

The Drumming of Ali Jackson



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Biography

Born April 3, 1976 into a legacy of jazz musicians, Ali took an early liking to the drums. At the age of two, his talent and potential was immediately recognized by his parents. At the age of five he began studying the piano which laid the foundation for his melodic approach to the drums. By the time he was seven, Ali was performing with his father on the streets of Detroit. These outings with his father were valuable lessons in performance and in life. He learned to appreciate the function of his instrument in an ensemble. His father also taught him to keep an open and absorbing mind in music and in life. Detroit, known for its rich legacy of producing some of the worlds finest musicians, was the perfect breeding ground for Ali.

He graduated from Cass Technical High School, known for producing some of the most renown names in Jazz: Paul Chambers, Donald Byrd, Barry Harris and Geri Allen to name a few. At Cass he performed in numerous ensembles and honed his natural ability. Ali has been awarded scores of medals and honors for his outstanding musicianship and leadership and he has performed with the Michigan All-State Honors Band and the Detroit Symphonic Honors Band. Ali won the Clarence Eddins/Blue Bird Inn Scholarship for outstanding music achievement and was selected to be a featured soloist for "Beacons in Jazz" honoring Jazz legend Max Roach. A recent graduate of the Mannes College of Music for jazz and contemporary music at the New School for Social Research, Ali continues to expand his study of fine art. In conjunction with his education from the Mannes School, he has taken private lessons and instruction from master teachers such as Joe Chambers, Charli Persip, Chico Hamilton and Max Roach.

His style, a powerful blend of technical mastery and showmanship, is strongly influenced by his late Uncle Oliver "Bops" Jackson Jr., Papa Jo Jones and Lionel Hampton. Ali's playing is also influenced by Laurence Williams, Roy Brooks, Elvin Jones, Philly Jo Jones, Ed Blackwell, Tony Williams, Ignacio Berroa, Billy Cobham; and a host of younger drummers: Jeff "Tain" Watts, Billy Drummond, Lewis Nash, Carl Allen, Ralph Peterson, Kenwood Dennard, Dennis Chambers, Steve Berrios and Herlin Riley. Ali has always been outspoken in making sure that young people are properly informed about jazz and its tradition. For the past three years Ali has been part of Young Audiences, a program that strives to educate New York City youth about Jazz. Ali has performed and recorded extensively. He has worked with some of the worlds finest musicians including Wynton Marsalis, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Aretha Franklin, Marcus Roberts, Gerald Albright, Eric Reed, KRS-ONE, Russell Gunn, Jacky Terrason, Rodney Kendrick, Buster Williams, Cyrus Chestnut, Chris McBride, James Moody, Vinx, Marcus Printup, Nicolas Payton, Milt Hinton and the New York City Ballet. Through his continued drive, integrity and spirit Ali continues to support and perpetuate the foundations of jazz: Spontaneity, freedom and spirituality. Ali has residences in New York City and Seattle, Washington.

Discography

Recordings as a leader

Ali M. Jackson Quartet, Groove at Jazz en Tête, Space Time Records

Recordings as a sideman

Wynton Marsalis: The Magic Hour, Columbia

Wynton Marsalis: Live at the Village Vanguard, Columbia

Gerald Albright: Giving Myself To You, Atlantic Jazz

Marcus Roberts: Blues for the New Millenium, Sony

Eric Reed Trio: Mo' Jazz Christmas, Motown

KRS-ONE: I Got Next, Jive

Russell Gunn: Gunn Fu, Muse/First Note Music

Rodney Kendrick: Last Chance for Common Sense, Verve

The Licks

I. "Feeling of Jazz"

This tune is the *SLOW* lead off track on Wynton Marsalis' 2004 album The Magic Hour. It features Dianne Reeves on vocals, Eric Lewis on piano, Carlos Henriquez on bass, and of course Wynton Marsalis on trumpet. Jackson's playing on the track is at once simple, refined, right on the mark, and *in the pocket*.

Ex. 1 – 0:00

After Carlos Henriquez sets up the tune with a groovy bass line, Jackson plays time on a surprisingly dry ride cymbal and nothing else, save a few backbeat cross-sticks on two and four. When Reeves enters on vocals he plays *only* the ride; no bass drum, no hi-hat, no nothing.

The notation for Example 1 consists of three staves. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a 3-measure rest. The second staff is a single-line cymbal staff with a double bar line and a '4' below it, containing a series of 'x' marks representing notes on a ride cymbal. The third staff is another single-line cymbal staff with a double bar line and an '8' below it, also containing a series of 'x' marks representing notes on a ride cymbal.

Ex. 2 – 1:16

At the end of the first chorus of vocals, Jackson plays this simple, yet surprisingly effective fill, propelling the tune into the next chorus and increasing the intensity.

The notation for Example 2 is a single-line cymbal staff with a double bar line and a '4' below it. It features a complex rhythmic pattern of 'x' marks with stems, representing a cymbal fill.

Ex. 3 – 2:10

At the end of the second chorus of vocals, Jackson reprises his earlier fill with this variation. He then changes the groove slightly, adding some extra notes in the bass drum. He also adds some attitude, by comping with his bass drum, playing some punchy off beat accents.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a drum solo. The first staff contains a complex rhythmic pattern with many notes and accents. The second and third staves show simpler patterns with accents and some rests.

II. “Free To Be”

This is the third tune of Wynton’s The Magic Hour, and it is a mid-tempo swing tune with rhythmic A sections and a pedal point bridge. The form of the tune is AA’BA, 32 bars.

Ex. 1 – 0:00

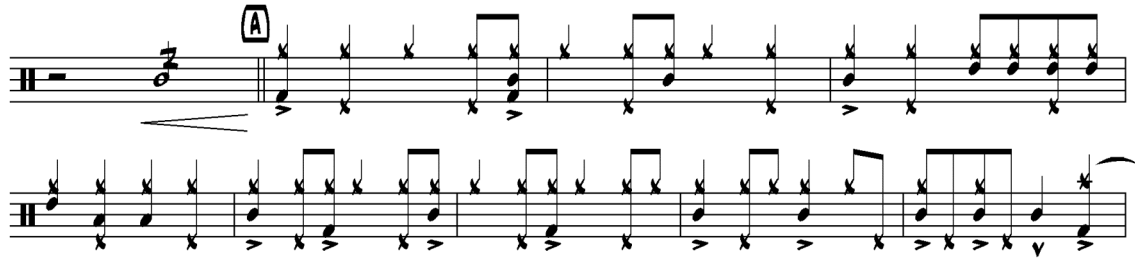
Below is the rhythmic transcription of the A sections of the melody. Jackson catches these rhythms in some very interesting ways, using the snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, and full kit orchestrations.

The image shows a single staff of musical notation with a treble clef and a common time signature. It contains a series of rhythmic slashes and notes, representing the A sections of the melody.

Ex. 2 – 0:28

Below is a transcription of Jackson’s orchestration of the melodic hits written above. He plays this particular orchestration over the final A section of the inhead. Note

the unison snare drum and bass drum hits, the tom orchestrations, and the send-off hit on beat 4 of the last bar.



Ex. 3 – 1:43

One of the greatest things about Jackson's playing is his unique and melodic accompaniment/comping/time keeping style. He often uses melodies in his toms, repeat motives, and unisons in his snare drum and bass drum. He also often blurs the bar lines between sections of music. The time keeping example below begins over the last A section of Wynton's second chorus of solo. Notice how Jackson completely blurs the bar line between the last A of this chorus and the first A of the next chorus. Eric Lewis even catches a few notes of the polyrhythm at the top of the third chorus.



Ex. 4 – 2:29

During the first A of Wynton’s fourth chorus of solo, Jackson begins playing with the time, placing off beat hits in each measure that create hemiola figures that also blur the bar lines. For the second A section, Jackson responds to Wynton’s sudden registral change and wailing with a melodic tom fill that he repeats 5 or 6 times before kicking the tune into the bridge.

The image displays four staves of musical notation. The first two staves are marked with a circled 'A' and show rhythmic patterns with off-beat hits. The third and fourth staves are also marked with a circled 'A' and show a melodic tom fill with repeated patterns.

Ex. 5 – 6:46

The last, but certainly not least excerpt off this track is Ali’s drum solo. Following the piano solo, Jackson and the bass player solo for two choruses. Jackson solos over all the A sections, with accompaniment from Henriquez on bass. Wynton also plays a few markers to denote the melody. Henriquez takes both B sections with no accompaniment. Notable here is the highly melodic style that Jackson employs, particularly in the first 2 A sections of the second chorus. He is also note afraid to develop an idea. The two A sections of the first chorus remain on the toms for the entire time, developing this idea. Also note the unisons in his snare, bass, and ride cymbal during the last A of the first chorus. Here, he keeps the same motive going over the bar line, again blurring the bar line between the end of the first chorus and the start of the second.

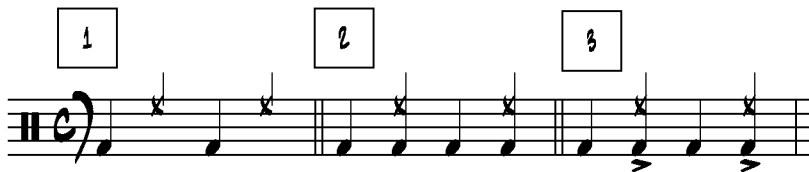
Solo excerpt on following pages.

III. “You & Me”

“You & Me” is the second tune on Wynton’s The Magic Hour. It features Henriquez playing bowed bass and Jackson on brushes, playing on both the cymbals and stirring on the snare. The groove is basically an “um-pah” 2-feel.

Ex. 1 – 0:00

Below is the basic “um-pah” groove to the tune. Number 1 is the way Jackson plays it most of the tune, and numbers 2 and 3 are ways Jackson embellishes the groove. When playing beneath solos, Jackson plays groove number one and comps with his bass drum rather than his snare.



Ex. 2 – 1:00

When Ali goes to brushes he plays a very simple quarter note groove. All 4 quarter notes are given equal length and accent. His brush playing is also notable because he stirs backwards (counterclockwise) with his left hand and always plays with his snares off.



Ex. 3 – 3:25

Following Wynton’s solo, Jackson takes a pseudo-drum solo that plays around with the groove. Henriquez accompanies him, playing with the wood of the bow on his strings. Following this solo, the melody returns.

This musical score consists of three staves. The top two staves are in treble clef and feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating muted notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a similar rhythmic pattern. A section of the bottom staff is marked "AT NUT" and includes a wavy line above the staff and a series of notes with circles below them, likely representing a fretted sequence or a specific technique. The notation includes various note values, stems, and articulation marks.