a ballad. It is traditional at times to play brushes on the head of a tune in a "2" feel before changing to sticks when going into "4" at the bridge or for the blowing. In the words of the great Tony Williams, one should be able to play all of the things he or she plays using sticks with brushes as well.

The Ride Beat

The ride beat is the "kick and snare" of jazz. The beat on the ride cymbal not only carries the time but it also informs the feel of the piece. It is fundamental to bringing a steady groove with a lot of heart. As far as playing jazz music goes, understanding this is key.

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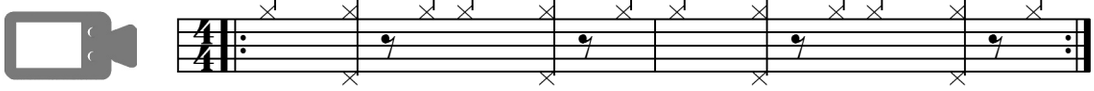

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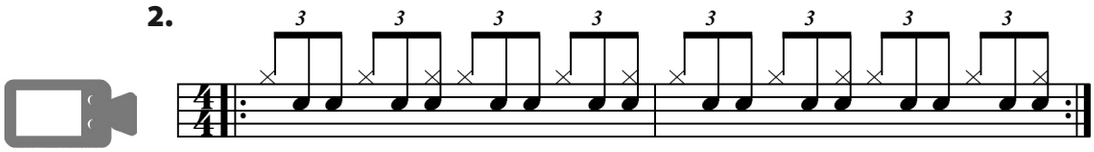

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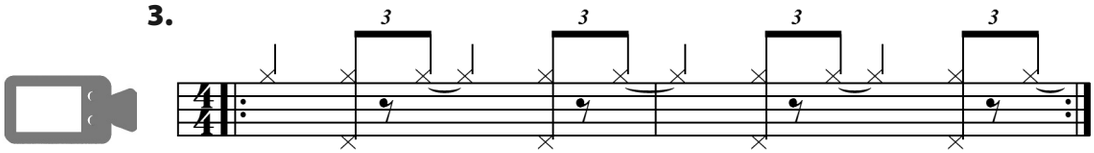

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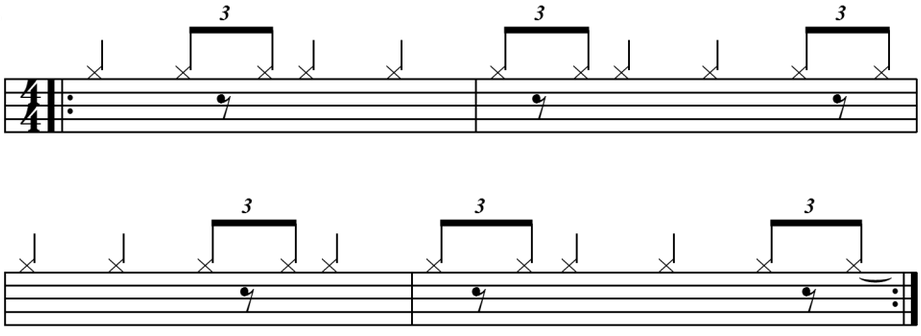

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