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For the full Tuition Tip archive, including sound files and videos, visit Andrew's teacher profile on the website: www.techmusicschool.co.uk. Each issue Andrew will be featuring a specific class taught at the school, giving you a bite-size chunk of the lesson and an insight into what it's like to be on a course.

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ANDREW MCKINNEY: TUITION TIP

Tuition Tip: Drums On Bass

Drummer Interview: Elliott Henshaw

Welcome back to the fourth of my interviews with drummers, where I'm quizzing them on all things bass. So far I've personally learnt a lot and got some great ideas for things to work on and practise – I hope you have too!

This month I spoke to another drummer who teaches at Tech Music School – Elliott Henshaw. Elliott teaches on the third year of our degree course on the Directed Music Skills module, which is all about performing from written music while following a musical director. Elliott brings a considerable amount of experience to this class as he has played on West End shows such as *The Lion King*, *The Rat Pack*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Jersey Boys*, *The Producers* and *Priscilla Queen Of The Desert*. He has also played with artists such as Shirley Bassey, Deep Purple, Paul Anka, Michael Ball, Jane McDonald, Tony Christie, and the BBC Big Band, and he also has his own band that has had headline shows at Ronnie Scott's, so a great tutor to have involved at the school.

One morning Elliott and I hooked up over a coffee to get deep into the world of bass ...

What are the qualities that you as a drummer most value in a bass player?

'Well, I'm sure everyone has said this: time. It's a two-way thing with drums and bass: my job hopefully is to make their job easier, and their job is to make my job easier, and that goes right across the different styles. When I first started out I was doing a lot of big-band playing and small-group jazz, and I think the bass player is as important, if not sometimes more important with his time, than the drummer. In small-group jazz the drummer often has more scope for improvisation, so I really rely on a bass player that's going to lay down the walking feel, which then gives me freedom to experiment and improvise. Also, when you're in a big band and the horns are really blowing, their frequencies may be masking out the drummer's ride cymbal, so they'll often be listening more closely to the bass as a reference point for time.

'Beyond that, bass players need to have an awareness of where within the time they're placing it; whether it's slightly in front, whether it's right on the money, or if it's slightly back. I love bass players that have that knowledge.

'Having a sensitivity to the music you're playing, and really listening to everyone in the band, are really important skills for any musician. Communication is very important to me – eye contact and visual cues can be all it takes to turn an otherwise bland function into a really good night's work.'

Who are your favourite bass players to work with and what is it about them that you most like?

'Dave Olney, whom I started working with pretty much as soon as I moved to London, mainly in a big-band and jazz style. He was the house bassist in the Parkinson band, works with Laurie Holloway's trio and has all the things I look for in a bass player in abundance. Offstage he's a beautiful guy, with a really calming, dry sense of humour – no ego at all – and onstage that comes across in his playing. I also really appreciated the fact that although I was a younger, more inexperienced player and a bit in awe of playing with him, he was so positive and encouraging onstage, giving me eye contact and always hugely enjoying the gig.

'Richard Hammond from Leeds is another favourite to work with – we play together in Tony Christie's band. There's



lots of bass players out there that have got great time and great feel, and then there's bass players who've got that and also this little bit of extra icing on the cake – Richard's one of those. He's got chops to die for, but 90 per cent of the time he plays just dead simple and really perfect. Not only that but he's always got a smile on his face, looking over not just at me, but at everyone in the band. When he plays it's like he's dancing, kind of almost walking in time to what he's doing. You could even turn him down, but you'd still be grooving just by looking at him move! He plays guitar really well too – he'd have an acoustic on the tour bus and be playing and singing James Taylor or Beatles songs ... a great musician.

'I'd also like to mention Julian Cox, who plays bass in my band. He's someone who has total commitment to the music, so much so that even when I watch him when I'm not playing I'm on the edge of my seat – he's really digging in and every note has 100 per cent conviction; it's really exciting.'

In your opinion, what are the most common things bass players get wrong?

'I think bass players can suffer from the same issues as drummers – we've got a lot of publications and events dedicated to our instruments in a way that doesn't really happen for, say, trumpet or keyboards. When you turn up in a big room and you see people playing on their own or with a backing track, like Victor Wooten does, it's staggering – he can play the whole orchestra by himself. I think it's amazing, but it's not what our instruments were invented for. You've got to be inspired by that, but then know where to use it. As a bassist or drummer, I think the best compliment you can get from a singer or a bandleader is "I didn't even notice you were there", because then you've done your job. If your super-slapping bass licks got in the way of a vocal line, then you've totally missed the point. If bass players spent as much time just practising a groove in time with a metronome as they do working out these great slap routines, then there'd be a lot more bass players out there working. There are a handful of bass players out there who've nailed that, and they're the guys doing everything.

'Also, as a musician you have to be prepared at times to compromise, and I've come across some bass players who are not prepared to do that, which really grates me. When I first moved to town and I played with some older, more experienced players, they would sometimes be totally uncompromising with me when it came to the time feel: "Stick with me or you're on your own!" Nobody's perfect, though, so being prepared to admit that and talking about it I think is really important. A lot of people are afraid to talk

about these things and don't want to accuse each other of having bad time, but we're human beings after all. There might be a day where sometimes I might be tired and I might play behind the beat, not because I'm thinking about it, just because I had a late night! I think if you open up those lines of communication early on and you trust each other, and you trust each other's ability, then it's a brilliant thing and the music can only benefit.

'If you're working with someone that's not as experienced as you and they're struggling for one reason or another and their time feel is being affected, rather than just hammering the ride cymbal or the snare drum and getting annoyed with them, it's about being supportive and helping them out, or just compromising and going with them, because it's better for the music as a whole. I would expect a bass player to do that for me too – there are times where I might be feeling out of my depth, and there's nothing more soul-destroying on a gig than when you're thinking, "I'm not cutting it here, and now the bass player's not helping me out at all!"

Who are the bass players you would most like to play with and why?

'Jimmy Johnson would be my ultimate. When I was younger I was drawn to the musicians that took technique to the limit, and Jimmy is one of those on bass, but he also really knows how to play a song, which these days I am more impressed by. One minute he's down the Baked Potato playing with Allan Holdsworth, absolutely flying round the instrument, and the next you see him onstage with James Taylor and it's like he's doing nothing, but what he is doing sounds amazing. To me he's the epitome of a song player.

'From a jazz perspective, Ray Brown would be hard to beat. I used to listen a lot to the Ray Brown trio recordings with him and Jeff Hamilton, and was very lucky to see them live at the Wigan Jazz Festival. He must have been 80 and still had a huge smile on his face when he was playing – absolutely loving every moment. He was even carrying his own gear! He was very much on the front foot of the time, digging in, and he had Jeff totally with him – so exciting. You'd have no choice but to swing your ass off playing with him.'

Exercises

Using a metronome, loop each grouping round and round, placing the accents as written. Taking each bar as a group of four, tap your foot in each of the following four ways:

Tap your foot on beats 1 & 3

Tap your foot on beats 2 & 4

Tap your foot on all four beats

Tap your foot on the quavers: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

EXERCISES

The exercises consist of 12 numbered measures, each on a bass clef staff. Above each staff are four boxes containing the measure number and a rhythmic pattern of accents: '1 e & a', '1 e & a', '1 e & a', '1 e & a'. The notes are quarter notes on the first four lines of the staff (G2, F2, E2, D2). The accents are placed on the notes as follows: Measure 1: 1, 3; Measure 2: 2, 4; Measure 3: 1, 2, 3, 4; Measure 4: 1, 2, 3, 4; Measure 5: 1, 2; Measure 6: 2, 3; Measure 7: 3, 4; Measure 8: 1, 2, 3, 4; Measure 9: 1, 2, 3; Measure 10: 2, 3, 4; Measure 11: 1, 2, 3, 4; Measure 12: 1, 2, 3, 4.

This is a great way of improving your coordination and making sure the groove is something your whole body is feeling and committing to – not just the tips of your fingers.

Once you've got the hang of it like this, try working it through again but only

What are your favourite grooves to play with a bassist?

'There's a Drifters tune we play in Tony Christie's band – "Like Sister And Brother". It's a laid-back straight-8th feel around 80bpm, which is really hard to nail as there's so much space between the notes, and there's a real temptation to fill that space! My bass drum and Richard's bass notes would be totally synchronised throughout. There's a few really long gaps in the tune where we'd hold a note and then come back in dead on the one with no fill – when it works, as it does so well with Richard, it's a beautiful feeling.

'From a big-band/jazz perspective, I'd say "Fly Me To The Moon". The version I love listening to is from *Sinatra Live At The Sands* with the Count Basie band. The whole band swings so hard – especially Sinatra's singing. It's just a medium-tempo tune, dead simple, but it sounds and feels so exciting when it's done this well.

'Also I love playing grooves with busy 16th-note basslines – something like "Big 'Uns Get the Ball Rolling" by the Stanton Moore Trio. As a drummer you can also play busy, but even better is to just keep it simple and let the bass player take charge of the forward motion. Just keep out of the way and enjoy being part of the audience!'

What things do drummers practise that you think would be valuable for bass players to work on too?

'It always surprises me how many musicians stand almost motionless when they play their instruments – they're not even tapping their foot. Coordination and independence are big parts of learning the drums and I think it's something all musicians can benefit from. If as a bass player you are constantly tapping your foot and moving your body in time with the music, then the groove is completely internalised and coordination-wise it's actually more difficult to play out of time, which can only be a great thing! These exercises I work through with drummers combine accents with tapping your foot in specific places, and would be great for bass players too.'

playing the accented notes. This is a great way of internalising the subdivision.

Also, for a further challenge, try mixing up the accents. Choose four at random and make them into a bar, eg 2-7-9-12. And then try it all again with triplets – have fun!

I hope you enjoyed this alternative viewpoint and have learnt something valuable! I'll be interviewing some more drummers over the next few issues, and I'm also thinking of branching out to other instruments as well – let me know what you think or if there's anything particular you would like to see!

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