

## Master's-Level Jazz Drumset Curriculum — In My Own Words

This is how I think about teaching jazz drums at a master's level, especially in a place like Siena. The whole point is to help students become real, creative jazz drummers — not just people who can play exercises, but musicians who understand the history, the sound, the language, and the spirit of the music.

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### 1. The Philosophy Behind the Program

At this stage, it's not about showing what you can do technically. It's about becoming a complete musician.

You learn the tradition, you study the great drummers, you work through the classic books — but the end goal is always the same:

Can you make music? Does your playing mean something? Can we hear you?

Everything else is in service of that.

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### 2. The Core Areas We Focus On

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#### A. *Learning the Language of Jazz Drumming*

You have to know the language — the real swing feel, the phrasing, the dynamics, the touch. We go deep into the lineage: Kenny Clarke, Max, Philly Joe, Blakey, Roy Haynes, Tony, Elvin, Jack DeJohnette... and how every one of them changed the music.

The goal isn't to imitate them forever.

It's to understand the language well enough that you can eventually speak it in your own voice.

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#### B. *Developing Your Own Sound*

This is huge for me.

At this level, it's not enough to play the right notes — your sound has to say something.

We work on:

- how you touch the drums
- tuning
- cymbal selection
- dynamic control
- brush sound
- the way your ride cymbal speaks

We do “sound labs” each week where we strip everything down and focus on tone and feel. That's how you build a personal identity behind the kit.

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#### C. *Knowing the History*

You can't play this music without knowing where it comes from.

So you listen — a lot.

You learn how the drums moved the music forward in different eras. You learn why Max plays the way he plays, why Philly Joe's comping works the way it does, why Blakey's press rolls sound like they're exploding.

When you understand the history, your playing immediately becomes deeper and more informed.

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### 3. The Technical Side — and How It Connects to Music

We study all the classic books, but always with one mindset: If you can't bring it into the music, it doesn't matter.

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#### A. *Jim Chapin*

What you get from Chapin:

- independence
- ride cymbal control
- bebop phrasing

How you use it:

- to comp musically
  - to keep a relaxed, swinging ride pattern
  - to support the band without getting in the way
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#### B. *Four-Way Coordination*

This book makes your brain hurt (in a good way). It teaches you to stay relaxed while doing complicated things.

How you use it:

- orchestrating ideas around the kit without losing time
  - playing more modern or contemporary phrases
  - becoming comfortable in odd meters or different textures
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#### C. *Jim Blackley*

This is all about feel.

Blackley teaches you how the time flows, how the quarter note breathes, how the ride cymbal and brushes should feel.

What you take into real playing:

- a deeper groove
- smoother phrasing
- a more relaxed, swinging time feel
- a more musical approach to comping

This is non-negotiable for a Master's program.

You pick solos from:

- Max Roach
- Philly Joe Jones
- Art Blakey
- Roy Haynes

And you:

1. Transcribe them
2. Learn them on the kit
3. Perform them convincingly

Not just the notes — the feel, the sound, the attitude, the language.  
That's how you really absorb the tradition from the inside.

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## **6. Ensemble Playing**

You play with different groups — trios, quartets, modern ensembles — because that's where you really learn how to make musical decisions.

You practice:

- interacting with the soloist
- shaping the music dynamically
- comping in a way that lifts the band
- trading, soloing, and using brushes in a musical way

You learn how to be a drummer musicians want to play with.

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## **7. Final Recital / Master's Exam**

By the end of the program, you should be able to show:

- That you know the tradition
- That you've internalized the language
- That you can bring your own sound to the drumset
- And that you can perform at a professional level

Your final recital includes:

- standard tunes
- modern tunes
- an original piece or arrangement
- and at least a few classic solos, played accurately and musically

Then you talk about your influences, your sound, what you learned from the books, and how the history shaped you.