1998

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Leadership in the Field of Drumming

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Richmond, Virginia

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Introduction

**Perspective of the Researcher**

Music has been an important part of my life for a long time. I have played the drums for seven years and have been interested in the drumming industry for just as long. As a student of leadership I have often pondered how I would combine my studies with my music to find a successful and enjoyable career. If there is one thing I have learned as a student of leadership it is that leadership is everywhere. The subject is so vast and so young that, given the innumerable possibilities, the body of research is quite small. Leadership is most often applied to business, politics, and other respected scholarly fields. Only recently has much consideration been given to leadership and the arts. How exciting it is to see that connection being made.

I see music as a natural expansion for leadership studies. The complexities and exchange of “power” between members of a band are intriguing and not easily understood, especially when considered within the same definition of leadership that has been used to study business and politics. In music the band leader may be the formal head of the band, in charge of bookings, salaries, and even conducting. However perhaps the piano player has the most musical theory background. He may be the leader of the band when writing music. The rhythm section keeps the band in tempo and on the beat while playing. They may be the leader in performance. During a solo the soloist may be the leader. Perhaps the trumpet player is the biggest celebrity in the band. Even though the band is following the band leader, they may also follow the trumpet player and follow his lead on occasion. With leadership theories in mind, it is hard to label what it is that happens when that band is together. It could be any number of theories. The
point is that music and leadership are inseparable, and there is much more to be learned about this topic. Although leadership in music as a whole interests me, my involvement in drumming has drawn me to the more specific topic of leadership in the field of drumming.

The Worthiness of the Topic

Music has always been a significant part of our culture. Even today, while concert halls and live music may not be as common as they once were, music thrives in other areas of our daily experience. Music is studied, played, performed, written, critiqued, and enjoyed by many as a hobby, a profession, and a lifestyle. Countless subtopics of music have been researched and studied. The lives on many influential musicians have been recorded in biographies and historical texts, but most of this work has been done for the entertainment value of music. Popular music and musicians are not widely used as topics of scholarly research. Yet, the impact that music and musicians have on our society would suggest that the field may have a more significance contribution than simply as entertainment.

One specific area of music in our society that receives very little recognition through research is the field of drumming. Outside of the “drumming world,” the drums are not highly revered. Drums are not normally considered as musical as other instruments, and they lack the respect given to woodwinds and string instruments. Drummer Joey Baron says, “I was told that I had to learn a different instrument to be considered a musician” (Tolleson, 1995, paragraph 13). The truth is that drummers of the
past have had immense influence on the styles of music we listen to today, and have helped earn the respect that drums and drummers deserve.

Drummer Joe Chambers has studied the history of drums in the Americas, and believed that the subservient role of the instrument goes back to the slave-era banning of drums in New Orleans. “Drums are subordinate to the melodic and harmonic content,” he says, “and that’s definitely a Eurocentric-dominated way of thinking. Drums have always changed music and been as important as the other instruments, but have taken a back seat with writers and promoters. . . . They may not know that drums were once banned, but they still know that the drums are something subordinate in this culture.” (Tolleson, 1995, paragraph 7)

Traditionally, in Western music, the drums accompany the instruments playing the melody. Jack DeJohnette, a professional drummer who studied some drumming in Senegal, explains, “There they celebrate drums. It does accompany, but its function is equal to that of whoever the soloist is, even when supporting” (Tolleson, 1995, paragraph 9). The tradition of the supporting role for drums in our culture has been changing slowly, and the people to lead that change have literally helped revolutionize drumming and music as we know it.

If we follow the role of the drummer in popular music from just before the turn of the century to now, we see a drastic increase in the impact and importance of the drummer in a band. The leadership in drumming has been hard at work to place drums not necessarily in the forefront, but at least on par with the other members of a band. This is true for not only the drummers, but also the drum manufacturers who have provided the instruments and hardware for drummers to develop into their modern styles.
The drummers and drum companies which have created such change offer the academic world a true lesson in leadership. However, as mentioned above, so little research has been done on drumming that leadership in the field of drumming is a mysterious topic even to the leaders of the change.

Given that leadership as a scholarly subject is only twenty years old, there are many areas within its realm that have not even been considered as topics for research. Leadership is happening all around us naturally as people interact, but it goes unnoticed until someone analyzes it and deems it “leadership.” Creative leadership has been studied in various contexts, and it seems to work nicely as part of the basis of leadership in drumming. Roger Bellows (1959) explains, in Creative Leadership,

The creative leader, as contrasted to the authoritarian, does not depend upon status but rather upon human relations skills; he depends not upon latent force but upon mutual understanding; authority as defined may be completely lacking, since mutual agreement takes its place as a mode of control. (p. 20)

The only authority that leaders of drumming have is that which they have gained through talent and innovation. There is no power involved. The “mutual understanding,” of which Bellows writes, between the drumming leaders and followers is a respect for the contributions that the leader has made. It is an understanding of the desire to advance drumming and to learn from the leaders.

This paper will explore the changes of drumset playing throughout the twentieth century in America, and specific people, companies, and drummers as leaders of that change. The research will shed light on the leadership characteristics of leaders in the field. As a whole, this paper will enhance our understanding of creative leadership, its
benefit as a viable leadership style, and the importance of innovation and change to the leadership situation.
Methodology

Design

A qualitative research design was used in this paper, because the data collected and the information researched had to be interpreted by meaning and quality as opposed to numerical value. The two research methods used were historical research and interviews, both of which require qualitative assessment. Finding themes and similar responses within all of the data was a large part of the research task. Marshall and Rossman (1989) describe qualitative data analysis as “a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data” (p. 111). Although qualitative research is not the simplest design to analyze it is appropriate for this topic due to format of the information available; historical research and interviews.

The research focused on the following questions: What role have drummers played in the leadership of music, as formal leaders, as innovators, and by leading changes in the style of popular music? What common characteristics do leaders in the field of drumming share, such as personality, playing skills, and other leadership attributes? Who have been the formal leaders of change in the field, such as drummers, instrument/hardware manufacturers, and other non-drummer musicians?

Participants

The participants fall into three categories; (1) leaders of drum-related manufacturers; (2) leading professional drummers, or well-respected, successful drummers of today; and (3) drummers/historians, who both play drums and have a thorough knowledge of the history of drumming. A total of seven participants responded to interviews. Three of these were leaders of drum-related manufacturers, and were all
from the same company, one was a leading drummer, and three were drummers/historians.

**Apparatus**

Different interview questions for the three groups of participants had to be developed. All of the questions allowed for open-ended responses, and were not designed to receive yes/no or true/false answers. The leaders of drum-related manufacturers were given seven open-response questions about their leadership characteristics, the characteristics of the person from whom they learned their trade, examples of leaders in drumming, and other questions (see Appendix A). The drummers/historians were given eight questions about innovations, characteristics of leading drummers, the effect of the leading drummers, examples of leaders in drumming, and other questions (see Appendix B). Non-e-mail interviews varied from this list where necessary to gain further information. The leading drummer was given nine questions, all of those given to the drummers/historians, and one question from the manufacturer interview (see Appendix C).

**Procedure**

The historical research for the project was conducted to gain a base knowledge of the subject area. The historical portion of the research required a combination of resources. Beringer (1978) writes:

> It is the unique task of the intellectual historians to assemble the jigsaw puzzle from the past pieces—the select, circumscribed studies—placed on the board by all sorts of scholars, including other intellectual historians (pp. 7-8).
bring with it was an era of new excitement to the music world. The 1910s and '20s did the same for drumming. A few leaders stand out as change agents for this jazz era. Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich are two drummers at the top of the list of jazz drumming leaders. However, Krupa and Rich, born in 1909 and 1917, respectively, were barely schoolboys when Warren "Baby" Dodds (1894-1959) was setting the stage for jazz drumming in New Orleans (Dodds, 1992).

To Baby the drum was "the key to the band" . . . . Baby believed that the drummer should bring out the best in each of the other players and in the outfit as a whole. He varied his drumming according to the music and the musicians, studying each player in order to provide the background that would make him play the best music he was capable of producing (Dodds, p xviii).

Baby would strive to allow the other musicians to play their best by adapting his playing to their needs. He was practicing Situational Leadership long before the term existed. His "followers" were the other musicians and he studied them to assess their preparedness to take on the task of playing.

Considering all that he did for the drumming world, Baby Dodds is not a commonly heard name in music. Perhaps he was not as flashy as the men who learned from him, or perhaps when jazz really exploded the younger drummers were first to fill the high profile seats, or, more likely, the racial prejudice at the time kept him out of those seats. Regardless of the reasons, Baby was a major influence on Gene Krupa (Crowther, 1987) and other drummers of the time, and thus was a leader as a contributor to change in drumming.
Gene Krupa is one of many Chicagoans to break into and in fact rewrite the scene of jazz in the late ‘20s and on. Krupa, Dave Tough, and George Wettling were the three main Chicago drummers of the time. Krupa undeniably earned the greatest fame of the three. On his first record, “The drums were so well recorded and played that interested reactions were aroused across the country” (Crowther, 1987, p. 41). From that point on, Krupa’s playing continued to stun the music world, and his additional good looks gained him greater attention than any other drummer.

The intensity that Krupa added to the drums was unmatched. Dave Tough had a very different style of playing. “His sensitivity, subtlety, and humor formed the perfect foil for Freeman’s whimsical solo work, but he could also provide a properly stirring backdrop for the majestic trumpeting of Bunny Berigam, Dorsey’s best soloist” (Hadlock, 1986, p. 135).

Krupa took a different path. A drummer of drive and proficiency, he began to be carried away with his role as a featured member of the Goodman orchestra and to play to the crowds rather than to the music. Never bashful, Krupa carried the showy Chick Webb approach to its extreme and sometimes turned Goodman’s simple swing style into a montage of frenzied drum solos with orchestral accompaniment (Hadlock, p. 135).

In the Benny Goodman Orchestra, Krupa helped drive the band to commercial success, meanwhile revolutionizing the drummer’s role in the jazz band. His extended drum solo on Sing, Sing, Sing helped define the new expectation for drummers (Peters, 1975, p. 208). “For better or worse, the extended drum solo in jazz grew out of Krupa’s display pieces in the Goodman band” (Hadlock, 1986, p. 140). In fact, the intensity
Krupa displayed on the stage was his eventual downfall as a member of the Goodman Orchestra. “Never one to willingly share the spotlight, Benny found Gene’s popularity rankled” (Crowther, 1987, p. 71). Krupa found success after Goodman with his own orchestra and other ventures.

Another leader in drumming is Chick Webb. Webb, like Baby Dodds, also influenced Krupa’s playing. Drummer for the Savoy in New York’s Harlem, “... from the first time he played there, Chick Webb, a tiny, crippled hunchbacked young man from Baltimore, became King of the Savoy” (Crowther, 1987, p. 53). Krupa played with a combination of Chicago and New Orleans styles, but when he heard Webb, “Now he added another ingredient, a dynamic fluidity which reflected Chick Webb” (Crowther, p. 54). Krupa knew that Webb was a better drummer then himself, stating, “That man was dynamic; he could reach the most amazing heights. When he really let go you had a feeling that the entire atmosphere in the place was being charged. When he felt like it, he could cut down any of us” (Crowther, p. 68). “... Webb was becoming an enormous influence on aspiring drummers, and Buddy [Rich] turned his incomparable musical ear in the direction of that worthy gentleman and soaked up what he had to say with his specially built Gretsch-Gladstone drums” (Torme, 1991, p. 29).

Chick’s hi-hat work and his general approach to powering a big band set standards that were copied by a multitude of drummers through the Swing Era. Born a hunchback, often in great pain, he died young, but his records have become a correspondence course for hundreds of drummers (Torme, p. 185).

Buddy Rich was also a leader in the field of drumming. He played with Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, and he led several of his own bands. In addition to being a solid and remarkable player, Rich’s dedication to the music went beyond playing well. Saxophonist Bob Bowlby says, “Some rehearsals were devoted entirely to standing up, bowing in unison and sitting down again, over and over and over, until we got it correct. . . . When we were on the job, Buddy wanted us to be ‘professionals,’ and he wanted his music rendered to ‘perfection’” (Torne, 1991, p. 213). It is important to note that Rich’s passion for music did not end at the drums, but he strove for musical perfection as a band leader as well.

Louie Bellson fondly remembers Buddy Rich. “He was among that group of players including Chick Webb, Baby Dodds, Jo Jones, Sid Catlett, and Gene Krupa who were all innovators. Players like that come around only every so often” (Torme, 1991, p. 212). Rich and Krupa shared an occasional drum battle, a spectacle for the audience in which the drummers would trade impressive solos. The two men never thought of each other as competition, “Nevertheless, Buddy blasted away during these sets and clearly ‘won’ them. Gene was sanguine about it all. As he remarked to Bobby Scott, ‘Anyone playing with Buddy is going to get blown away . . .’” (Crowther, 1987, p. 107).

That today’s drummer actually relates to the melody and form of the composition he is improvising on in an artistically meaningful way still mystifies those listeners who think of rhythm only as an accompaniment factor or musical propellant. In the mid-sixties, Elvin Jones began successfully to combat this ignorance by elevating the drum solo to the status of a classic production. Today
there are few critics or musicians who would not rate his solos as some of the best in contemporary jazz (Rivelli & Levin, 1980, p. 54).

Jones’ technique, originality, complexity, and pure talent has had a major influence on music since the 1960s. Rivelli & Levin (1980) explains the revolutionary value of Jones to the drumming world. “Undisputed as the present major influence in contemporary drumming, Elvin Jones creates a rhythmic excitement which surpasses the efforts of all previous drummers” (p. 51). Jones helps describe his style by referring to the original concept of jazz as a non-rigid style of music. When jazz was first beginning there was very little structure, and a strong emphasis on improvisation. That quickly changed as jazz became the popular music of the ‘30s and ‘40s. Explaining his revolutionary style, Jones says, “... [An artist] can use any form he wants within the framework of the composition. It goes back to getting away from the rigidity that jazz had to face when it was primarily dance music” (Rivelli & Levin, p. 54). Gene Krupa introduced the world to a real 1930’s jazz drum solo. Elvin Jones did the very same to a higher degree in the ‘60s.

Intense and innovative drummers are the true leaders of drumming. However, it would be wrong to overlook the impact of a drummer like Ringo Starr of the Beatles, who admits, “I know I’m no good on the technical things but I’m good with all the motions, swinging my head, like. That’s because I love to dance but you can’t do that on the drums” (Clayson, 1992, p. 23). Any true leadership displayed by Ringo would have to be in the form of reverse innovation, in that the style he introduced was superbly simple. “Drum solos were tedious to him, and if ever he had a pet hate amongst their perpetrators, it was bandleader Boddy Rich who was every smartalec’s notion of
percussive splendor because ‘he does things with one hand I can’t do with nine but that’s
technique” (Clayson, p. 22).

One major change which Ringo helped lead was the astonishing popularity of
Ludwig drums, certainly due to the popularity of his band more than his expertise on the
drums. “The Ludwig kit which became the goal of many players was the Ludwig Super
Classic” (Trynka, 1996, p. 94). Certain instrument manufacturers, like Ludwig, have also
been leaders in the field of drumming.

Instrument Manufacturers as Leaders

There are other factors in the leadership of drumming besides drummers. The
companies who produce the instruments and hardware that drummers use also have the
capacity to be leaders in the field. The Avedis Zildjian Company has been making
cymbals since 1623, in Constantinople. After moving the company to the U.S. in 1929,
Avedis III personally began to travel to the musical hot spots around the nation,
beginning the sense of artist relations and innovative development for which Zildjian is
known so well.

Jazz was a very different sound compared to the more orchestral sounds before its
day. This new type of music had different requirements for the rhythm. A desire to keep
a steady beat brought about the use of a new device called the “‘snow-shoe pedal’—two
hinged boards with two small ‘clapper’ cymbals fastened on. This device rested on the
floor and provided the drummer with an ‘extra’ beat” (Zildjian, 1997, Development).
The “low-sock” pedal evolved from this, and then was raised up off the floor so that the
drummer could also play it with his hands; the “hi-sock.” “Jo Jones, then with Count
Basie, and Gene Krupa are—along with Avedis—credited with perfecting the hi-hat which remains to this day part of the drummer's stock-in-trade” (Zildjian, 1997, Development).

The development of the hi-hat led to a change in music. It allowed drummers another level of sound and rhythm, influencing the creation of bop, and used widely in rock music.

The many types of cymbals that Zildjian eventually produced had a direct influence on the types of music that were made possible. Just as the electric guitar is a vital part of rock music, certain types of cymbals are necessary in different styles of music, and Zildjian was the company that developed new models of cymbals. As the leader in the cymbal-making field, Zildjian has even influenced other cymbal companies. Avedis III created the cymbals and names crash, ride, hi-hat, swish, splash, sizzle, and ping (Zildjian, 1997, Development). Other cymbal manufacturers, including Sabian and Paiste (the two major competitors) use the names ride, crash, hi-hat, and splash for their cymbals. The sounds, the names, the designs and the impact the Zildjian company made was so significant that the names and designs of the cymbals were adopted around the world.

Around the late 1930s and early '40s Zildjian was supplying the rise in high school and college bands, but was facing a shortage in metals due to the war. Fortunately, because directors of military musical units specified “Avedis Zildjian or equal” on all requisitions, the government-approved quota of both metals [tin and copper] was sufficient to keep a skeleton crew of skilled craftsmen busy (Zildjian, 1997, Development).
And busy they were, as bebop soon began to take over the stage. Different cymbal sizes were being called for, so “Avedis, now assisted by his son Armand, again went all out to respond to their needs” (Zildjian, 1997, Development). However, Zildjian did not stop its innovation in the ‘30s. Rock and Roll brought a new level of demand to Zildjian.

The demand for Zildjian cymbals quadrupled practically overnight as rock drummers stepped up the beat to “FFFF” [FF is fortissimo, or very loud. FFFF is that much louder] on the ride cymbals. A bright and articulate sound was called for, and the Zildjians wasted no time in providing it with their 20” and 22” Ping-Ride and other medium-weight top cymbals (Zildjian, 1997, Evolution).

Drummers in the sixties and seventies began breaking all of the rules of drumming, and Zildjian was right there to help them.

The company moved to its modern facility in Norwell, Massachusetts, during the ‘80s, and has continued to develop new models and new lines of cymbals, with Armand Zildjian as president. Also during the ‘80s with the growth of rock-n-roll music, more powerful drummers were looking for loud and new sounds. This led to the creation of the Z Series, “The first totally new cymbal design to be produced in three centuries using the Zildjian alloy”(Zildjian, 1997, Innovation). The new Z’s were heavy cymbals created by a modern computerized hammering technique. Technology and innovation allowed Zildjian to modernize cymbal-making.

With so many types of music in practice now throughout the world, Zildjian has recently been creating special effects cymbals to add an extra dimension to the art of drumming. All of Zildjian’s exciting new sounds have helped to reinvent drumming, and increase the options available to drummers.
The one drum company who has made a dramatic impact in drum quality in recent years is Drum Workshop, or DW. Started in 1972, but only involved in drum manufacturing since '78, DW's short history has been a true leadership success story, especially within the past ten or so years. The goal of founders Don Lombardi and John Good "...was to help restore the great American tradition of drum making in order to provide drummers with the highest quality American-made drums available" (Drum Workshop, 1996). They continue to achieve that goal as the elite and expensive DW drum kit has become the dream of many drummers, just as Ludwig drums were in the 1960s. Don and John have set the highest standards of quality and innovation with their drums.

Named best quality and most innovative acoustic drum company in the 1995 Modern Drummer Magazine Consumers' Poll, today DW remains dedicated to setting newer, higher goals for American quality, craftsmanship and innovation - continuing to establish newer, higher standards for the international drum industry while producing the drums and drum products that serve the needs of the world's top drummers. (Drum Workshop, 1996)

The leadership of DW has spread to other companies who are taking advantage of the recent popularity in custom drum kits. Not only are small custom drum shops benefiting from DW's success, but the high-volume manufacturers like Pearl, Tama, and Yamaha, are also putting more effort into producing higher quality drums. However, no other strictly custom drum company also has a complete line of hardware are pedals. DW's hardware and pedals, like its drums, are filled with innovative design elements and top
quality materials. A leader in innovation and development in the true sense of the phrase, DW has achieved its world image with a mere seventy employees.

**Leadership: Change, Creativity, and Innovation**

As a twenty-year-old science, leadership has not nearly reached its research capacity. Some areas of leadership are well-studied, while others have not even been considered for research. Leadership has been mostly applied to the business world, leaving more artistic areas as frontiers of leadership potential. Drumming is one of those areas. Since scholarly material directly related to the topic is unavailable, we must learn from the rest of the leadership literature what can be applied to drummers. Leading change is a popular leadership topic which relates well to the type of leadership provided by leaders of drumming. Innovation and creativity are also valuable aspects of drumming leadership.

Like any leadership situation in which new ideas are shared, leading drummers have always shared new techniques, styles, and innovations with the drumming world. "It's by keeping the doors open to the passage of ideas and information that we become knowledgeable about what goes on around us" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 47). By only studying other drummers, leading drummers will never further the field. While playing and practicing, it is the moments of originality and the flow of creative thoughts that spark new ideas that lead to innovations in the field. If Krupa had ever decided to mimic Baby Dodds he would have been stifling the creativity that revolutionized drumming. The same can be said for drum companies, who, without the feedback and communication from drummers, would never know what products are needed and what
innovation is on the brink of creation. "Thus leaders must destroy confining barriers. Those who enclose themselves, who shut the door to the world outside, will never be able to detect change" (Kouzes & Posner, pp. 47-8). The leaders of drumming must communicate and experience the novel ideas and changes in drumming.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) explain the interrelated nature of innovation, change, and leadership. "Leadership is inextricably connected with the process of innovation, of bringing new ideas, methods, or solutions into use. To Kanter, innovation means change, and 'change requires leadership . . ." (p. 51). Part of what makes a successful musician is the ability to create and innovate. What leadership scholar would deny those as characteristics of a good leader? The significant changes that have taken place in drumming can be attributed to specific leaders and innovations developed by them. The real leaders do not wait for a change to occur, but are constantly challenging their own abilities to discover new and better techniques. "To be sure, leaders challenge standard operating procedures. They continually ask, 'Why do we need to do it that way? Why not this way?' And occasionally they do invent entire new industries or technologies" (Kouzes & Posner, p. 245). Zildjian created a line of computer-hammered cymbals, known as the Z series, by challenging the old technique. "Yes, leaders must search for opportunities to grow and innovate; they must experiment and take risks" (Kouzes & Posner, p. 245).

Changes such as Buddy Rich's use of double bass drums, or Krupa's use of tunable tom-toms opened up numerous possibilities for the drumming world. It certainly helped that these two men were celebrities and very skilled players. As Kouzes and Posner (1995) explain, "Successful innovations are always advocated by influential
people" (p. 264). Even if a major innovation comes from a discreet source, it will soon be endorsed by an influential person, which will ensure success of the innovation. For example, when DW drums first arrived on the scene very few drummers endorsed them, but as the major drummers started playing DWs, the popularity of the drums skyrocketed.

An organization will be successful if it can generate creativity regularly, "The leader's own creativity certainly can be helpful in that regard. However, it may be even more important for the leader to be able to stimulate creativity in others" (Hughes, Ginnet & Curphy, 1993, p. 354). John Good of DW is renowned for his innovations, and the company has seen the benefit of that. DW has modernized the drumset through creativity and questioning of past beliefs. Good thoroughly believes in the drumset as a single complete instrument, as opposed to a collection of individual drums. This perspective, along with others, has been vital to the success of DW as a leader in drum making.

"Thus, creativity is the ability to look at things from new and different perspectives" (Hughes et al, 1993, p. 355). If the goal is to advance the field of drumming, leaders must continue to challenge the beliefs and norms of the drumming world. If this is done, the future of leadership in drumming is certain to remain strong.
Results

Five interviews were conducted for the research. The interviewees represented a wide array of perspectives and backgrounds in the drumming field. Representing leaders of drum-related manufacturers, three people from the Avedis Zildjian Company contributed to one interview. These people were Armand Zildjian, owner and president, Craigie Zildjian, and Lennie DiMuzio, who are both key players at Zildjian. The Zildjian interview was returned by e-mail on April 9, 1998.

Representing leading professional drummers, Dave Weckl was interviewed by telephone on April 9, 1998. Weckl is one of the top studio drummers of the day and has played with numerous artists, including Chick Corea, Peabo Bryson, and Robert Plant.

Three individuals were interviewed as drummers/historians. Jim Payne is author of *Give the Drummers Some*. He responded via e-mail to the interview on April 9, 1998. Harry Cangany is a drummer, drum historian, and drum store owner. He writes vintage drum articles for *Modern Drummer* magazine, and is the author of *The Great American Drums and the Companies That Made Them*. The interview with Cangany was conducted over telephone on April 9, 1998. Howard Curtis is a professional drummer, drum teacher, and has a wealth of knowledge on the topic of drumming. He is a well-known jazz drummer in the Richmond area and has worked on numerous recording and touring projects over the past few years. Curtis was interviewed in person on April 3, 1998.
Interviews with Drummers/Historians and Leading Professional Drummer

The responses made by the drummers/historian who were interviewed are listed below. After each question, the interviewee’s name code indicates his response. The codes are, Harry Cangany (Ca), Howard Curtis (Cu), and Jim Payne (JP). The responses by the leading professional drummer interviewed, Dave Weckl (DW), are also below. Note that question 2a was asked only to Weckl. Telephone and in-person interviews were edited for clarity and length. Bracketed sections were added by the researcher.

1) How does innovation play a part in the leadership of drumming?

Ca: Original drum shops were one step away from machine shops. They would provide products for drummers by asking ‘what do you need?’ and ‘what would you like?’ Innovation is important in the leadership of drumming, and it has always been necessary. The drum-maker, however, may only be an innovator after the drummer says the product is good.

JP: If you're doing something different they [other drummers] have to listen to you to figure it out. [If a drummer has an innovation in his playing, that innovation will spread as people try to learn from it.]

Cu: Elvin Jones was a true innovator. If you listen to a pre-Elvin recording, then listen to Elvin in his prime, and finally listen to a post-Elvin record, you will hear his influence on the later record. Max Roach expanded bebop and was an innovator, but Buddy Rich, who always gave 150%, was a leader but not an innovator. He picked up things from Krupa and Webb, but for the most part he was one of many swing drummers, unlike Roach who was the major impact on bebop.
DW: Innovation makes someone a leader. The people able to rise to the occasion of leadership figure out a very important thing. Innovation comes from finding yourself in the instrument.

2) What are some of the important characteristics of leading drummers, and what, if any, do they have in common?

Ca: The leading drummers are all very musical. They are not just guys with great chops. For example, Buddy Rich could accentuate and imitate what the brass section was playing. People who play drums the best play them as musical instruments.

JP: Confidence that their time is strong. No doubt about it. Others have to listen to them for it. They don't get swayed on time. Consummate ability - got to start with that to get respect. Ears - show them you can hear what they're doing and respond to it.

Cu: Philly Joe Jones was funny and witty, and there was humor in his playing through things like exaggerated motions and cymbal chokes. Elvin Jones was very dignified, almost soft spoken, whereas his playing is dynamic and possessed. Max Roach has very structured solos, and he is the same way in life, very intelligent, sort of a renaissance man.

In general the leaders have the trait of aggressiveness to get yourself out there. They are assertive with a go-get-'em attitude.

DW: The leading drummers all have the love and desire to be as good as can be. Practice is also key. Very importantly, the drummer must possess the ability to be spiritually and emotionally communicative through the instrument.
2a) From who did you learn the drums, and what pieces of knowledge which you learned from them have aided in your success?

**DW:** From my first drum teachers in St. Louis to Freddy Gruber most recently, the bottom line is that the individual has to want it themselves.

3) What drummers have had a significant leadership role beyond the field of drumming?

(ie: influenced changes in a whole musical style, etc.)

**Ca:** Ulysses Leedy and William Ludwig were both players who stopped to become manufacturers. Don Lombardi and John Good of Drum Workshop.

George Way, who worked for Leedy and was a drummer, is credited with the first lug [screw for tuning a drumhead]. Bill Ludwig II also had a significant role.

**JP:** Clayton Fillyau with James Brown. Started breaking up the beat. Took emphasis away from back beats—ergo funk.

**Cu:** Billy Cobham combined the power of rock with the sophistication of jazz. All fusion music writers had his style of playing in mind when composing pieces. Jack DeJohnette influenced many younger musicians through his style. Tony Williams has an influential sound with loud playing on small drums. He influenced the music of a music innovator, when Miles Davis wanted to fire his own band and hire Tony’s as a rhythm section. Max Roach founded bebop and influenced other musicians rhythmically.

**DW:** Baby Dodds, Chick Webb, Krupa, and Rich all put drummers in the forefront of music, and the drummer in the spotlight as a soloist. Steve Gadd, Billy Cobham, and Tony Williams have more recently affected musical styles.
4) Please give a few examples and explanation of DRUMMERS from this century who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

**Ca:** Baby Dodds, whose music came up the Mississippi into Chicago, then Krupa, Buddy Rich, and into bebop with Max Roach. Then Ringo and John Bonham had a big influenced on the beginning of heavy metal. Krupa was really in the right place at the right time. He played black oriented music and was a good looking guy.

**JP:** Buddy Rich, Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Clyde Stubblefield, Clayton Fillyau.

**Cu:** Gene Krupa turned the drums into a legitimate solo instrument with his solo on *Sing, Sing, Sing*. Baby Dodds wasn't exactly polished, but he didn't sound so march-like, mechanical, and stiff like drummers before him. Elvin Jones opened up the drumset as accompaniment combined with the solo. He did a lot of work with polyrhythms.

**DW:** I studied Steve Gadd deeply when I was younger. He changed the whole way of recording drums, and revolutionized the proficiency of the studio drummer.

5) Please give a few examples and explanation of hardware and/or instrument MANUFACTURERS who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

**Ca:** Leedy was the first really great manufacturer. Ludwig was strong in the ‘20s, Slingerland was strong in the ‘30s and ‘40s. The most significant piece of hardware in the twentieth century is the Rims mounting system. The hi hat, developed by Walberg and Auge, was also very important.
The first significant invention was the Ludwig pedal in 1909. The next would be the Ludwig throw off right after WWI, then the hi hat. The tunable tom-tom was also important, for which Slingerland is credited because of Krupa. In the 1970s hardware became better, mostly because of the Japanese influence.

Gretsch was not a national powerhouse until the late '40s and early '50s.

**JP:** None. They just follow what drummers want.

**Cu:** Ludwig’s bass drum pedal made them a leader. Gretsch developed hoops that held shape better. Remo, with the synthetic drumhead, changed a drummer’s life. DW has taken drums to the next century. Sonor, before DW, was known for taking care of drums and paying attention to detail. Zildjian is definitely a leader. All other companies nod toward Zildjian. Many other companies have tried to copy the old K [Zildjian] sound [a highly sought-after cymbal sound from Turkish Zildjian cymbals].

**DW:** There are a lot of good drums out there. I have endorsed Yamaha drums for the past fifteen years and they are by far one of the most innovative.

Zildjian really listens to a lot of artist input. I had the opportunity to work with them to develop the K Custom ride.

6) Please explain what role drummers and drumming-related manufacturers have played in the leadership of music. (ie: How have drumming-related people or products helped to create change in music as a whole?)

**Ca:** Besides melodies, music is made up of the beat. The beat made the drumset come together because of the bass drum pedal. Our culture has reacted to that: the beat comes out and grabs people.
7) How has the drummer's image within the world of music changed over time?

**Ca:** The drummer’s image hasn’t changed for some people. I’m friends with [professional drummer] Kenny Aronoff. He gets the great gigs because he is a time keeper. The best musicians will find the drummer who is the time keeper. The drummer of today is considered a serious musician, and is a respected member of the musical team.

**JP:** More respect as foundation of a song or piece of music.

**Cu:** Drummers are now more intelligent. At the beginning they were not well studied, but they are now true musicians.

**DW:** It has been made apparent that the drummer is a very integral part of the band. The drum chair has been put in the forefront.

8) Is there anything else on the topic of Leadership in the field of Drumming that you would like to share, about you, drummers, innovations? Please add any information you feel would be helpful.

**Ca:** The field of drumming is an ever-changing landscape where education is important. Physical strength is also important. The best drummers of today are really taking care of themselves. The leading drum companies have always been about who has the “magic.” DW has it now, Slingerland had it, Ludwig had it. Everyone makes good drums, but the most successful company is the one who has the magic.
JP: [No response given]

Cu: If I had to define a leader who played drumset, unquestionably the name that comes to mind is Art Blakey. His band was a finishing school for music leaders. More leaders came out of his band then anyone else. He’s the epitome of a band leader. He has charisma and respect for the music. He was a role model in jazz. Luck sometimes has a lot to do with how certain drummers become leaders, such as Ringo Starr. Like many singers, they just haven’t been through the whole experience of being a musician. Leaders view themselves as a vehicle for the music to go through. Certain musicians are just there, out of luck. They don’t feel the music as a full experience.

DW: It is the responsibility of the person put in the leadership situation to take the responsibility to further education. For some players there is a mystique about their playing and styles. I personally have always been against that. It’s the duty of the leading drummers to share and to educate.

Interview with Leading Manufacturer

Both Craigie Zildjian (CAZ) and Lennie DiMuzio (LAD) provided information from the Avedis Zildjian Company. Armand Zildjian (AAZ) responded to one question. 1) Which of your personal characteristics do you feel have contributed to your success as leader in your field? (i.e., creativity, motivation, sense of humor)

CAZ: Creativity. A love of both music and musical talent have motivated us to “push the envelope” in cymbal manufacturing.

2) What factors have helped make your company a leader?
CAZ: Working so closely with the top drummers of the day. We are very passionate about cymbals and cymbal quality.

LAD: Also, innovation in product development.

3) From who, if anyone, did you learn your trade and what are some pieces of knowledge, which you learned from them that may have aided in your success?

AAZ: I learned the art of cymbal making from my father, Avedis, when I was 14 years old. I was fortunate to learn about drumming from the great drummers who visited the factory: Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Jo Jones, etc.

4) Please give a few examples and a brief explanation of DRUMMERS from this century who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

We recommend the purchase of a book called *The Great Jazz Drummers* by Ron Spagnardi which can be purchased through the *Modern Drummer Magazine* for $20 and *The Cymbal Book* by Hugo Pinsterboer for $25.

5) Please give a few examples and a brief explanation of hardware and/or instrument MANUFACTURERS who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

LAD: 20 years ago the Rogers Drum Co. was very innovative with their snare drums and foot pedals. They later sold to CBS and eventually went out of business. Yamaha was important with the introduction of electronic drums and hardware (still being sold today). Pearl Drum Co. introduced an entrance level drumset under $1000 with decent quality. The are also very innovative with their high-end drums and hardware. D.W. Drums has been a very strong and competitive drum company during the past 10 years for all high-end equipment. Other innovative companies:
Remo Drumheads/ the leader in drumheads and world percussion.

Latin Percussion/ the leader in Latin percussion products.

Vic Firth/ leading in drumsticks.

6) Please explain what role drummers and drumming-related manufacturers have played in the leadership of music. (i.e., How have drumming-related people or products helped to create change in music as a whole?)

**LAD:** All the great drummers over the years have given the companies the vehicle to create and test new products made by all companies.

7) Is there anything else on the topic of Leadership in the field of Drumming that you would like to share, about you, the company, drummers, innovations? Please add any information you feel would be helpful.

**CAZ:** At Zildjian, we revere the great drummers. Later this year, the Company will host a charity event, the “American Drummers Achievement Awards” to honor Max Roach, Elvin Jones, Louie Bellson and Roy Haynes.
Discussion

Findings and Implications

The research has shown that leadership is very active in the field of drumming. In many cases, drumming professionals agree on characteristics of drumming leaders and on who have been the leaders during the twentieth century. Five interviews were conducted for the research. Although the number of interviews is relatively small, there were definite themes in the answers, as well as varied perspective from the interviewees.

Combining the interviews with the literature research, it must be concluded that certain drummers are truly leaders in the field. Baby Dodds, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Max Roach, and Elvin Jones are most often mentioned for their innovations and other contributions to drumming. Manufacturers often mentioned include Ludwig, Slingerland, Zildjian, Remo, and Drum Workshop. An interesting explanation for leading manufacturers was given by Harry Cangany. Although certain innovations by drum companies help to create change, the companies we see as the leaders are the ones with the “magic,” or that lure of quality and beauty. Another important fact is that manufacturers only develop innovative products after a drummer requests or suggests it. Jim Payne wasted no words in saying that no drum manufacturers are leaders, because they only do what the drummers request.

Some leadership characteristics in the field of drumming are unmistakably significant. Innovation, for example is explained by many interviewees as key to the leadership role. Craigie Zildjian cites creativity as a characteristic attributable to her success. “Instead of generating creativity and responsibility, charismatic authority can generate a mindless following or devolve into bureaucratic institutions that rely on central
planning and control. Creativity is stimulated by engaging with one's environment . . .” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 66). The need for creativity in drumming leadership is particularly true in the manufacturing companies given that they are real organizations with real employees, and real possibilities for the problems of stagnant leadership.

Other leadership characteristics are perhaps as varied as those in other fields of leadership. Talent, assertiveness, and the desire for success are attributes than any leader should have. The other characteristics of drumming leaders are specific to their field, but still important to their success as leaders.

Suggestions for Improvement

There were a few shortcoming of this study. The most significant being the small number of interviews conducted, although the information gained from them was thorough and useful. Some of the people interviewed were very important people in their businesses and in the field. Marshall and Rossman (1989) indicate that interviewing such “elite” individuals is beneficial due to the great amount of information and knowledge they possess. However, accessibility was a problem since they also tend to be very busy people. The elite status of these people is a benefit due to the respect they have in the field. The elites who did respond confirmed their dedication to the field of drumming by participating in research on leadership in the field. However, the other professional drummers and companies who were e-mailed did not respond. The interview process should have been started much earlier in the research process to avoid this problem.

Also, question 6 on the drummers/historian and leading professional drummer interview was not worded to elicit any new information. That should be remedied before
further use, and a greater number of specific questions may help in gaining more information.

**Conclusion**

The historical research and interviews have provided a good base of knowledge for leadership in the field of drumming and how it relates to leadership as a whole, with an emphasis on creativity, innovation, and change. The changes that have taken place in the field of drumming throughout the twentieth century are a direct result of the leadership of the people involved. While some drummers are undeniably leaders, others may be considered leaders by those who hold them in high regard. Part of the intrigue of leadership studies is its wide application to topics as varied as a big business and boy scout troop. Somewhere within that continuum is music, and a small part of that is drumming. This research has given a better understanding of leadership within that realm. In another twenty years the understanding may be complete.
References


http://www.dwdrums.com/insidedw.htm


http://www.slingerland.com/products/slingerland/


**Personal Electronic Communications**

Payne, Jim (jpayne@funkydrummer.com). (1998, April 9). Re: Please HELP: Researching Leadership and Drumming. E-mail to John O’Donnell (jodonnel@richmond.edu)

Smey, Pam (PSAZ@aol.com). (1998, April 9). Zildjian. E-mail to John O’Donnell (jodonnel@richmond.edu)
Appendix A

Interview questions for leading manufacturer.

1) Which of your personal characteristics do you feel have contributed to your success as a leader in your field? (ie: creativity, motivation, sense of humor.)

2) What factors have helped make your company a leader?

3) From who, if anyone, did you learn your trade, and what are some pieces of knowledge which you learned from them that may have aided in your success?

4) Please give a few examples and a brief explanation of DRUMMERS from this century who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

5) Please give a few examples and a brief explanation of hardware and/or instrument MANUFACTURERS who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

6) Please explain what role drummers and drumming-related manufacturers have played in the leadership of music. (ie: How have drumming-related people or products helped to create change in music as a whole?)

7) Is there anything else on the topic of Leadership in the field of Drumming that you would like to share, about you, the company, drummers, innovations? Please add any information you feel would be helpful.
Appendix B

Interview questions for drummer/historian.

1) How does innovation play a part in the leadership of drumming?

2) What are some of the important characteristics of leading drummers, and what, if any, do they have in common?

3) What drummers have had a significant leadership role beyond the field of drumming? (ie: influenced changes in a whole musical style, etc.)

4) Please give a few examples and explanation of DRUMMERS from this century who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

5) Please give a few examples and explanation of hardware and/or instrument MANUFACTURERS who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

6) Please explain what role drummers and drumming-related manufacturers have played in the leadership of music. (ie: How have drumming-related people or products helped to create change in music as a whole?)

7) How has the drummer's image within the world of music changed over time?

8) Is there anything else on the topic of Leadership in the field of Drumming that you would like to share, about you, drummers, innovations? Please add any information you feel would be helpful.
Appendix C

Interview questions for leading professional drummer.

1) How does innovation play a part in the leadership of drumming?

2) What are some of the important characteristics of leading drummers, and what, if any, do they have in common?

2a) From who, if anyone, did you learn your trade, and what are some pieces of knowledge which you learned from them that may have aided in your success?

3) What drummers have had a significant leadership role beyond the field of drumming? (ie: influenced changes in a whole musical style, etc.)

4) Please give a few examples and explanation of DRUMMERS from this century who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

5) Please give a few examples and explanation of hardware and/or instrument MANUFACTURERS who you feel have been the leaders of change in drumming.

6) Please explain what role drummers and drumming-related manufacturers have played in the leadership of music. (ie: How have drumming-related people or products helped to create change in music as a whole?)

7) How has the drummer's image within the world of music changed over time?

8) Is there anything else on the topic of Leadership in the field of Drumming that you would like to share, about you, drummers, innovations? Please add any information you feel would be helpful.
Appendix D

Sample personalized form e-mail.

Dear Zildjian Public Relations,

My name is John O'Donnell, I am a senior at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond, VA. My home town is Norwell, MA, and I have played drums and Zildjian cymbals for seven years. I am writing you in regards to my research project for the semester, Leadership in the Field of Drumming. I am hoping that you will be able to provide a little assistance in my project, but first, please allow me to give you a brief explanation.

I am focusing my research on drumming (drumset, as opposed to orchestral percussion) in the twentieth century in America, and more specifically, who have been the leaders of change in the field of drumming and what has made them leaders. The following questions are driving my research:

1) What role have drummers played in the leadership of music?
   a) as formal leaders?
   b) as innovators?
   c) leading changes in the style of popular music?

2) What common characteristics do the leaders in the drumming field share?
   a) personality?
   b) playing skills?
   c) other specifically leadership characteristics?

3) Who have been the formal leaders of change in the field?
   a) drummers?
   b) percussion/hardware manufacturers?
   c) non-drummer musicians?

I have been a huge fan of Zildjian for quite some time and through my involvement in music and my interest in your company I am very aware of the important role Zildjian plays in the world of drumming. Zildjian's development and innovation have helped to form the world of music as we know it.

I am seeking assistance from Zildjian in the following areas: (1) I would like to interview an individual(s) knowledgeable in the history of Zildjian and the role the company has played in drumming: (2) I would appreciate any contacts you can give me, including professional drummers and those knowledgeable of the leading drummers of the past and
Dave Weckl, who I contacted through his personal home-page, has been kind enough to agree to an interview. John Good, of DW drums, will be responding via e-mail to a few specific questions. I don't know if it would be possible to send a similar short list of questions to Mr. Zildjian, but considering the role he has played in drumming, his views, knowledge, and opinion would add great weight to my research.

Drummers and the field of drumming are often overlooked in musical research. I feel that exploring the leadership of the drumming field is a worthwhile endeavor, and I greatly appreciate any help you can give me in expanding our knowledge of drumming and its leaders. Thank you!

Sincerely,

John O'Donnell

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