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ELVIN JONES: THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN JAZZ DRUMMING

BY

MARKIQUIS JABBAR MCKNIGHT

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Music
with a concentration in Jazz Performance
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2023

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

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ABSTRACT

Jazz drumming has substantially evolved over the years and has done so with the help of some iconic innovators. Although many drummers have contributed to the progress of the style we have come to know as modern jazz drumming, one of the main influencers of modern jazz drumming is Elvin Jones. Often referred to as the father of modern jazz drumming, Jones is a legendary jazz drummer who left his mark on both the history and the sound of jazz music. His melodic and energetic playing, which drew inspiration from African and Caribbean drumming has been immensely influential to both jazz and funk music.

While Jones's name is internationally known, especially among drummers of all music genres, jazz musicians, and fans of jazz music, relatively few scholarly works have discussed in detail what he did to shape and define the complex style of modern jazz drumming. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to examine how Jones influenced its evolution. In particular, this thesis will focus on the height of Jones's performing career with the John Coltrane Quartet from 1960 to 1965. A history of previous innovations, transcriptions of recordings, as well as books, articles, interviews, and observations from other drummers, musicians, musicologists, and historians are the basis of the research. These various resources will help demonstrate what shaped Jones's unique style and his influence on the evolution of jazz drumming.

To evaluate Jones's style and contributions, I will concentrate on his unique approach to accompaniment (comping), four-limb independence, polyrhythms, and ride cymbal patterns. Jazz pedagogy, reflections from jazz musicologists, and my own transcription and analysis of Jones's recordings with the Coltrane Quartet between the years 1960-65, informed by my own experience as a jazz drummer and educator, will support my analysis. Understanding

Jones's approach is relevant to a complete understanding of jazz drumming because his style has been so influential in jazz music and in other musical genres as well.

To my family,
especially my grandmother, the late Crizell Elizabeth McKnight,
the first female drummer I ever knew.
She helped to lay the foundation of my musical career.

To all the drummers
who have made and will make their mark on history,
especially those who inspired me on my mission trip to Haiti.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to say thank you to the members of my doctoral committee for their guidance during my educational pursuits at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

I also greatly appreciate the many friends that have encouraged me on this journey, with a special thanks to Dr. Bailey, Jeff B., Karen G., Kevin H., Robert L., Dr. Meyers, Lamonte and Edna P., Dr. Roberson, Bob S., Willie S., and Michael S.

I am forever grateful for the love and support of my family, especially for the countless prayers offered by my mom, Rushon, and for my first snare drum, given to me by my dad, Lorenzo. Thank you to my father- and mother-in-law, Warren and LaJewel, for your support.

An Elvin-sized drum roll to goes to the love of my life, Valencia, for her support, encouragement, and patience.

Last, but most certainly, not least, To God be the Glory!

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CHAPTER 1: BIOGRAPHY

Elvin Ray Jones was born in Pontiac, Michigan on September 9, 1927, and he died in Englewood, New Jersey on May 18, 2004.[1] Born to Henry Sr. and Olivia Jones, he was raised in Pontiac with his siblings. Jones's identical twin brother, Alvin Roy, died from whooping cough at age eight months.

Jones's parents were part of the Great Southern Migration to the north that began in the 1910s. In 1919, they traveled from Vicksburg, Mississippi, to the Detroit suburb of Pontiac, Michigan, to be a part of the automobile production boom that was occurring there. Pontiac is where Jones spent his formative years. Henry Sr. worked as a lumber inspector at the Yellow Truck and Coach Manufacturing Company and later transitioned to General Motors in the same position. He was also a deacon at the Trinity Baptist Church in Pontiac. Jones's mother, Olivia, was a homemaker; during the Great Depression, she opened their home to the community for people to come to eat and receive financial help.

Like the many other African American families that moved to the Detroit area during that time, the Joneses were primarily located on the southeast side of the city. Approximately 500 families moved to Detroit during this period, even though a city ordinance prohibited local white businesses from serving African American people. In addition to economic opportunity, the Joneses' move was also influenced by Henry Sr.'s brother, Joseph, who was already a prominent African American entrepreneur and resident there.

Jones was born into a musical family. His interest in the drums can be traced back to his childhood in Pontiac, when he was "enraptured" by the drummers in the circus parades that took

1. John Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," *Oakland Journal*, 14 (2008): 10.

place near his home.[2] In later years, he recalled following the band in the parades just to be able to walk alongside the drummers.

Even as a youth, Jones began to exhibit the discipline that laid the foundation for his skill set. After getting a Paul Yoder drum method book around age twelve, he practiced daily for hours until he learned all twenty-six rudiments.[3] Jones had no drum set while growing up, and instead, he practiced using drumsticks and a book or a drum pad. Years later, in an interview with Talking Drums magazine, Jones recalled: "[H]ere in the United States is where any aspiring musician has to teach himself. This is where you have to be taught, this is where you learn your lessons. Otherwise, you start traveling with an incomplete education, and you're not prepared; you haven't had enough hard knocks and this is the School of Hard Knocks."[4]

Jones was a drum major in his junior high school marching band, and he studied music in high school, earning first drum chair. As a teenager, he also played at paid gigs, including at a bar frequented by workers from a nearby factory. "On a good night I could make 2 bucks," he told an interviewer: "Anyway, one customer came up to me and said, play a drum solo. Go on, make some noise. I didn't know much about playing so I guess I made quite a bit of noise. That's how people thought about drumming then. Many musicians felt like that too."[5]

Jones quit school in the tenth grade to work at the General Motors Truck and Bus Plant in Pontiac. In 1946, he moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where he worked until he enlisted in the

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2. "Elvin Jones," interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, on WHYY, January 7, 1998, https://freshairarchive.org/guests/elvin-jones.

3. Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," 12.

4. "Absolutely Elvin," *Talking Drums*, 1996, 38.

5. Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," 12.

Army Air Corps. While in the military, Jones was a member of the 766th Army Air Corps band. It was during this time that Jones was influenced by recordings of artists such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Many years later, in a 1998 "Fresh Air with Terry Gross" radio interview, Jones described hearing for the first time the recording of Gillespie's composition of the song "Salt Peanuts," featuring the drummer Sid Catlett, who Jones described as "amazing."[6] Jones recalled the impact of hearing Catlett's 8-bar introduction using brushes: "I never heard anything so beautiful, so precise, so musical, that I was completely enraptured by that. From that point on, I tried to listen to every record I could get."

Jones returned home from the military and bought his first drum set in 1949. This was also the same year that his father, Henry Sr., died.[7] After Henry Sr.'s death, Jones's mother Olivia welcomed jazz musicians into their home for weekly jam sessions. Jones recalled that the house was filled with musicians every Monday night, and neighbors would also gather to enjoy the music: "[T]he house would be mine," stated Jones, "and all the musicians from Detroit would flock out there. We would jam and have a ball. My mother made it comfortable for everybody."[8]

Upon his return to Pontiac, Jones began playing at the Grand River Street Club in Detroit. He also began playing at the newly established jazz venue, the Blue Bird Inn, where he attracted an audience that included musicians such as Miles Davis. Jones also performed at the New World Stage in Detroit and at local concerts.

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6. "Elvin Jones," interview by Terry Gross.

7. Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," 14-15.

8. Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," 15.

In 1955, Jones moved to New York City. He originally went there to audition for the drummer position in Benny Goodman's big band, but he was unsuccessful. "Jones . . . arrived in New York City in 1955 with the rudiments of a heavier, distinct style that set many ears atilt. Jones did not fit smoothly into the standard timekeeping role, as he took rhythmic liberties that drew uncommon attention to the drum kit."[9] Thereafter, he joined Charles Mingus's quintet, the members of which played as backup musicians on Miles Davis's *Blue Moods* album. Jones and Mingus later joined the trio of bebop pianist Bud Powell. Mingus eventually left the trio, but Jones and bassist Tommy Potter remained in the trio for more than a year.

New York City ultimately proved to be a ripe environment for the growth of Jones's career. He joined Sonny Rollins's trio and played on the 1957 album *A Night at the Village Vanguard*. Finally, in 1958, Jones recorded his first family album with older brothers Hank (piano) and Thad (trumpet), entitled *Keepin' Up with the Joneses*, on the MetroJazz label. The bassist was Eddie Jones, of no relation to them.

It was in 1960 that Jones got the call to join the legendary John Coltrane Quartet, along with pianist McCoy Tyner and bassist Jimmy Garrison. Jones had been listening to Coltrane perform in New York City for some time when Coltrane approached him about possibly joining the band, and Jones said that he would be ready whenever the opportunity arose.[10] Coltrane and Jones had a symbiotic relationship as band leader and drummer. When asked about his drumming during the introduction of the Coltrane song "Spiritual," performed in 1961 at the well-known New York City jazz club, the Village Vanguard, Jones recalled that everything was

9. Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 46.

10. "Elvin Jones," interview by Terry Gross.

improvised and further added: “We never had a rehearsal in the whole time that we were together. Not one time.”[11] Jones’s performances with Coltrane are best known for their duets that produced what is commonly described as “sheets of sound” or a “wall of sound.” Frequently, the volume of the sheets of sound overshadowed Tyner’s and Garrison’s playing, essentially resulting in a duet between Coltrane and Jones.

Jones left the Coltrane Quartet in early 1966 to lead his own small bands, including the Elvin Jones Jazz Machine. His bands featured musicians such as saxophonists Joe Farrell, Frank Foster, Dave Liebman, and Pat LaBarbera. Jones’s numerous post-Coltrane recordings include *The Ultimate Elvin Jones* (1968), *Remembrance* (1978), and *It Don’t Mean a Thing* (1993). As a band leader, Jones recorded fifty albums, beginning with *Keepin’ Up with the Joneses* in 1958, and ending with his last one in 1999, *The Truth: Heard Live at the Blue Note*. As a sideman, Jones recorded 149 albums beginning with, *Swing . . . Not Spring!* in 1948, and ending with *Collaboration* in 2004, the year he died. In total, Jones performed on 500 recordings throughout his long musical career.

Widely recognized as one of the greatest drummers in jazz drumming history, Jones received numerous awards and recognitions. A mere snapshot of his vast contributions to the international drumming community includes winning the DownBeat Magazine’s International Critics Poll in 1973 and 1998, being inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 1991 and the Modern Drummer’s Hall of Fame in 1995 and being recognized by Zildjian cymbal company with The American Drummers Achievement in 1998. Notably, Jones received an honorary Doctor of Music degree from the Berklee School of Music in 2001. When awarding Jones’s honorary doctorate, Berklee president Lee Burke observed: “In the world of music, there

11. “Elvin Jones,” interview by Terry Gross.

are leaders and followers, innovators and imitators. Elvin Jones is both a leader and an innovator and one of the most influential drummers in the history of jazz."[12]

As a member of "one of the most celebrated jazz families," the role of Jones's family in the development of his musical career cannot be overstated.[13] Jones's musical family was a large family that was among the first to embrace jazz music as a family unit. Jones recalled that all of his immediate family was musically inclined. Notably, this group included his older brothers, pianist Henry Jr. "Hank", and trumpeter/cornetist Thad, his sister Olive, a pianist, and his sisters Malinda and Anna Mae, who were singers. His father and mother, Henry Sr. and Olivia, were also singers, although Henry Sr. did not share the family's appreciation for jazz music. The family owned a grand piano, and both Hank and Olive took private piano lessons; as a result, sometimes Jones had to go upstairs to the attic to practice.[14] Unfortunately, Olive, who was classically trained and showed a great deal of promise, died at age twelve as a result of an ice-skating accident.

In addition to the Jones family's love of jazz music, several family members were a part of their church choir. On Sundays, which were considered sacred in the family, playing and listening to jazz was forbidden; on other days, however, they frequently listened to symphony and big band radio broadcasts.

Perhaps the most substantial familial impact on Jones's development as a musician and a drummer was the influence of his brothers, Hank and Thad, who were accomplished jazz

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12. "Berklee Honors Elvin Jones and Al Kooper, and Welcomes 950 New Students at Fall 2001 Convocation," *Berklee Now,* September 1, 2001, https://www.berklee.edu/berklee-today/fall-2001/Berklee-Honors.

13. "Elvin Jones," interview by Terry Gross.

14. Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," 10, 12.

musicians in their own right. Hank Jones, (1918-2010), was the oldest of the sons and one of the pianists in the family. Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, before the Jones family moved north to Pontiac, Michigan, he was influenced by pianists Earl Hines, Art Tatum, Fats Waller, and Teddy Wilson. He became a professional musician at the age of thirteen and as a youth, played in territory (regional) bands. It was during this time that he met Lucky Thompson, who invited him to New York City in 1944 to play with the "Hot Lips" Page Band. After arriving in New York City, he worked with artists such as Billy Eckstine, Coleman Hawkins, John Kirby, Andy Kirk, and Howard McGhee. In the fall of 1947, he began touring with Norman Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic concert series. The following year, in 1948, he began playing with Ella Fitzgerald, whom he accompanied until 1953.[15] After his time performing with Fitzgerald ended, he was a sideman for artists such as Cannonball Adderley, Benny Goodman, Milt Jackson, and Artie Shaw.

In 1959, Hank became a staff pianist for CBS which lasted for seventeen years. He then began an extensive recording career that lasted through the 1980's. Throughout his career spanning more than seven decades, Hank played on a total of 540 albums.

Thad Jones, (1924-86), was a trumpeter, cornetist, composer, and band leader. Born in Pontiac, Michigan, Thad taught himself how to play the trumpet by listening to records and using method books; his professional musical career began at age sixteen.[16] From 1943 to 1946, he

15. Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1988), 89.

16. "Thad Jones," accessed March 11, 2023, http://thadjones.jazzgiants.net.

served in the United States Army. After leaving the Army, he continued to perform professionally, and in 1954, he joined the Count Basie Band where he played until 1963.[17]

In 1965, Thad and drummer Mel Lewis started the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, described as "one of the most influential big bands since the swing era" of the 1930s and 1940s.[18] The original members of the orchestra played together until 1978, when Thad moved to Copenhagen, Denmark.[19] The same year, the orchestra received a Grammy for the album, *Love in Munich*. Prior to that time, the Village Vanguard opened its doors to the orchestra on February 7, 1966. Although the original members of the orchestra have since died, the orchestra now known as the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra continues to perform weekly at the Village Vanguard and has had the longest running jazz gig in history.

As a result of their own professional successes, Hank and Thad were able to provide Jones professional advice. They were also able to provide him with access to a wide variety of recordings, instruments, musicians, and venues: "A whole new world opened up to me then because my brother Hank was playing with the Jazz At the Philharmonic and he was Ella Fitzgerald's accompanist, so I met Ray Brown, I met Buddy Rich, I met Gene Krupa, I met J.C. Heard, all these guys. It seemed like another world."[20]

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17. Mark Stryker, "Thad Jones: 50 years of big band jazz in present tense," *Detroit Free Press*, February 7, 2016, https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/2016/02/07/thad-jones-mel-lewis-jazz/79845538/.

18. David Lisik and Eric Allen, *50 Years at the Village Vanguard: Thad Jones, Mel Lewis, and the Village Vanguard Orchestra* (Chicago, SkyDeck Music, 2017), 8-9.

19. Mark Stryker, "Thad Jones: 50 years of big band jazz in present tense."

20. "Absolutely Elvin," *Talking Drums*, 41.

Jones impressed and influenced scores of drummers and other musicians. Art Mardigan, who was a drummer in the house band at the Crystal Show Bar in Detroit, helped ensure that Jones got his house band gig after he left the band. Younger musicians that Jones influenced included saxophonist Charles McPherson and drummers Roy Brooks, Frank Gant, Roy and Louis Hayes. During Jones's tenure at the Blue Bird Inn, "when they knocked at the window, Jones, playing on stage with his back to the front window, would pull back the venetian blinds, allowing a view of the band. As for the drummers, "they asked me a lot of questions about drumming and music, and I tried to give them as much knowledge as I could."[21] Some other musicians included saxophonists Wardell Gray and Billy Mitchell, pianists Barry Harris and Tommy Flanagan, guitarist Kenny Burrell, and bassist Paul Chambers.

21. Cohassey, "Elvin Jones' Detroit Years," 16.

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF JAZZ AND JAZZ DRUMMING

An appreciation of Jones's contributions is aided by a general understanding of the evolution of jazz music, and more specifically, jazz drumming. The following discussion will begin with a broad overview of the evolution of jazz music, from its beginnings through Jones's tenure with the Coltrane Quartet, then survey key developments in jazz drumming during the same time frame.

Jazz standards frequently consist of a chorus of thirty-two measures divided into eight-bar phrases. They are labeled as AABA, and all the A's have the same melody and chords. The first two and the fourth sections are the same, but the third section is called the bridge. It is the most important phrase because it is a different melody and helps keep everyone on track. Tonally, it is different and sometimes rhythmically too. It is the place where the groove or style switches to indicate the change. If the A's are swing, then the B may be Latin (or vice versa) or the A's could have a two-feel and the B swing.

Traditional jazz music can be traced to New Orleans, Louisiana. It is the result of a mixture of different types of music, including the blues and African American spirituals. Jazz flourished in the 1910s and 1920s, and as it did, New Orleans style jazz was adopted in other major cities and began to evolve.

Originally, a jazz band involved two or three drummers, one to play the bass drum, one to play the snare drum, and possibly one to play the cymbals, or "accessory" or "sound effect instruments."[22] Of these instruments, the bass drum played an especially important role; in a

22. Robert B. Breithaupt, "History of the Drumset," *Percussive Notes*, Fall 1989, 5.

technique known as "feathering," the drummer relied on the bass drum to play quarter notes to keep time.

The invention of the first bass drum foot pedal was an especially notable development because the foot pedal allowed for a single drummer to play the bass drum and snare drum simultaneously. While a bass drum pedal may have been used in Europe as early as the 1840s, bass drum pedals did not appear in the United States for about another forty years.[23] Many drummers made their own bass drum pedals, and Dee Dee Chandler is credited with making the first homemade bass drum pedal in New Orleans.

As jazz music grew in popularity, jazz artists began to record with a commercial type of sound, which included the early recordings of artists such as Louis Armstrong. During this time, jazz drumming evolved as well. This evolution included multiple factors, such as the number of drummers required to play a drum set, the physical design and setup of the drum set, and drummers' playing methods.

Subsequently, the snare drum was mounted to the side of the bass drum, resulting in one cohesive instrument that could be carried and played together. This was followed by the addition of the hi-hat cymbal, which allowed one drummer to control all the drum sounds. Later, drummers began adding cymbals, wood blocks, temple blocks, cowbells, and gongs to this instrumentation. This configuration became known as a "trap set," a term associated with drummer and entrepreneur William Ludwig.[24] Later, the addition of the ride cymbal to the trap

23. Matt Brennan, *Kick It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 34-36.

24. Brennan, *Kick It*, 44-45.

set significantly aided the drummer and the band in keeping time. Eventually, the trap set became known as the drum set.

Warren "Baby" Dodds has been recognized as the first jazz drummer "due to his ability to support the improvising soloist as well as to improvise himself."[25] He is also credited with pioneering the full utilization of the bass drum, tuning the drums, and playing breaks.[26]

Gene Krupa was known for obtaining worldwide recognition for his drumming. Notably, in 1927, Krupa successfully played his drum set on an ensemble recording and defied a skeptical engineer's concerns about the noise that the bass drum would produce.[27] Krupa's performing brought notoriety to the role of the drummer and reflected a shift of the role of the drummer from that of as a mere timekeeper. "Krupa's ability to structure a drum solo captured audiences of the era and set a style which drummers continue to use in the present day."[28]

The evolution of jazz continued with the swing era of the 1930s and 1940s, during which jazz was notably influenced by classical music and swing music. This era was marked by big bands with leaders such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman.

The advances in drum set technology aided in the development of drummers' speed, dexterity, and endurance. These advances enabled inherently fast drummers like William "Chick" Webb to perform increasingly complex beats, such as rolls on the bass drum.

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25. Breithaupt, "History of the Drumset," 6.

26. The term "break" refers to the period where the band stops playing to allow the drummer to play a drum solo.

27. Brennan, *Kick It*, 141.

28. Breithaupt, "History of the Drumset," 7-8.

With the evolution of the swing/big band era, some drummers, such as Jonathan "Papa Jo" Jones, began reducing the size of the drum set by reducing the number of accessories like cowbells, wood blocks, and gourds. This was a practical adjustment that allowed for more space on the stage as well as when transporting equipment. Papa Jo's minimalist approach paved the way for him to integrate into his playing an enhanced role of the hi-hat cymbal in keeping time.

Thereafter, William "Cozy" Cole's technique of shifting from reliance on the hi-hat for keeping time to reliance on the ride cymbal, was the precursor of four-limb independence—one of Jones's signature techniques.

Kenny "Klook" Clarke, a pioneer of bebop jazz drumming, introduced a different method of demonstrating four-limb independence, which gave more prominence to the bass drum. He "began to use the bass drum as a punctuating and independent voice on the drum set around 1940."[29] Cole's and Clarke's techniques laid the foundation for the ride cymbal to become the dominant, and sometimes only timekeeping instrument in modern jazz drumming.

Later, bebop emerged. It was considered a more improvisatory style: "Jazz had been born outside the mainstream, and after the mass acceptance of the swing bands, bebop was returning the music to its niche of unconventiality."[30]

Maxwell "Max" Roach was the first bebop jazz drummer to play melodic lines on the drums. He was also an expert in odd time signatures and superimposing different time signatures on top of one another. "In addition to expanding the creative possibilities of the instrument,

29. Breithaupt, "History of the Drumset," 8.

30. John Hasse, ed., *Jazz: The First Century*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 91.

bebop drummers engaged in direct dialogue with drum and cymbal manufacturers to further refine the shape and size of the drum kit itself."[31]

Jazz reached its peak in the 1950s through its commercial success. During this time, cool jazz was the predominant style of choice. It was thought of as an introspective style of music that "generally featured moderate tempos, vibratoless playing and a much more restrained approach."[32] However, it also had practical impacts on drumming, as "[t]he limited equipment demands of this style helped to 'downsize' the standard drumset."[33] Artists that were at the forefront of this style of music included Chet Baker, Dave Brubeck, and Miles Davis. Also, during this period, vocalists such as Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan rose to new heights of fame.

Later in the 1950s, hard bop emerged as a popular new style that was characterized by complex harmony and extended solo improvisations: in addition to the embrace of "minor-key melodies," "[t]he hard boppers also made use of the new long-playing record format to stretch out on extended solos."[34]

Jones, Arthur "Art" Blakey, and Joseph "Philly Joe" Jones are three pioneers of the hard bop style of jazz drumming. Characteristics of hard bop include four-limb independence, melodic lines, superimposed time signatures, African rhythms, polyrhythms, high energy, and counterpoint techniques.

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31. Brennan, *Kick It*, 174.

32. Breithaupt, "History of the Drumset," 8.

33. Breithaupt, "History of the Drumset," 9.

34. Hasse, ed., *Jazz: The First Century*, 116.

This evolution of jazz music, and more specifically, jazz drumming, are the foundations of Jones's style.

CHAPTER 3: JONES AND THE COLTRANE QUARTET

The John Coltrane Quartet began in the spring of 1960 after Coltrane left the Miles Davis Sextet.[35] It initially consisted of John Coltrane on saxophone, Steve Davis on bass, Pete La Roca Sims on drums, and Steve Kuhn on piano.

By September 1960, Kuhn and Sims had been replaced by McCoy Tyner on piano and Jones on drums. This group, Coltrane, Tyner, Garrison, and Jones formed what is known as the classic Coltrane Quartet.

Davis, also known as "Luquman Abdul Syeed," (1929-87), was the first bassist to record and play in the Coltrane Quartet. He was born in New York City and died at fifty-eight years old due to emphysema he contracted in 1980. Davis was from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He first met and performed with Coltrane when they were teenagers in Philadelphia. Davis played on three Coltrane Quartet albums: *Coltrane Plays the Blues*, *Coltrane's Sound*, and *My Favorite Things*.

Pete La Roca Sims, (1938-2012), was the first drummer in the Coltrane Quartet. He was born in Harlem, New York, and he died from lung cancer at age seventy-four. Unfortunately, because he was only with the Coltrane Quartet for a few months, he did not perform on any recorded albums.

Steve Kuhn was the first pianist in the Coltrane Quartet. He was born in New York City in 1938. Sadly, he shared the same fate as the drummer Pete Sims, not appearing on any albums due to his short tenure with the group. He recently retired from his professional life in late 2022.

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35. Ben Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 57-59.

Bassist Reginald "Reggie" Workman replaced Davis in 1961. He was born in Philadelphia in 1937. During the time that Coltrane was performing with Miles Davis, he met Workman, who was at the time performing with Roy Haynes and Eric Dolphy. Subsequently, Coltrane ended up hiring all three musicians for his band, although Haynes and Dolphy only played for very short periods of time. Workman played with the group until October of 1961. Workman played along with Davis on the song, "Africa," from the album *Africa/Brass*, which was Coltrane's first recording under the new Impulse label. Workman appears on eight other albums with the quartet which are: *In Europe* in 1961, *Live in Stockholm* (1961), *My Favorite Things* in 1961, *Ole Coltrane* in 1961, *Live at the Village Vanguard* in 1962, *Ballads* in 1963, *Best of Coltrane (Universal International)* in 1963, and *Impressions* in 1963.

Jimmy Garrison (1934-76) on bass was the last piece added to complete the puzzle of the final member of the Coltrane Quartet on November 1, 1961, during the *Live at the Village Vanguard* recording. He was born in Miami, Florida. Coltrane met Garrison when he saw Garrison play in Ornette Coleman's Quartet.

McCoy Tyner was the pianist in the last version of the Coltrane Quartet. He was born in New Jersey (1938-2020). Coltrane hired him in the summer of 1960 at the young age of twenty-one. Initially, they met in 1955 at Coltrane's mother's house when Tyner was seventeen years old. Coltrane mentioned that he wanted to start a quartet of his own, and he wanted Tyner to be a part of it. Years later, after Coltrane formed the Coltrane Quartet, Tyner joined and remained with the Quartet from 1960 to 1965.

Jones was the second and main drummer in the Coltrane Quartet. He was summoned by Coltrane in September of 1960. Coltrane and Jones "first met in 1957 when Jones went to

admire Shadow Wilson play at the Five Spot one night with the Monk-Coltrane group." They both came from strict religious families.

My Favorite Things was released in March 1961, and it was Coltrane's favorite of all his recordings. "If Coltrane had been self-critical about "Giant Steps," he was giddy about 'My Favorite Things." Coltrane told the French critic Francois Postif a year later that the song was "my favorite piece of all those I have recorded. I don't think I would like to do it over in any way, whereas all the other discs I have made could have been improved in some details. This waltz is great: when you play it slowly, it has an element of gospel that's not at all displeasing; when you play it quickly, it has other undeniable qualities."[36]

One of the musical concepts for which the Coltrane Quartet is best known is "sheets of sound." The term "sheets of sound" was developed in the late 1950s by jazz critic Ira Gitler to describe "Coltrane's rapid arpeggio style in his liner notes to *Soultrane*, in 1957."[37] Of this term, author Ben Ratliff notes:

> "Sheets of sound" is one of the few phrases from jazz criticism that has more or less broken free of its origin; few know who coined it. Anyway, it is a suggestive description, a mellifluous phrase, and it has become the dominent [sic] cliché for describing Coltrane's sound. Coltrane even eventually used if himself to describe his own playing, citing Gitler. Perhaps he liked the image—suggestive as it was of flat surfaces that have no definitive length and width, or of music paper.[38]

The term is still widely used today. It is a musical event that takes place where the amount of consecutive notes played matches with the volume of the sounds of those notes and collides in

36. Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*, 59.

37. Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*, 124.

38. Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*, 124.

such a way that it dominates the overall perception of the group or individual. It results in a bombardment of sound. This is a highly complex style of musicianship because of the speed, endurance, dexterity, and power required to produce and sustain it.

The Coltrane Quartet only recorded at two studios. The group made its debut recording with Atlantic Recording Studios located in New York City. It was started in 1947 by Amit Ertegun and has been a dominant force in the music industry ever since. Atlantic is not limited to jazz music and has had a wide variety of groups and artists that have released some of the most popular albums of all time. An example of this success is Aretha Franklin's "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You." Coltrane's tenure with Atlantic Records lasted from March of 1959 through May of 1961.

The second studio that produced most of the Coltrane Quartet's work was Impulse Record Studios in Hackensack, New Jersey. It was founded in 1960 by the producer Creed Taylor, and it was subsequently part owned by ABC-Paramount Records. Unlike Atlantic, Impulse Records was a label primarily focused on the production and recording of jazz music. In 1960, Coltrane became Impulse Records' first artist when it bought out his contract with Atlantic. As a result, he had a major influence on how the studio captured the sound of jazz. All of the features set up in the studio revolved around Coltrane and the rest of the band. For instance, a key innovation that involved Jones was the use of microphones on a stand with a pulley system that could be moved back when the volume of his drums started to peak on the soundboard. The microphones would just be rolled back and forth, toward and away from the drums as needed. In *A Love Supreme*, author Ashley Kahn noted that Impulse producer Ed Michel recalled: "Impulse was absolutely The House that Trane built."[39] Throughout the years,

39. Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album*, 213.

Impulse Records released more than 250 albums that set a new industry standard in particular in recording jazz albums. Eventually, in 1979, Impulse Records was sold to GRP Records.

The classic Coltrane Quartet's tenure ended in late 1965 with Tyner's exit. Jones left shortly thereafter in January 1966 after Coltrane hired another drummer, Rashied Ali.

> "He added another drummer," Jones told Whitney Balliett, "and I couldn't hear what I was doing any longer. There was too much going on, and it was ridiculous as far as I was concerned. I was getting into a whole area of frustration, and what I had to offer I felt I just couldn't contribute. I think Coltrane was upset, and I know in those last weeks I had a constant migraine headache."[40]

Coltrane, the Story of a Sound by Ben Ratliff provides an in-depth look at the Coltrane Quartet; it discusses how the band members thought about each other and how the musical world viewed them. In researching this thesis, it was the first source that provided a glimpse of Jones through the eyes of Coltrane. Ratliff observes that Coltrane's and Jones's bond was the most important bond in the Coltrane Quartet, as well as the strongest bond in the group. Their chemistry paved the way for and gave permission to other musicians to explore new possibilities of an expanded form, such as the use of the vamp.

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40. Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*, 103.

CHAPTER 4: JONES'S ACCOMPANIMENT (COMPING) STYLE

A hallmark of Jones's accompaniment (comping) style is that he liked to actively engage with whichever soloist he was accompanying. Jones is especially well known for his musical interactions with Coltrane. During the Coltrane Quartet years, Jones and Coltrane often played extended duets. Ben Ratliff vividly describes:

> A recording of "One Down, One Up," during which Elvin Jones breaks his bass pedal and plays without a bass drum for several minutes, remains one of the best indicators of the group's energy. From the midway point to the final iteration of the theme, thirteen minutes of its twenty-seven-minute duration are a duet between Coltrane and Jones, and so it belongs in that select group of Coltrane-Jones performances alone, alongside "Vigil" (from *Transition*) and a portion of "Crescent." And in it Coltrane swings, wired to the slightest accents of his drummer, delivering massive projection.[41]

Jones's and Coltrane's duets exhibited chemistry. The two musicians respected one another, and they trusted each other's musical talents and abilities to communicate musically to one another. Drums are a universal partner in duets because they provide a freedom that allows the other musician to explore melody and harmony without being dictated to or constrained by piano or bass.

Jones's accompaniment style was aggressive, in that he often matched Coltrane note for note. Coltrane liked this attribute of Jones's style of playing. However, Jones was versatile, and when a song demanded it, he would not play as aggressively. Such was the case in the Coltrane Quartet's version of "Say It," a traditional ballad with a standard form of AABA, that was originally a part of the 1940 film soundtrack for the movie "Buck Benny Rides Again." The song was composed by Jimmy McHugh, and the lyrics were written by Frank Loesser. Since that time, in addition to the Coltrane Quartet, other artists have recorded the song, such as Frank

41. Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*, 92.

Sinatra, John Hicks, and Pharoah Sanders. "Say It" is included on, surprisingly, the only album of ballads (also titled *Ballads*) that the Coltrane Quartet ever recorded. Released in 1963, *Ballads* later received a Grammy Hall of Fame award in 2008.

I chose to analyze this song for two reasons. First, ballads rarely get transcribed from the drummer's perspective. Second, "Say It" shows the lighter and more delicate side of Jones's playing and displays his range and uniformity. Ballads are some of the hardest styles of jazz to play because they require the most focus to details such as technique, time, and tone. Ballads will quickly shine a spotlight on a musician's flaws in any of these areas.

Like many ballads, "Say It" is a song about love, and more specifically, a lover longing to hear their lover's profession of "I Love You!" It is also commonly known by the title "Say It (Over and Over Again)." The ballad is about the constant longing, wanting and needing to have that profession stated repeatedly. Also, the concept is reinforced using the romantic leap between the first and third measures of the melody that gets repeated every four measures of the A sections.

"Say It" begins with the traditional form of the statement of the melody for eight measures that are repeated. The next section is the bridge that lasts for eight measures. It ends with the melody being restated for the last eight measures. All of the choruses have the same format.

Some of the key elements of Jones's adaptability include playing the hi-hat on beats two and four with his left foot, swirling the ride cymbal pattern with his hands on the snare drum, and only using triplets in two measures (the seventh and the fifteenth).

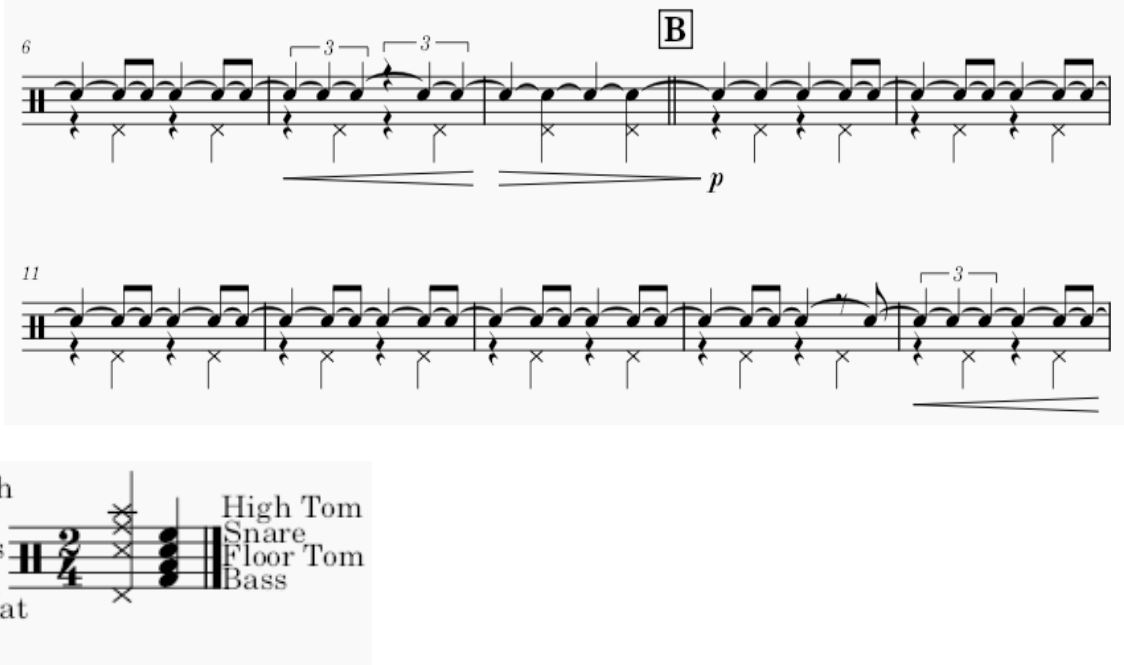

Figure 1: "Say It" bars 6-15.

As is typical with the bridge to contrast a change, Jones begins to let the hi-hat ring starting on the second beat of the second measure. By the fourth measure, it is happening every time the hi-hat is played, until ending on the second beat of the seventh measure, with no hi-hat on beat four, and resuming the regular closed hi-hat on beat two of the eighth measure. The one and only crash cymbal occurs on beat three of the eighth measure that sets up the return to the last A section of the song.

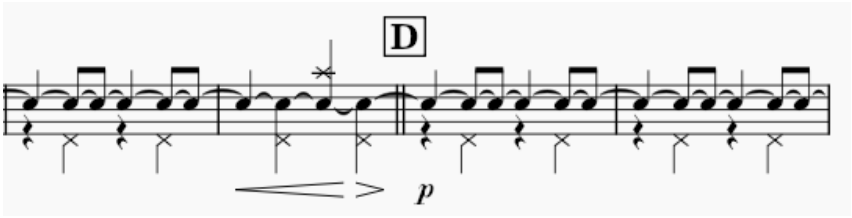

Figure 2: "Say It" bars 23-26.

It is amazing to hear Jones only play one crash cymbal for a full chorus, but just as important is where he chose to position it. The placement is exactly where one of his buzz rolls would have been played with sticks like in the last measure of the song "Blues to Elvin." The

buzz roll is another example of the control, precision, and uniformity of his playing style. One always knew that Jones's roll was a setup for a soloist or a downbeat of a new section of the form of a tune.

Although Jones's comping in "Say It" is somewhat understated relative to his comping on other songs, especially those that are not ballads, there are still takeaways from his performance.

First, Jones was aware of the stylistic demands of the song, and he flawlessly adjusted to the nature of the ballad. Because "Say It" is a slow, enchanting ballad, Jones remained in the song's 4/4 time signature throughout, which is atypical of his polyrhythmic technique. Similarly, he tempered his characteristically quick tempo by playing rubato. By playing in a slower tempo, Jones allowed Tyner and Garrison to have more dominant playing roles. These adjustments resulted in a role reversal of sorts, where Jones shifted into the drummer's more traditional role as timekeeper.

Second, as a ballad, Jones was aware that the song required particularly subtle dynamics. To that end, Jones adjusted his techniques, such as the use of brushes to create swirls on the snare drum, instead of the traditional use of drumsticks on the ride cymbal and snare drum. Notably, he never used the bass drum. Instead, he primarily used the snare drum and hi-hat, with the occasional use of the ride cymbal. This meant that the use of swirling triplets on the snare drum was his primary approach to creating tension and release within the song.

Third, Jones's adjustment to the ballad format shifted the balance of tension and release. By avoiding polyrhythms almost entirely (except for two measures), he allowed the music to breathe, which in turn, allowed the piano and bass to have more prominence within the song.

Despite the criticism from some observers and fellow musicians that Jones generally played too loudly, “Say It” demonstrates Jones’s patience and his ability to play a slow groove softly and sound like a typical drummer playing a ballad. In other words, Jones could not be distinguished from anyone else playing drums on a ballad. This is crucial because it is one of the rare times that this happens in his career. In “Say It,” he comps the least out of all the members in the Coltrane Quartet. In contrast, he usually is either first or second in command. Ultimately, Jones’s performance on “Say It” demonstrates how less is more.

CHAPTER 5: JONES'S FOUR-LIMB INDEPENDENCE

Jones's mastery of four-limb independence is the backbone of his modern approach to jazz drumming. "The term 'four-limb independence' refers to a drummer's ability to perform a unique rhythm or function with each one of the hands and feet simultaneously."[42] It is the coordination ability that is necessary for the physical multitasking of advanced drumming. Each limb is considered its own instrument, and it "knows exactly what the others are doing and how they work together, not independently."[43] In the traditional sense, an example of four-limb independence is the right hand playing the ride cymbal pattern on a ride cymbal, the left foot closing the hi-hat on beats two and four, the left hand playing beats on the snare drum, and the right foot playing quarter notes on the bass drum.

However, with respect to Jones's playing, his only consistency with the example mentioned above is the ride cymbal pattern being played on the ride cymbal. His other three limbs are used for accents and comping. It is this change in drumming style that birthed the bebop style. Jones was able to secure his place in jazz drumming history because he helped shape this new sound.

Four-limb independence is not just the basic building block for modern jazz drumming, but for any percussion instrument that utilizes a mallet to play it (which is the majority of the instruments in the percussion family). It is a critically important skill for drummers to have to be successful in mastering their instruments. There are some external factors that make this

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42. Barry Elmes, "Elvin Jones: Defining His Essential Contributions to Jazz" (master's thesis, York University, 2005), 28 footnote 39, https://www.barryelmes.com/stuff/4stuff/Thesis-Elvin%20Jones.pdf.

43. John Riley, *The Art of Bop Drumming*, ed. Dan Thress (Miami: Manhattan Music Publications, 1994), 17.

instrument mastery more of a challenge for drummers than other musical instruments. One main factor is that drummers usually do not touch the drum set by hand when we play. Instead, we use mallets such as drumsticks, brushes, and timpani mallets to strike the drums, cymbals, or accessory items on the kit. Another factor is that each part of the drum set is its own instrument, which is why it takes all four limbs to play a drum set. Yet another factor is the timing involved in striking those different instruments. For example, on a traditional four-piece jazz kit with a hi-hat and two ride cymbals, one on the left and right, it takes more time for your right hand to go from the hi-hat to the ride cymbal on the right than it does for the ride cymbal on the left, and if done in succession, it has to be calculated very quickly. Therefore, demonstrating four-limb independence is an act of multitasking to the extreme for the drummer, perhaps as demanding as any use of a musical instrument could be.

The song I chose to transcribe to illustrate Jones's four-limb independence is "Blues to Elvin." It was recorded on the album *Coltrane Plays the Blues* for Atlantic on an LP with the call number 1382. The album's personnel consist of Coltrane, Jones, Tyner, and Garrison, and it was recorded on October 24, 1960. "Blues to Elvin" is a standard medium blues song in the key of E-flat. This is a blues song that, at a tempo of 74 bpm, is slower than the tempo at which a typical blues song would be played.

The form of the song is twelve bars equaling one chorus. There are twelve choruses in the song. The format is first chorus with the rhythm section playing in a two-feel, the second chorus with Coltrane playing the melody, the third through fifth choruses make up Coltrane's solo, Tyner solos in the sixth and seventh choruses, and the eighth through the twelfth choruses are Coltrane's solo.

The song swings at the beginning, and the intro is only played once by the rhythm section (piano, bass, drums). Tyner plays the melody in octaves with a two-note hit with the octave from low to high (occasionally switching from high to low) on the and of four and the down beat of one along with Garrison, while Jones plays the ride cymbal pattern on the hi-hat accentuating the same hits. Coltrane takes the first solo but for four choruses with no melody. Then, Tyner gets two choruses. After that, Coltrane takes another five choruses to end the song with the melody played in the last measure. The ending sounds abrupt, and this could be the result of someone indicating that the song must end due to the time constraint on LPs, which was approximately twenty-five minutes per side. This track lasts for seven minutes and fifty seconds, taking up almost one-third of the LP's allotted time.

Specifically, I analyze the first chorus, and measures one through four of the twelfth chorus. Jones remains rather reserved during the first chorus playing in a hybrid style similar to that of Philly Jo Jones, where the swing pattern is played on the hi-hat with the accents on beats one and three, and the and's of beats two and four. While Philly Jo would accent beats one and three, Jones switched the pulse by adding and's before those beats, consequently shifting the role of the hi-hat into a primary role like the bass drum.

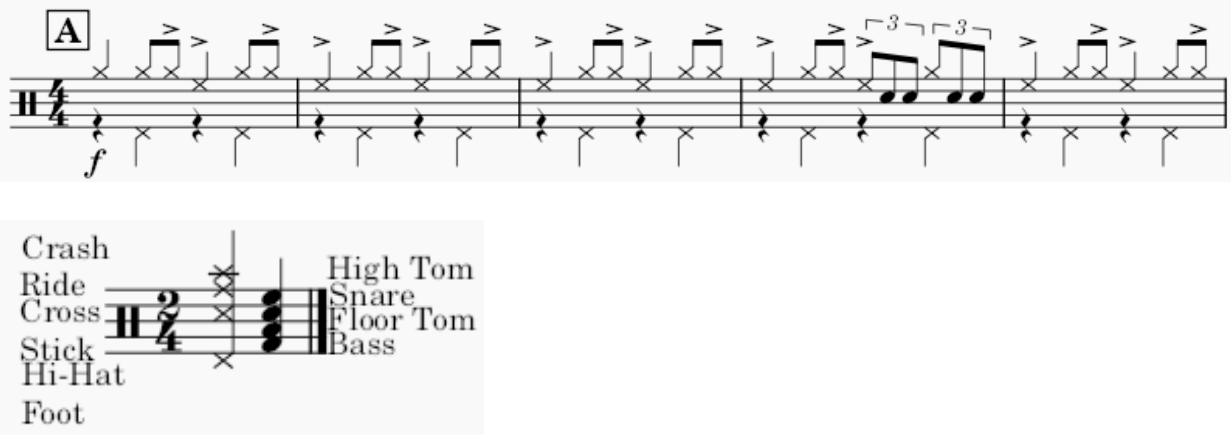

Figure 3: "Blues to Elvin" bars 1-5.

This is similar to a samba feel that imitates the beat of the human heart.

Jones was the middleman in the rhythm section that glued everyone together. As it relates to the opening groove, Garrison plays accents on the and of four and on one (the downbeat), while Jones plays those along with him and in between them on the and of two and on beat three, while Tyner plays all the eighth notes that Garrison does not. Specifically, it is the and of beat one, beat two and the and, beat three and the and, and beat four. Jones's accents are perfectly symmetrically lined up to play equal time with Garrison and Tyner. It is this key ingredient that makes this section of the song groove so hard and feel so good, providing the best wave for Coltrane to enter on with the melody in the second chorus.

One noteworthy aspect of Jones's approach to this song is his four-measure phrasing. On the last measure of each phrase, he accents with the snare drum in some variation of a triplet pattern. In the first phrase, the pattern consists of the la and le of beats three and four, in the second phrase, it consists of is the la of beat three and the le of beat four, and in the third phrase, it consists of the la's and le's of beats two, three, and four.[44]

44. "La" refers to the second beat of a triplet, and "le" refers to the third beat of a triplet. For instance, one la le, two la le, three la le, etc.

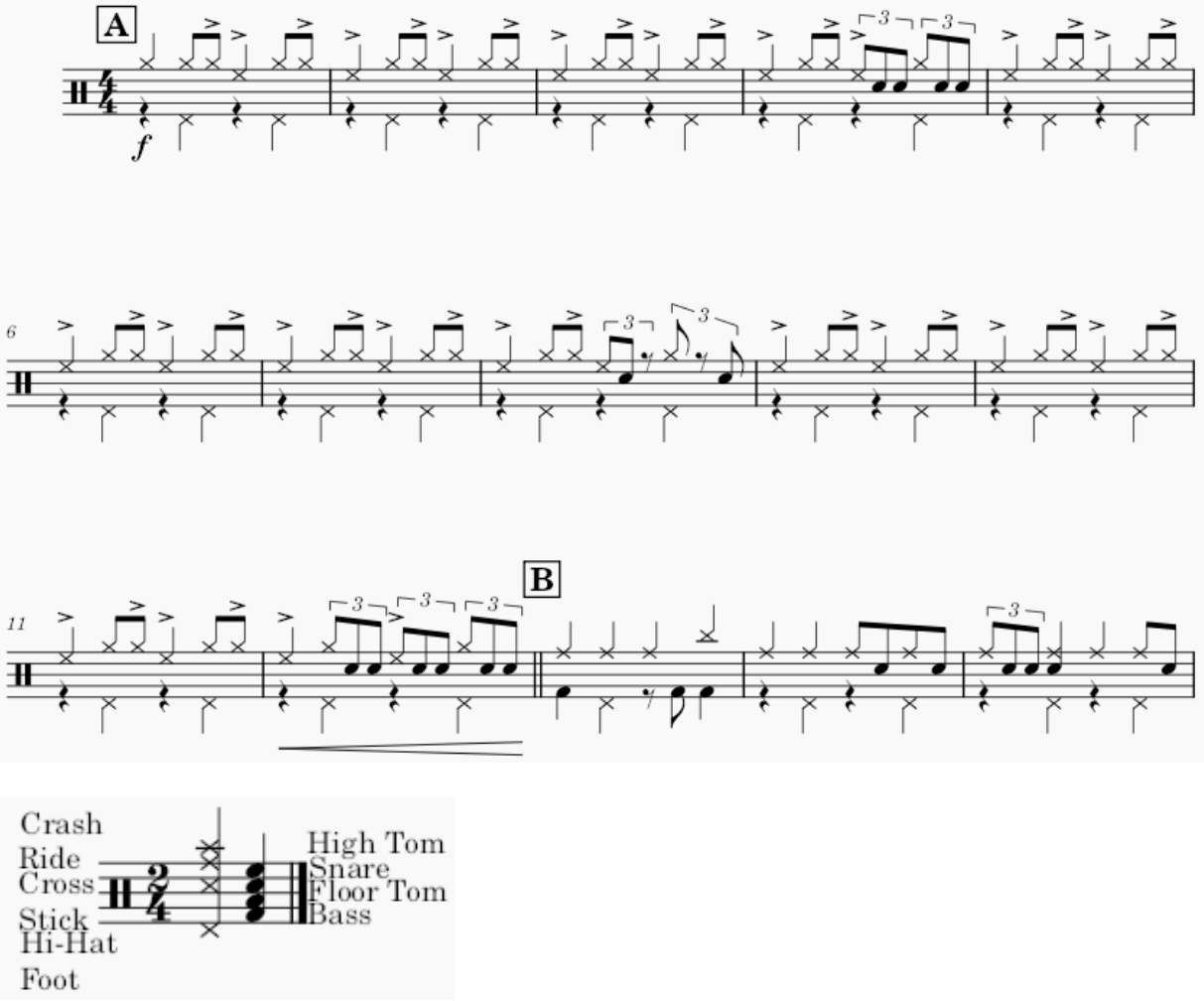

Figure 4: “Blues to Elvin” bars 1-15.

The first phrase builds up the tension, the second phrase releases the tension, and the third phrase builds the tension back up even more to set up Coltrane’s entrance with the melody. Also, that phrasing provided the transition from the rhythm section playing to the quartet playing, which in turn, signaled for the bass to start walking by playing quarter notes, and Jones to start swinging by switching to the ride cymbal.

Jones demonstrates this same climactic build in the first four measures of the twelfth chorus. The bass drum takes the lead by playing three notes that would be repeated in the last

measure but on different parts of the beats. Simultaneously, the snare is played once in the first measure, twice in the second measure, and four times in the third measure.

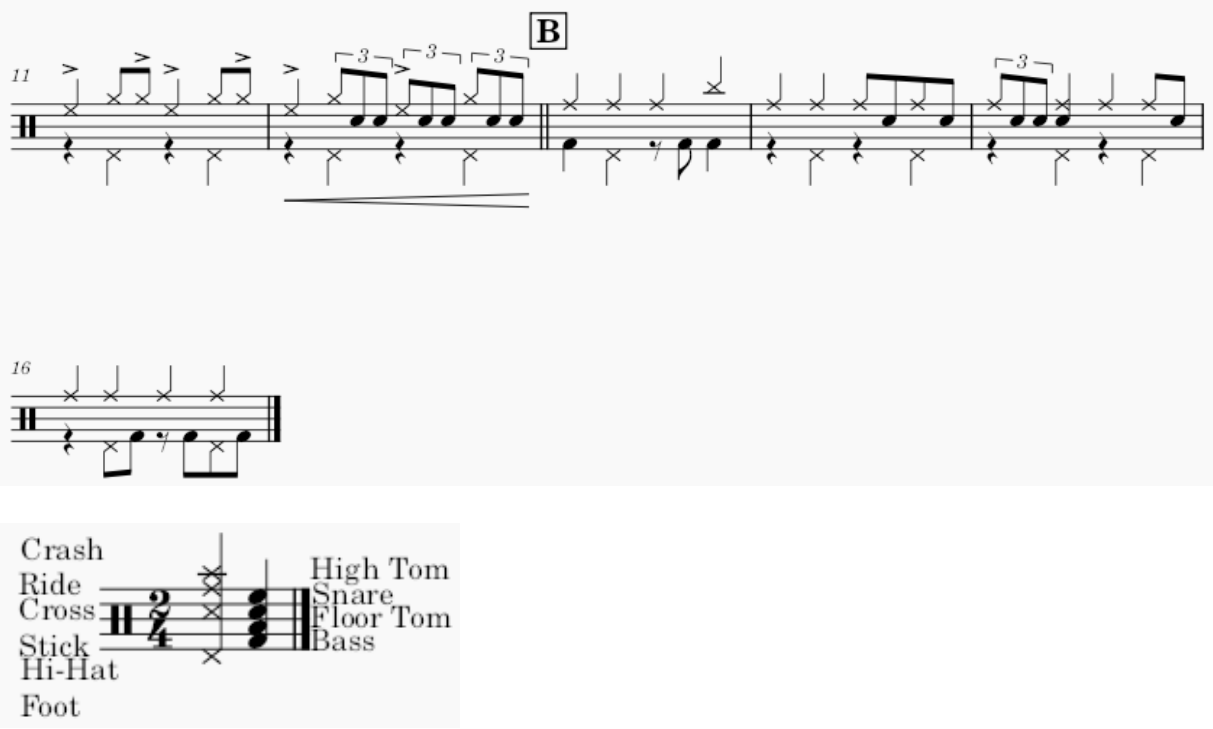

Figure 5: "Blues to Elvin" bars 11-16.

In essence, Jones doubled the snare drum notes to indicate the climax for the end of the song. In the first measure, the bass drum is played on beats one, the and of beat three, and on beat four, and in the last measure, it is played on the and's of beats two, three, and four. This was another example of Jones's tendency to switch to the up parts of beats to accent.

With the snare drum, Jones switches between the and's with a triplet sandwiched in the middle. In the first measure, the accent is on the and of two. Then, there is a shift to the and's of beats three and four in the second measure, that is immediately followed up by la and le of beat one in the third measure, and it concludes with an and on the fourth beat of the measure. This is yet another indicator of tension, release, tension.

In his thesis on Jones, Barry Elmes observes that "while Jones seems to use the ride cymbal as the primary instrument to state his time keeping phrases, the cymbal line alone does not reveal the whole story."[45] He continues: "In fact, [Jones] employs the ride cymbal in conjunction with (and not independent of) the other drum set components. In developing this approach, Jones created a unified concept that totally integrated the function of all four limbs into the expression of flowing rhythmic phrases. This integration redefined the role of four-limb independence. With Jones, it became a musical tool to serve his phrasing concept, rather than a technical goal of the drum set performance."

Another term that is associated with four-limb independence is linear drumming. As the role of the drummer evolved, drummers experimented with more complex rhythms. In linear drumming, each limb is considered an independent instrument that plays together but never at the same time on the same beat.

Linear drumming is rooted in early African drumming traditions, and these traditions were brought to the United States. In the 1940s and 1950s, jazz drummers began to incorporate linear drumming into their playing. Instead of playing multiple notes at one time, drummers would play one note at a time. However, this would require drummers to readily adapt their technique.

An example in one measure of common time would be the bass drum being played on beat one, the hi-hat being played on beat two, the snare drum being played on beat three, and the ride cymbal being played on beat four, so that no two parts of the drum set are struck at the same time. Of course, this technique can be contracted and expanded depending on the musical context in which it is applied. In the case of Jones, he liked to contract a psuedo form of this

45. Barry Elmes, "Elvin Jones: Defining His Essential Contributions to Jazz," 58.

technique by incorporating the use of triplets to fill in the gaps between the quarter notes being played. The use of triplets is an identifying factor of the linear style. The bomb of the bass drum along with the crash on the downbeat of one is a traditional style of drumming; "[t]he bass drum's first step outside of strict timekeeping was playing isolated accents, called dropping 'bombs.' "[46] In essence, Jones blended the best of both worlds in rhythmic studies by intersecting the crossroads of form and functionality.

If we use the example of analog sound being digitally remastered, that might provide a greater understanding of what Jones produced. Traditionally, analog is known for having a warm sound while digital is known for high fidelity. Therefore, we can deduce that the merging of the two would produce warm fidelity which would be the best of both worlds. Transitioning this concept back to Jones's style, where he believes the drum set should be identified and played as one instrument, maybe the term interdependence is a more appropriate term. To put in layman's terms, instead of seeing your hand as five independent fingers, you make it into a fist. Jones explained:

> It is one instrument, and I would hasten to say that I take that as the basis for my whole approach to the drums. It is a single musical instrument of several components. Naturally, you've got tom-toms scattered around, and the snare drum is in front of you, and the bass drum is down there, and you have cymbals at different levels. But all in all, just as a piano is one instrument, a drumset is one instrument.[47]

This is another modern example of Jones's holistic approach to modern drumming that we are still using.

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46. Riley, *The Art of Bop Drumming*, 24.

47. Rick Mattingly, The Drummer's Time: Conversations with the Great Drummers of Jazz (Cedar Grove, NJ: Modern Drummer Publications, 1998), 26.

There are multiple factors to keep in mind about the use of interdependence. The rhythmic groove or pulse is primary. It is the foundation, and maintaining it is your main role as the drummer. It is also known as a pocket, especially in funk and gospel settings. How deep is your pocket? That will determine the use of accents, dynamics, and fills within the context of the song. Accents help to feel, shape, and shift the pulse of the beat. Jones liked to place his accents on the up parts of the beat to give a sense of perpetual forward motion. This one factor alone can prevent the band from dragging without feeling a sense of being rushed. Jones would place his accents on the and's and la's of beats. Dynamics are another powerful tool to aid in any transition with a song. Fortunately, drums have the greatest dynamic range of any instrument. Fills are the most used tools to help indicate, setup, and direct a band through transitions. Solos are the culmination of all these factors coming together, hopefully harmoniously.

CHAPTER 6: JONES'S USE OF POLYRHYTHMS

Jazz music is known for its complex and diverse rhythmic patterns, and one of the defining features of this genre is the use of polyrhythms, which involves the simultaneous playing of multiple rhythms that are not normally heard together. This creates a layered sound that is incredibly complex and can be difficult for many listeners to fully comprehend. Nonetheless, polyrhythms play a significant role in jazz music, and they have been used by many of the greatest jazz musicians.

A polyrhythm is a permutation or combination of rudiments that flow and transition together in a smooth and engaging way. So, to break it down even further, let's look at rudiments and how do we define them? Just like notes and key signatures, rudiments are an internationally known and accepted pattern of beats that are repeated in succession, typically with your hands. But in the case of Jones and his approach, his polyrhythms included the feet as well. By the introduction of the use of his feet to play these rhythmic patterns, his polyrhythmic combinations doubled instantaneously. However, something to not be discounted is that the use of one's feet to play polyrhythms makes it more complex to play those patterns. One must have an even greater level of concentration to ensure the smoothness of transition between all of the limbs.

Traditional jazz songs are commonly recognized for the repeated build up and release of musical tension. Polyrhythms play a central role in this process because they are the main elements of creating tension in a band. Polyrhythms also allow a drummer to improvise and explore the rhythmical boundaries of a song.

As the jazz drummer's role shifted from that of primarily timekeeping to active soloing in the band, the drummer's use of polyrhythms evolved. One of the pioneers of polyrhythmic jazz

drumming was the legendary bebop drummer Art Blakey, who explored different rhythmic patterns and influenced countless other jazz musicians, including Jones.

Jones's masterful polyrhythmic technique is a main feature of his style. His polyrhythmic technique is distinct; yet because it is so distinct, it is widely recognizable. Because of their complexity, Jones's polyrhythms are commonly featured in jazz drum set pedagogy books.

> Using only a standard drum kit—without the aid of any electronics—Jones changed the face of percussion in the jazz world. He is responsible for the innovation of a circular style of drumming, an approach that uses broad sweeping movements across the drums. Often beginning an arrangement by introducing a simple pattern or theme, he perpetually builds the rhythm into a near-kinetic state. By removing the traditional four-four beat on the bass drum, Jones is able to create what he calls a more "constant flow of rhythm." On the snare drum and cymbals, he plays irregular accents that often accompany soloists in furious dialogue. Although many modernist drummers try to imitate Jones's techniques, they often lack his skillful execution. For as Jones stresses, no matter how abstract the arrangement, a drummer's main responsibility is to keep time.[48]

Jones's mastery of polyrhythms is demonstrated by his ability to manipulate and superimpose time signatures, which is well illustrated in Jones's performance in "Afro Blue." "Afro Blue" was recorded on March 26, 1965, on *Live at the Half Note: One Down One Up* for Impulse Records. The song was one of the Coltrane Quartet's last recordings. Previously unreleased, the album was released on October 11, 2005. The personnel on the album are John Coltrane on tenor and soprano saxophone, Jones on drums, Tyner on piano, and Garrison on bass.

"Afro Blue" was composed by Cuban percussionist and bandleader Ramon Mongo Santamaria Rodriguez (1917-2003), also known as Mongo Santamaria. He was raised and grew

48. John Cohassey, "Jones, Elvin," in *Contemporary Musicians Vol. 9*, ed. Julia M. Rubiner (Detroit: Gale, 1993), 106-08, https://link-gale-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/apps/doc/CX3492700037/GVRL?u=uiuc_uc&sid= bookmark-GVRL&xid=db6495a9.

up on the streets of Havana, Cuba, where he learned to play congas. He moved to New York city in 1959 to be a part of Tito Puente's band. He was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame for his rendition of Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man."

Santamaria composed and recorded "Afro Blue" in 1959, which was on his self-titled album, *Mongo*. Notably, it is the first jazz standard to incorporate Afro-Cuban rhythms. While it was initially written in 12/8 time signature, it was modernized to a 3/4 time signature. It took two processes to get to the modern approach that the time signature is written and played in today. First, the twelve beats in the one measure was cut in half. This gave us the two measures of 6/8. Those two measures indicated which measure would start and end the rhythmic pattern. If the rhythmic pattern in the first measure had three beats in it and the second measure had two beats, then it would be labeled as a 3/2 pattern. The opposite would be labeled a 2/3 or Afro-Cuban 6/8 polyrhythm. Secondly, the six beats were shortened to three beats. This evolution gives us the present day 3/4 time signature instead of 6/8. Even with the time signature changes, the ostinato pulse of the song remains the same. Originally, it was written in the form of a 3/2 African rhythm. In 3/4 time, the three beats in the first measure were on beats one, two, and the and of three. The two beats in the second measure were on beats one and two. Subsequently, in 6/8 time signature, the three beats in the first measure were on beats one, three, and six. The beats in the second measure were on beats one and four.

The form of "Afro Blue" is the statement of the melody for sixteen measures followed by a solo for sixteen measures, that is repeated. It is repeated for a total of fourteen choruses, even though technically, it is actually twelve, just like "Blues to Elvin" and "Village Blues." Coltrane just took an extra two choruses to give his benediction.

Coltrane begins the song by playing the melody solo for the first two measures. Then the band joins him in the third measure. Coltrane repeats the melody in the second chorus. The third through seventh choruses Tyner takes the first solo. Coltrane follows in the eighth through eleventh choruses soloing. He transitions back to the melody in the twelfth chorus. In the thirteenth and fourteenth choruses he vamps on the last four notes of the melody.

In "Afro Blue," Jones plays an Afro-Cuban 6/8 polyrhythm. This technique creates a heme-ola, which is a repeated groove pattern. Additionally, the syncopation of the bass drum accents the melody notes that Coltrane plays.

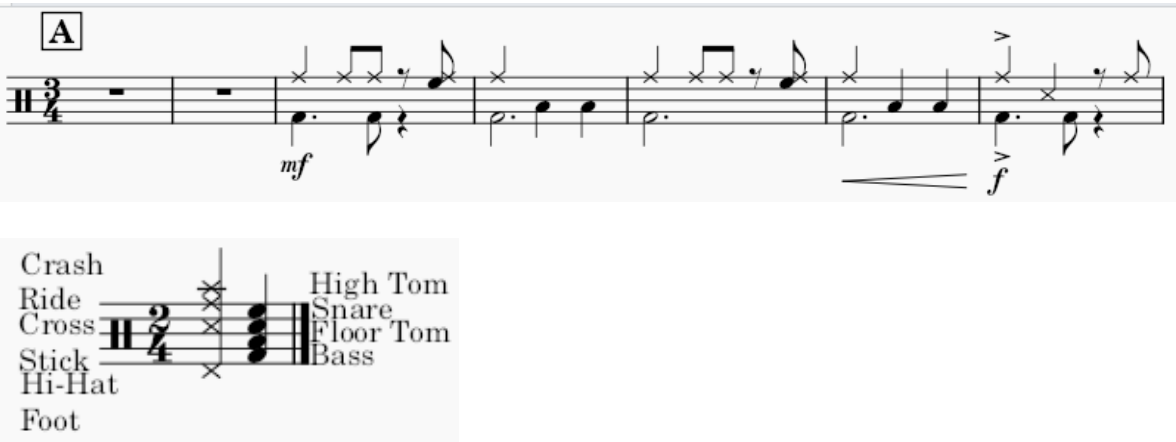

Figure 6: "Afro Blue" bars 1-7.

When Coltrane solos for the second sixteen measures, Jones switches the polyrhythms from the bass drum to the hi-hat, playing an ostinato pattern consisting of hits on the beats on the and of one, and on the third beat.

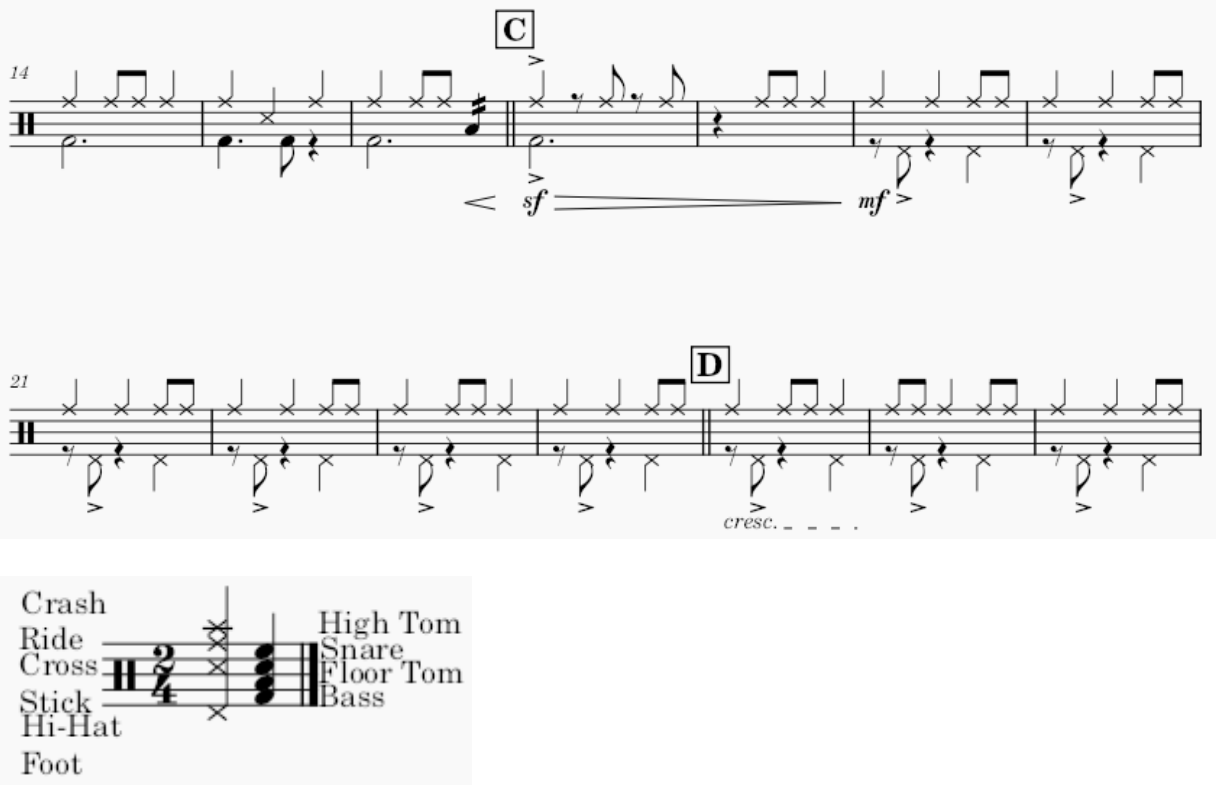

Figure 7: "Afro Blue" bars 14-27.

This continues for the remainder of the sixteen-measure solo phrase, with bass drum accompaniments played sparingly throughout, and ending with the classic drumroll on the third beat of the last measure to the bomb on the down beat of the second chorus.

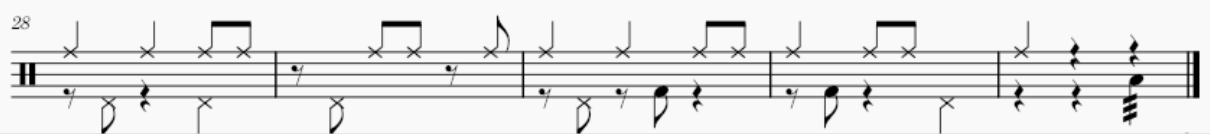

Figure 8: "Afro Blue" bars 28-32.

Jones's distinctive polyrhythmic technique is a fixture in jazz and jazz drumming pedagogy. Jazz musician and scholar Mark Gridley noted that "Jones was one of the first

drummers to play polyrhythmically and still swing hard in a loose flowing way."[49] In that regard, he was different from "earlier drummers who attempted to use polyrhythms," who "sounded stiff and self-consciously calculating":

> While listening to Elvin Jones, you might get the impression that he is juggling. Things seem forever in the air, never sharply defined in exact, predictable proportions. But the different rhythms played simultaneously were not just randomly different; they were different rhythms constructed to complement each other. And, in a broad sense, they fit together. It might not be obvious unless you listen carefully to four- and eight-measure sequences in their entirety. Some of his figures purposely omit a stroke or two but let you feel the missing stroke in the overall pattern. He distributes the parts of his triplets so that perhaps the first third is silent and the next two are sounded on snare drum. Or perhaps the middle member is omitted. Sometimes the first two members of a triplet will sound on the snare drum and the third on the high hat or the bass drum. It might be because of his complexity and lack of predictability that few drummers ever managed to sound like him.[50]

49. Mark Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis* , 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 258.

50. Mark Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, 258.

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS OF JONES'S RIDE CYMBAL PATTERNS

Widely considered to be one of the greatest drummers in the history of jazz music, Jones's innovative approach to rhythm and his ability to create excitement and energy on the drums have had a profound impact on the development of jazz drumming. One of the key elements of Jones's playing was his use of the ride cymbal, which he used to create a unique and influential sound.

The ride cymbal pattern consists of two main patterns. Originally, the drummer played quarter notes on the ride cymbal. Later, the drummer used a technique called feathering, playing quarter notes on the ride cymbal to match the quarter notes of the bass drum. This combination of bass drum and ride cymbal helped define the rhythm and pulse of the band because sometimes there was not a tuba in the band to provide the bass notes. This pattern also served the drummer's purpose as the band's human metronome.

Sometimes, the bass drum would be more felt, while the ride cymbal would be heard. Because the bass drum was lower in pitch and sound, it got masked by the rest of the band, while the ride cymbal was louder and higher in pitch that would allow it to cut through the sound of the band. Multiple factors would determine whether the drummer would feather the bass drum along with the playing of the ride cymbal: the size of the band, the instrumentation of the band, the volume of the band, and location of the drummer to the band. All of these factors dictated how the drummer would play to accommodate and support the band. It is not unusual for these factors to change several times in a song. The changes might outline the form, such as switching between the A and B sections, switching between the melody and soloist(s), or indicating a vamp. Some of the changes may include playing the ride cymbal pattern on the hi-hat, cowbell, temple blocks, or woodblocks. The result is a balance between what the leader,

band, and drummer wanted, and what the drummer felt was needed. Knowing whether to feather the bass drum is a skill that can only be honed on the bandstand in real time.

The modern ride cymbal pattern that emerged during the swing era and that is still used today is the pattern 1-2-Le-3-4-Le-1, repeated. Traditionally, this was played on the hi-hat. Then it evolved into opening the hi-hat on beats one and two. From there, the pattern moved over to the ride cymbal with the hi-hat closing on beats two and four. It evolved even more with Jones, who eliminated the consistent pattern of the hi-hat on beats two and four for timekeeping, resulting in the ride cymbal being the primary timekeeper. This shift resulted in reliance on the ride cymbal and the bass player for timing. Therefore, the ride cymbal became the most important sound on the drum set that the rest of the band had to listen to and be aware of.

To make sure that the band heard the ride cymbal sound, Jones sometimes used the butt end of a drumstick to play the ride cymbal so that it could clearly be heard by all the band members. Using the butt end of a stick was yet another innovation by Jones.

Jones's ride cymbal patterns were characterized by a highly syncopated, polyrhythmic approach. Rather than simply playing a steady "ping" on the ride cymbal, as was common in many jazz drumming styles of the time, Jones used the ride cymbal as a canvas for creativity and improvisation.

One of the key elements of Jones's ride cymbal patterns was his use of accents within the patterns. Instead of playing a steady stream of notes, Jones would accent certain beats or subdivisions of the beat, creating a highly syncopated and unpredictable sound. He would often play accents on the and of the beat or on the off beats, creating a sense of tension and release that was highly effective in driving the music forward.

Another key element of Jones's ride cymbal patterns was his use of polyrhythms. Beyond playing in a straight ahead 4/4 time signature, Jones would often layer multiple rhythms on top of each other, creating a complex and highly textured sound. He would often play in 3/4 or 6/8 time signatures over a 4/4 time signature, that gave the sense of forward motion in the music.

Jones's use of the ride cymbal was also characterized by his highly expressive touch and dynamic range. He would often play with incredible intensity, creating a powerful and explosive sound, but he was also capable of playing with incredible sensitivity and subtlety. His use of the ride cymbal as a dynamic tool was highly effective in creating a sense of ebb and flow in the music, and it allowed him to create a wide range of moods and emotions in his playing.

Other characteristics of Jones's ride cymbal patterns include phrasing and accents. Jones had a technique of phrasing the pattern and groupings of three with the accents on the up part of the beat rather than the down part of the beat. This was a key factor that made his approach and sound unique and easily recognizable. Jones liked putting accents on the up part of beats. Playing on the upbeat gave the feeling of forward momentum to the music and pulse. This approach gave the loose feel that most musicians and historians attribute to Jones. Even though he is known for playing behind the beat, the use of accents on the upbeat still allowed him to be coordinated with himself, the bass, and the rest of the band. The combination of the phrasing and accents would shift constantly throughout a song depending on what polyrhythmic pattern was being played in the moment. The process of making these spontaneous decisions while playing the music is an underestimated skill. This is the reason some songs speed up or slow down during their performance. Jones learned the ride cymbal rules and then redefined them.

Jones's ride cymbal pattern is well demonstrated in the song "Village Blues." I chose to transcribe it for three main reasons. First, it is the Coltrane Quartet's first recording as a quartet (before the classic quartet formed a year later). This song is on the album *Coltrane Jazz* for Atlantic Records on an LP with the call number 1354. The album's personnel consist of Coltrane on soprano sax; Tyner on piano; Davis on bass; and Jones on drums. It was recorded at Atlantic Studios in New York City in October 1960. The second reason that this song was chosen is that it is a blues song; blues music is the basic form of jazz music. Third, the song provides a good baseline representing how the Coltrane Quartet started and what it evolved into.

"Village Blues" is a twelve-bar blues song with a tempo of 110 bpm. The song has a two-feel, with accents on beats one and three. There are a total of twelve choruses. The intro consists of the first three choruses. It begins with the trio of piano, bass, and drums playing for two choruses, with Tyner playing the melody both times. Coltrane follows in the third chorus, playing the melody once.

Coltrane then solos for choruses four, five, and six. Tyner's solo begins in the seventh chorus and continues through the ninth chorus. During the outro, Tyner plays the melody, then Coltrane, and then Tyner again.

From first chorus through the sixth chorus, Jones begins with the traditional swing approach, consisting of the ride cymbal pattern being played on the hi-hat on beats two and four, with the sustaining accents on beats one and three and comping between the bass drum and snare drum and hi-tom. His use of triplets normally occurs in two measure phrases, typically beginning in the first measure. An example of this can be seen in measures one, three, and nine of the first chorus.

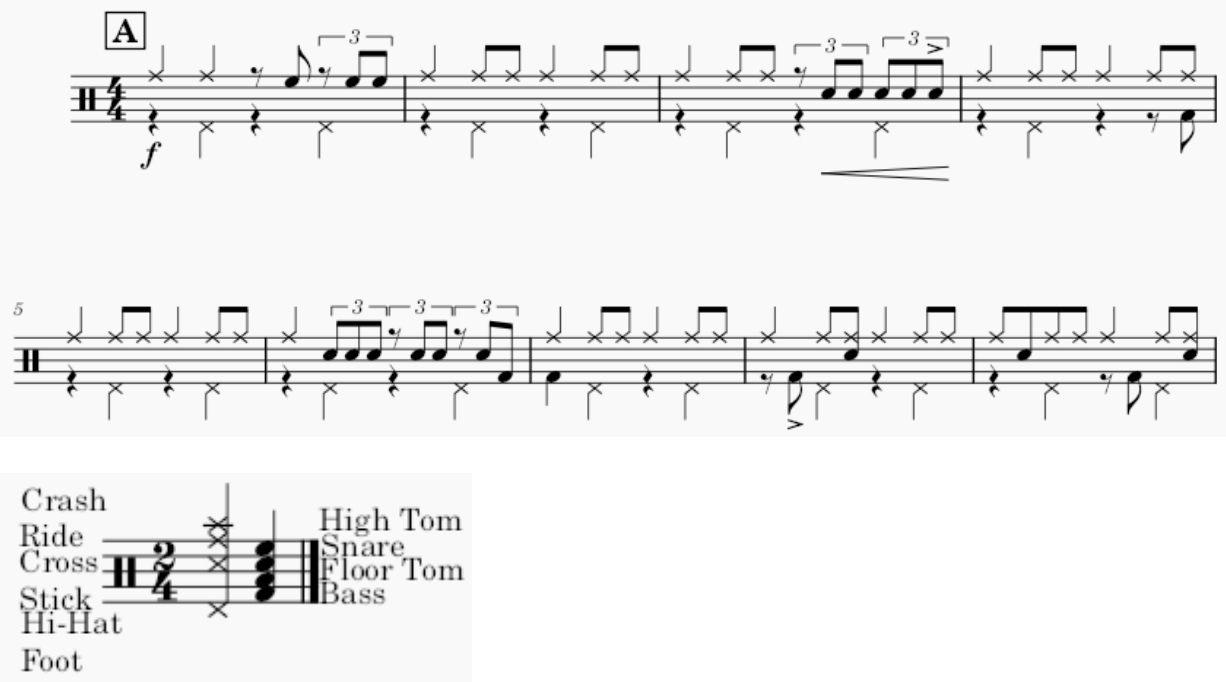

Figure 9: "Village Blues" bars 1-9.

In the seventh chorus, Tyner plays block chords of the melody while Davis lays down a three-note arpeggio syncopated groove ascending from the root, and Jones fills in between the spaces that are left. Tyner's solo transitions from the two-feel to Davis playing quarter notes and Jones swinging.

Ingrid Monson, author of *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, considers Jones's ride cymbal patterns in Coltrane's recording of the song "My Favorite Things." She observes that "Elvin Jones's ride cymbal rhythm is particularly infectious given the timbre and accentuation with which he plays it . . ." She continues: "[t]he repetitions at two-measure intervals gives the vamp sections a strong metric feel in six. By contrast, in the A sections of the melody, the rhythm section plays rhythms that repeat at one-measure intervals, giving these sections a rhythmic feel in three."[51]

51. Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 110.

Jones uses the same repetition of two-bar phrases in “Village Blues.” There, the comping normally occurs in one of the two measures in the phrase, and he alternates between combinations of the hi-tom, snare drum, and bass drum. Interestingly, while Jones is known for not subjecting the hi-hat to the traditional usage on beats two and four, here, the hi-hat remains constant with the closing on beats two and four of each measure.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Jones's influence on jazz drumming cannot be overstated. His creative, expressive, and masterful playing has had a profound impact on generations of drummers. His legacy continues to be felt in jazz and beyond. His innovative approach to rhythm and his ability to create excitement and energy on the drums made him an extraordinary musician and a giant in the musical arena.

Jones is well deserving of the credit for his role in the evolution of modern jazz, and more specifically, modern jazz drumming. His unique approaches to comping, four-limb independence, polyrhythms, and ride cymbal patterns are key characteristics of modern jazz drumming, and his years of performing with the John Coltrane Quartet provide noteworthy examples of these characteristics.

Jones's comping style was noteworthy because of his ability to play with incredible energy and intensity, and his performances were often filled with explosive fills and dynamic shifts in tempo and feel. He was a master of playing around the beat, creating a sense of tension and release that was both exciting and unpredictable. This was often displayed in his extended duets with Coltrane.

Jones's mastery of four-limb independence redefined the role of the drum set as one instrument. Far more than just a technical goal, four-limb independence was a tool that Jones used to broaden his musicality.

Jones's innovative use of polyrhythms and his ability to create complex, layered grooves pushed the boundaries of traditional jazz drumming. His drumming was characterized by his use of a wide range of dynamics, accents, and cymbal work, in particular, his ride cymbal patterns, which allowed him to create a unique and constantly evolving sound.

Jones's legacy in the field of jazz drumming has been significant and enduring, and his contributions to the world of jazz continue to be celebrated and studied to this day.

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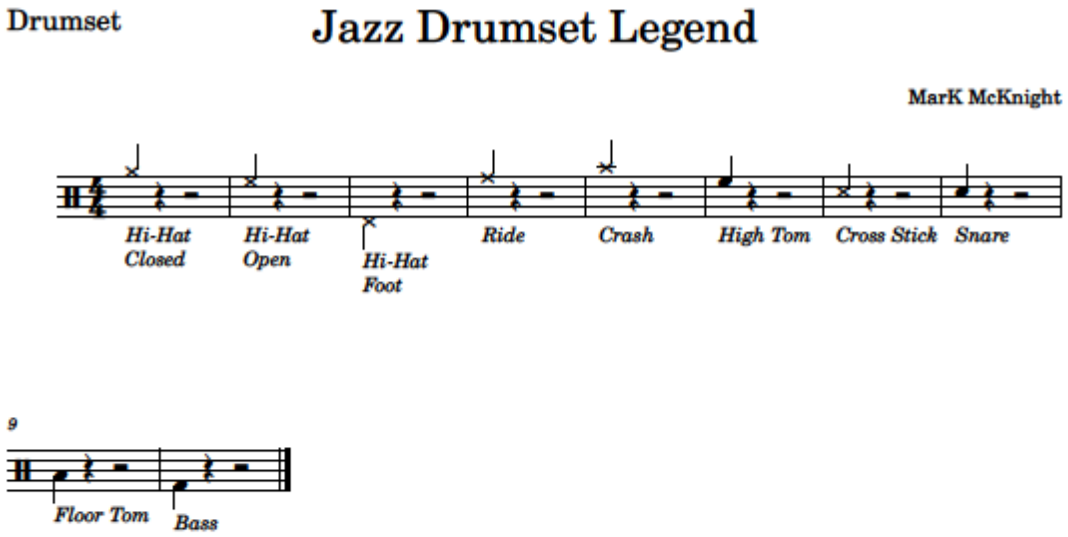
APPENDIX A: LEGEND



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APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF JONES'S RECORDINGS

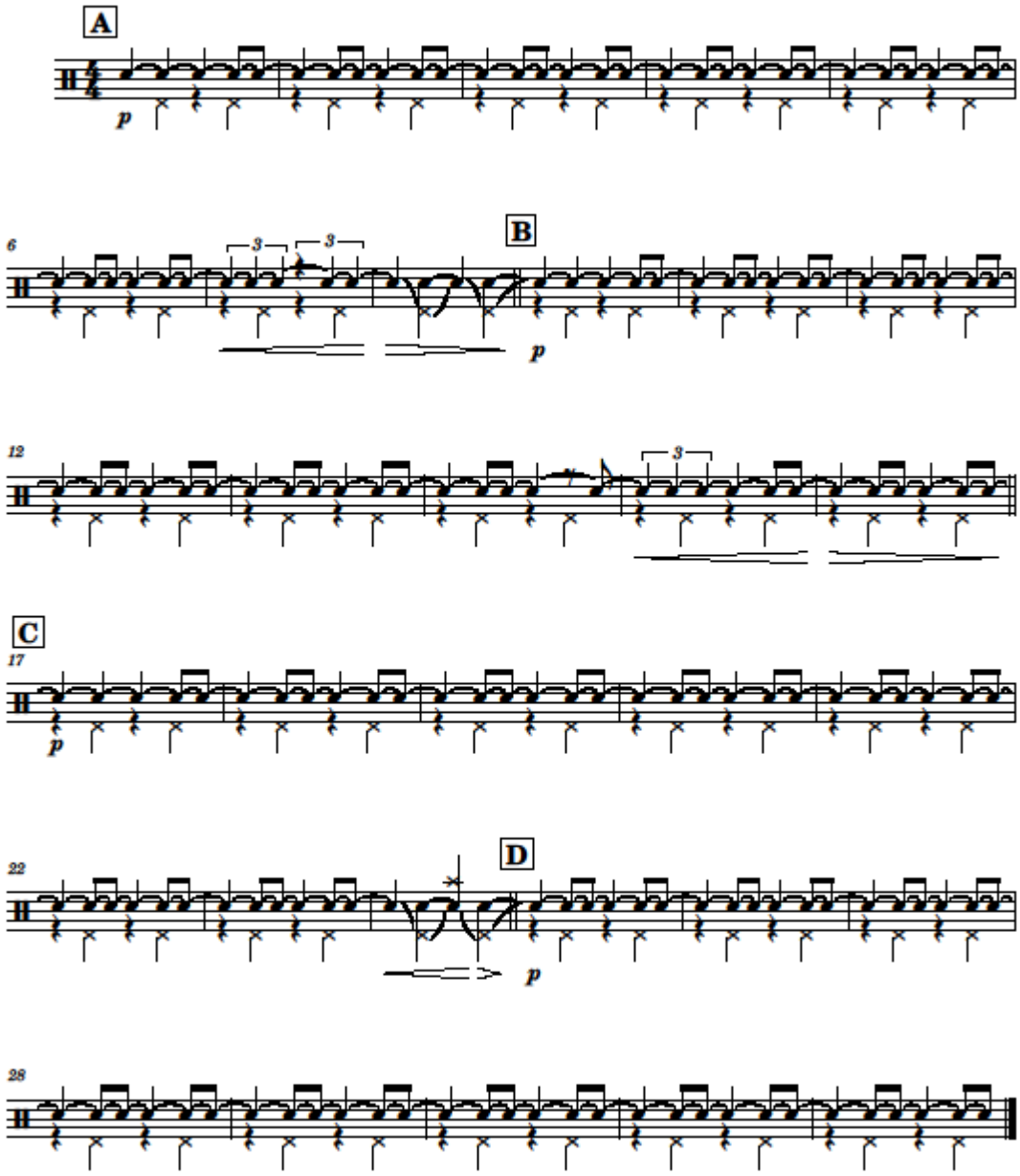
The following pages include transcriptions of the four songs transcribed for the analysis of Jones's comping style ("Say It"), four-limb independence ("Blues to Elvin"), polyrhythms ("Afro Blue"), and ride cymbal patterns ("Village Blues").

The ties in the song "Say It," indicates counterclockwise swirls of brushes on the snare drum batter head.

Drumset

Say It (Over and Over Again)

Frank Loesser — Jimmy McHugh

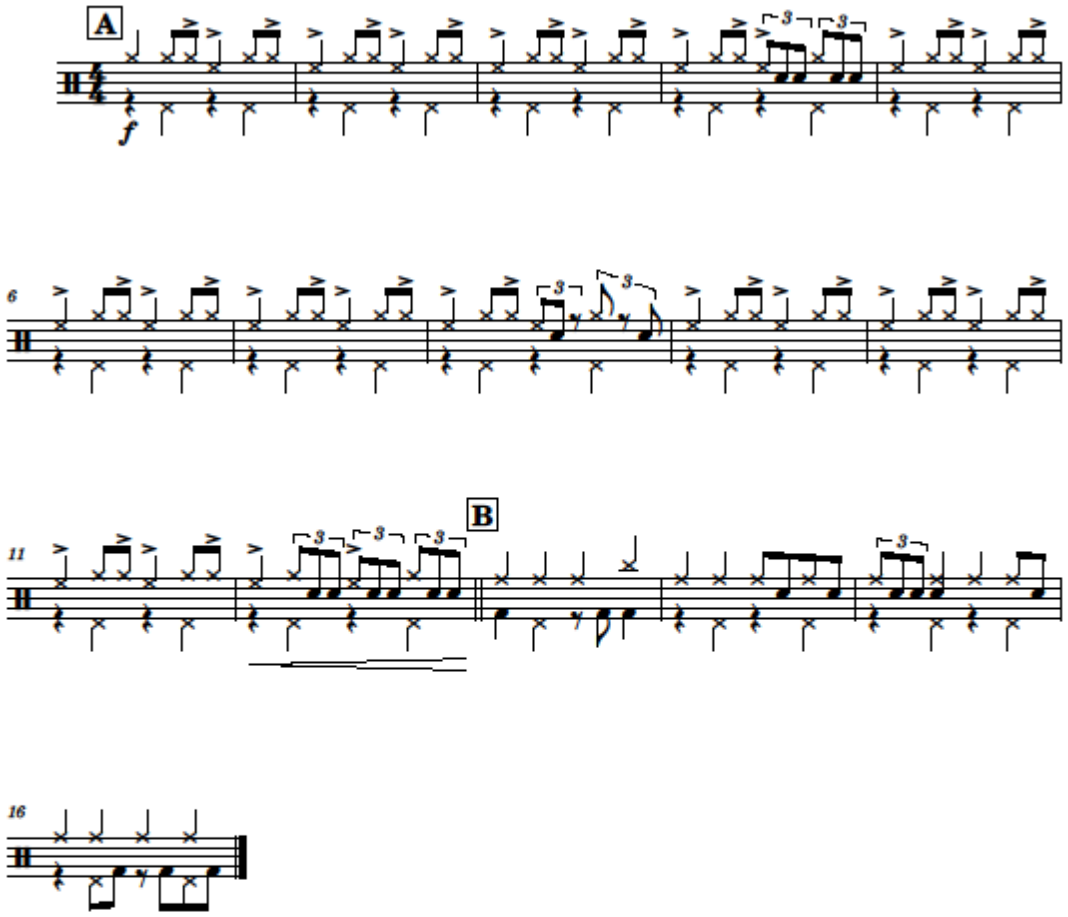


1963

Drumset

Blues To Elvin

John Coltrane

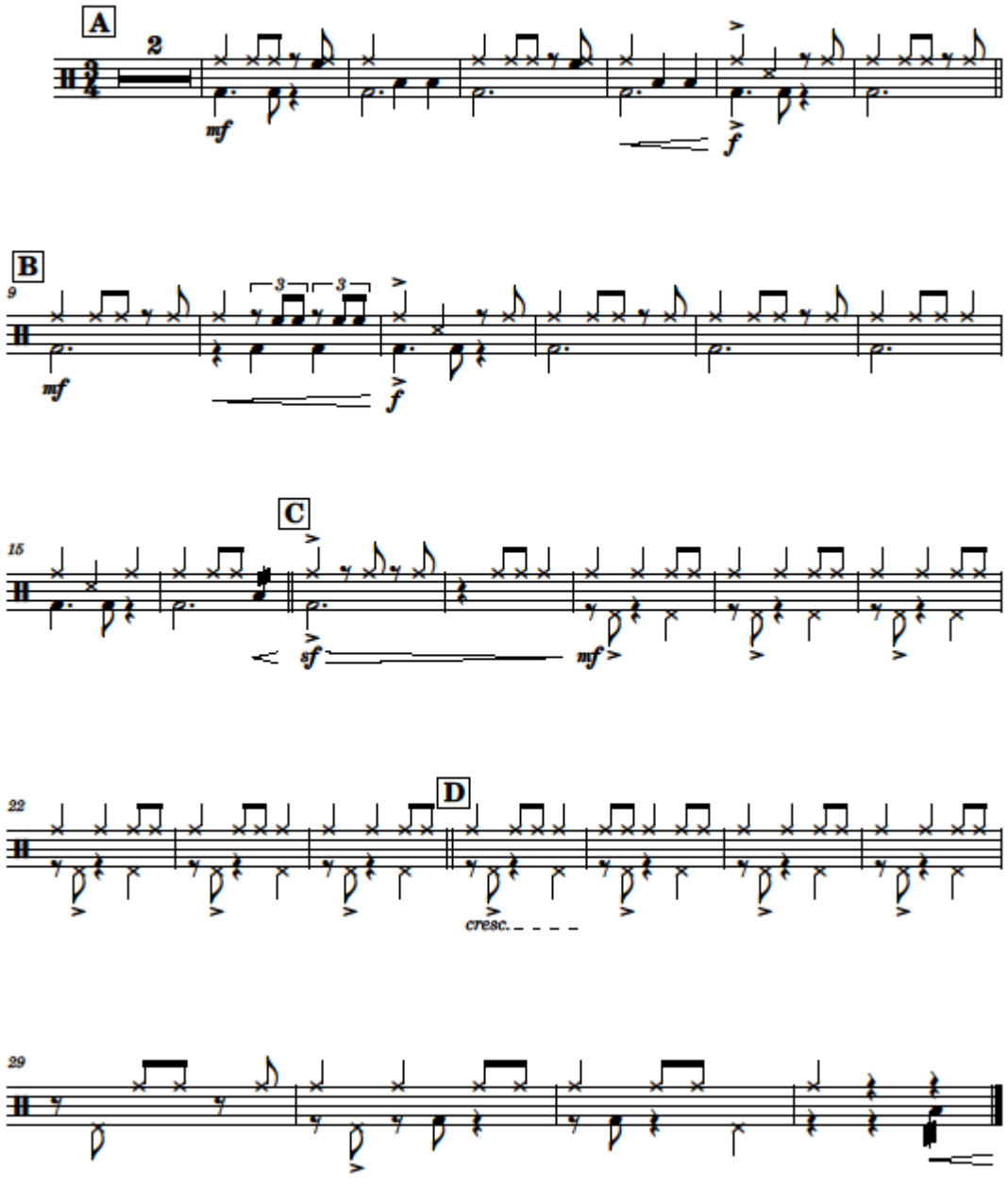


1977

Drumset

Afro Blue

Mongo Santamaria

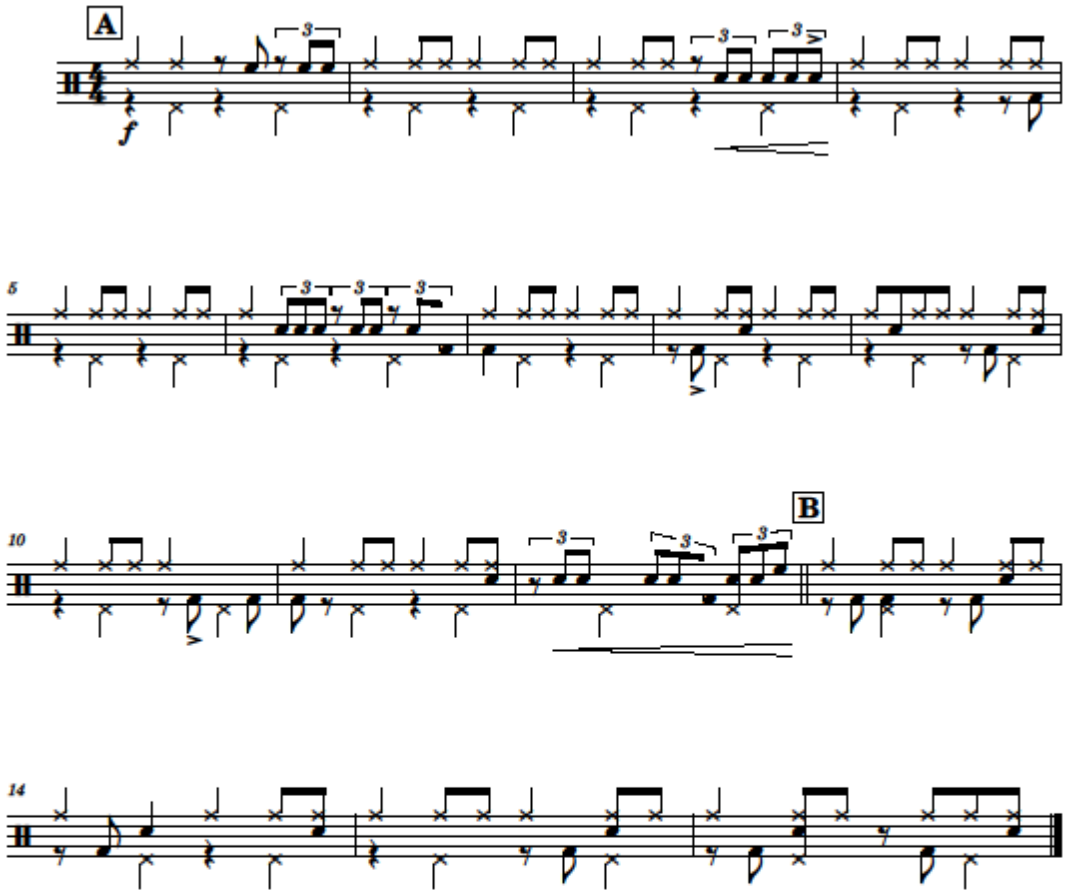


1959

Drumset

Village Blues

John Coltrane



1977

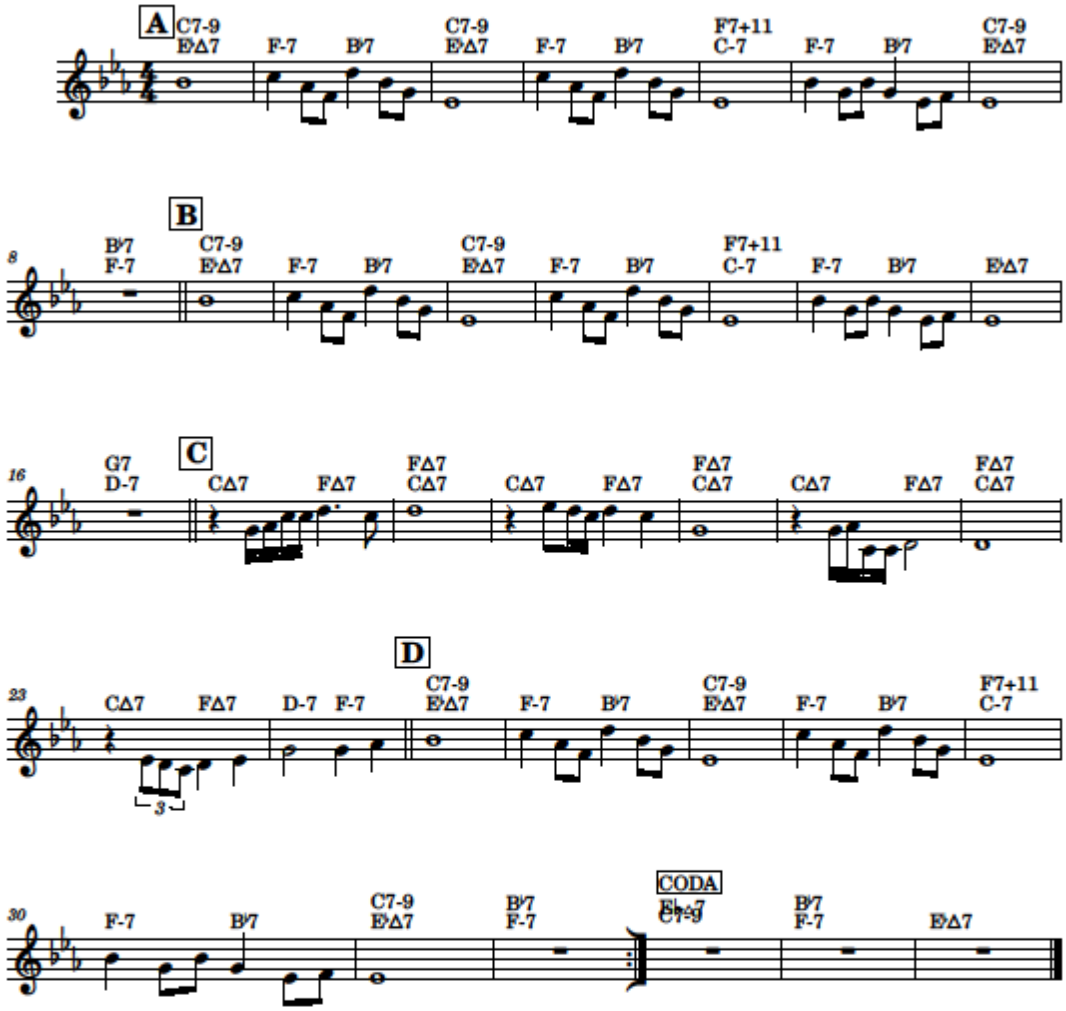
APPENDIX C: LEADSHEETS

The following pages include lead sheets for the four songs transcribed for the analysis of Jones's comping style ("Say It"), four-limb independence ("Blues to Elvin"), polyrhythms ("Afro Blue"), and ride cymbal patterns ("Village Blues").

Voice

Say It (Over and Over Again)

Frank Loesser — Jimmy McHugh

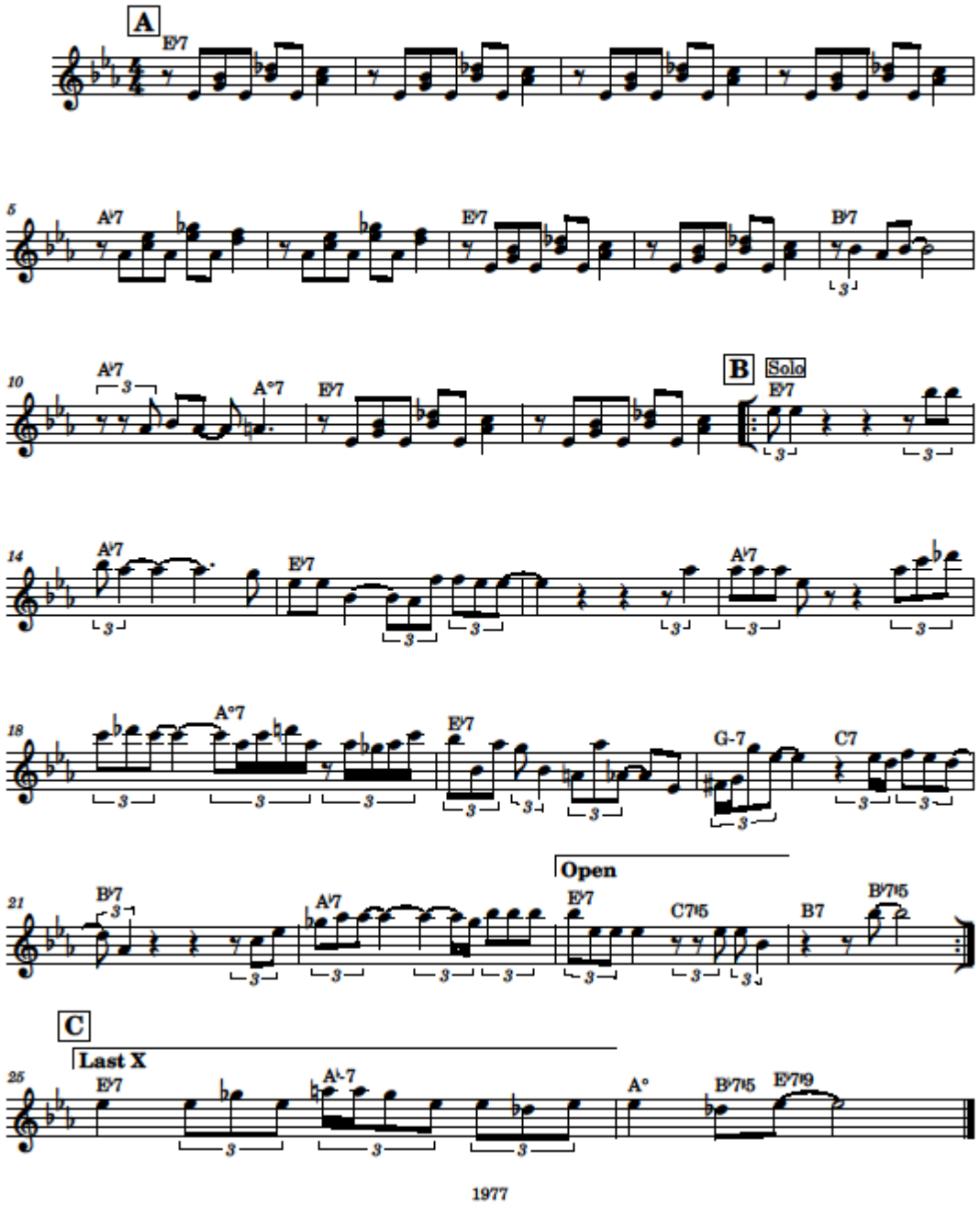


1940

Voice

Blues To Elvin

John Coltrane

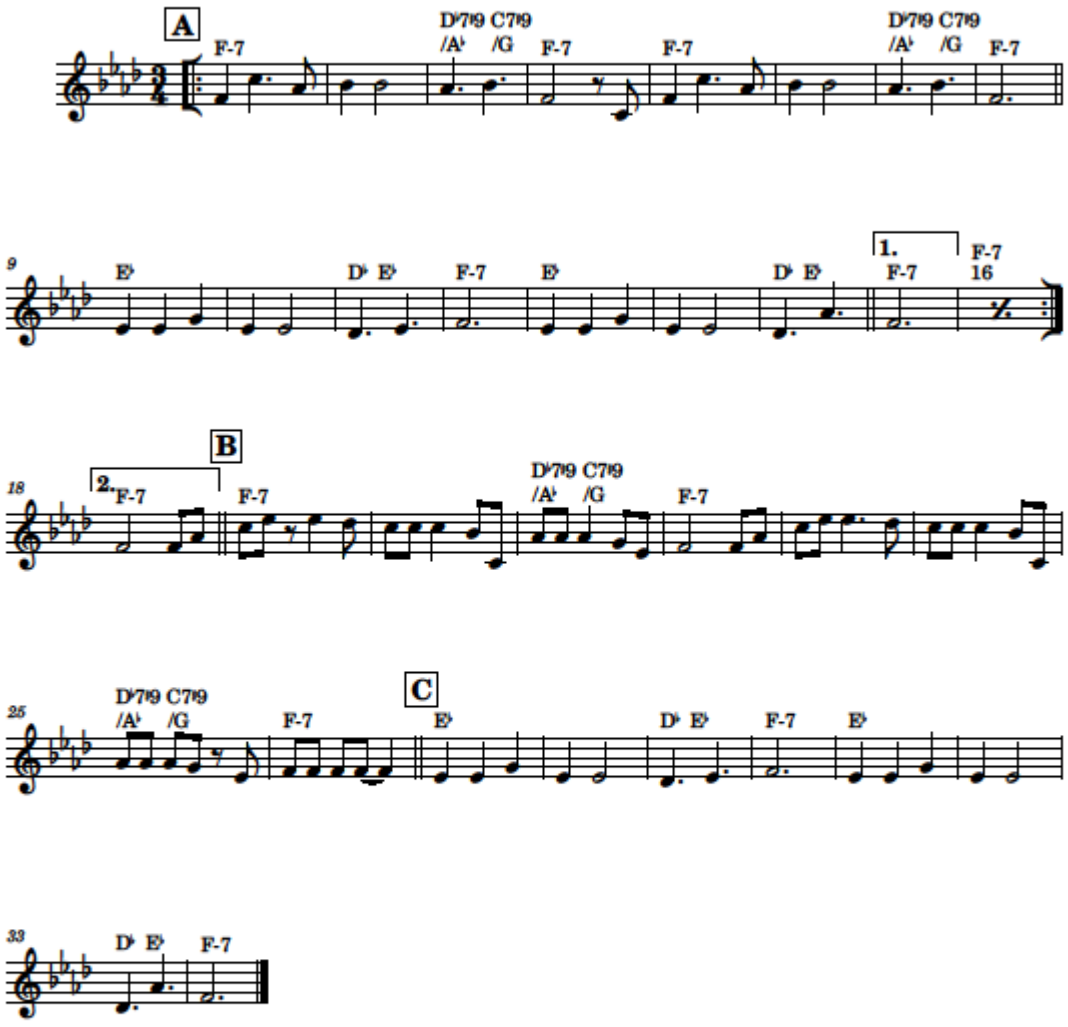


1977

Voice

Afro Blue

Mongo Santamaria

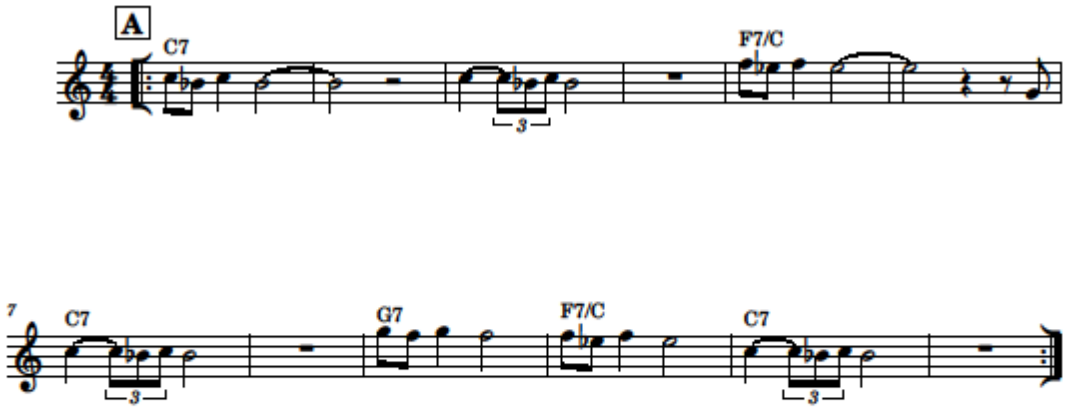


1959

Voice

Village Blues

John Coltrane



1977