# 12 Mentorship

## Jazz Drumming across Generations

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#### Introduction

Jazz music has long been understood as a generational practice, one where older musicians mentor, encourage, and teach younger, aspiring players. <sup>1</sup> That tradition of tutelage is often evident in the long lineages of musicians who have graduated from the ensembles of noted bandleaders. Historical examples of such ensembles include those of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and most germane to this volume, Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, an ensemble celebrated for its famous alumni as much as for its spirited drummer and leader. <sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I consider this tradition as it relates to two specific drum kit players: Jack DeJohnette, a major figure in the history of jazz drumming and a bandleader recognized for his history of nurturing younger musicians, and Terri Lyne Carrington, a premiere figure in contemporary jazz drumming and a celebrated leader of ensembles that feature young, developing musicians.

Specific themes include: (a) the importance of mentors in the lives of the participants, (b) challenges of learning to play the drum kit, particular to the instrument itself, (c) the unique place and space of drummers, behind kits, on band stands, and in the roles of leader or leader/mentor, and (d) 'something bigger than just the music', the larger contexts of learning to play, of connecting to a community and lineage of jazz drummers.

## The Participants

Although both participants are quite renowned, and full details of their extensive recording, performing, and education careers are readily available to readers elsewhere, in order to provide context for this chapter contribution, short profiles of each participant are in order. I will start with Jack DeJohnette, whom I have known for some 30 years, and who led me to Terri Lyne Carrington, and eventually to the ideas that informed this writing.

Jack DeJohnette, a name likely familiar to drum kit players reading this volume, has played with some of the most storied figures in jazz and improvised music. DeJohnette's credits include recordings, performances,

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and long-time associations with Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Stan Getz, Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, Dave Holland, Joe Henderson, Freddy Hubbard, Betty Carter, and Pat Metheny among many others.

Jack's creative drumming in jazz, avant-garde, fusion, and new age styles has been recognized by critics, associations, institutions, and peers so often as to preclude listing every honour in this chapter text. A quick summary of recognitions includes a Grammy Award, perennial inclusion in readers and critics polls published by each of the major US jazz magazines, *Down Beat* and *Jazz Times*, Hall of Fame status in the *Modern Drummer Magazine* readers poll, recognition with the French Grand Prix du Disc award, and induction into the Percussive Arts Society's Hall of Fame.

The honour most relevant to this chapter is a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master Fellowship. This award is the highest honour awarded by the US Federal Government in recognition of the life's work and contributions of notable jazz musicians. The Jazz Master designation noted Jack DeJohnette's remarkable career achievements, life-long contributions to jazz music as a cultural and artistic form, and his commitment to mentoring younger generations of aspiring jazz musicians.

Terri Lyne Carrington, one of the most highly regarded musicians of her generation, has been playing the drum kit since childhood, manifesting prodigious talent as early as ten years old. In a career that spans some 40 years, Terri Lyne Carrington has played drums, sang, and produced music for record, for television, and for marquis live events affording her opportunities to collaborate with the likes of Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, George Duke, Carlos Santana, John Scofield, David Sanborn, Stan Getz, Geri Allen, Esperanza Spalding, Christian McBride, and vocalists Cassandra Wilson, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Dianne Reeves, among countless others. A three-time Grammy Award winner, Terri Lyne Carrington is the first female recipient of the Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Jazz Album. In 2019, Carrington was awarded the Doris Duke Award in recognition of and in support of her outstanding record of achievements in jazz performance.

One hallmark of Terri Lyne Carrington's work has been the ways in which she features young musicians in her ensembles, providing opportunities early in the careers of Ambrose Akinmusire, Tineka Postma, and Morgan Guerin, among many others. Accordingly, Carrington is an esteemed educator, lauded for her work at Boston's Berklee College of Music, where she founded and, at the time of this writing, serves as Artistic Director for the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice,<sup>3</sup> an organization that has mentoring young musicians as part of its stated mission.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, it is important for me to contextualize my own background so that readers might better understand the experiences and perspectives that have informed my analysis of the participants' expressions. I am a drummer, composer, and music education researcher. In my research, I have considered improvisation education,<sup>5</sup> popular music education,<sup>6</sup> technology in music education,<sup>7</sup> and music teaching and learning as it occurs outside of schools.<sup>8</sup> I am also an educator, holding the position of full professor at the State University of New York Oneonta, where I teach music industry courses, beat production, and direct ensembles that perform experimental music and improvised rock.

Lastly, I have extensive experience working in the jazz recording industry, including tenures at notable labels such as CMP Records, ECM Records, and RCA Victor. More recently, I am a band leader and recording artist, leading the jazz fusion group Bright Dog Red, which records for the influential Philadelphia label, Ropeadope Records. The views of and interpretations of the participant expressions presented in this chapter reflect and have been informed by these various identities, experiences, and professional activities.

#### Method

Given the nature of what I sought to understand, the dynamic personal and professional relationships between two expert practitioners, the phenomenon of generational mentoring, and the role of mentoring in jazz music, I selected qualitative research methods. Qualitative inquiry afforded me the opportunity to interpret the themes explored in this chapter, as they emerged and as I engaged the participants in discussion about mentoring in jazz drumming, the drum kit itself, and our collective experiences learning and teaching the instrument.<sup>9</sup>

I conducted two stages of data collection, both based on a protocol developed for the Music Learning Profiles Project. To For the first stage, I shared the twelve-question protocol with the participants and asked them to freely respond, either in writing or in spoken and recorded voice, individually and without discussing their answers. For the second stage, I interviewed both participants simultaneously, using the protocol to structure the interview. Although the protocol helped start the discussion, the participants' responses drove the discussion, 11 illuminating key themes, ideas, and expressions reflective of the participants' understandings of their relationship, of mentoring in jazz and in drumming, and of the project itself.

After conducting both stages of data collection, I reviewed the transcripts of participant responses, expressions, and thoughts. That review

process allowed me to code themes, concepts, and recurrent notions, in an emergent and evolving manner. <sup>12</sup> As I came to understand the data, I simultaneously rethought the themes and points of focus. That iterative approach led me to the understandings, analyses, and conclusion offered in this chapter contribution.

Finally, after transcribing the data, I shared transcriptions, emerging themes, and the final draft of this chapter with Jack DeJohnette and Terri Lyne Carrington to ensure that the final work represented their perspectives, their participation, and the points they wished to communicate. The analyses, discussion, and conclusions reflect my understandings, responses to, and interpretations of Jack DeJohnette's and Terri Lyne Carrington's statements.<sup>13</sup>

#### Discussion

I have known Jack DeJohnette for some 30 years, first meeting him when I worked for the drum manufacturer Latin Percussion. A few years after working for Latin Percussion, I got to know Jack well during my time working for ECM Records, home to much of Mr. DeJohnette's recorded output. To describe Jack as a friend would not suffice. He's been a mentor, a figure of wise council, and a role model in drumming and in life. I am grateful to have gotten to know him in these ways, to have grown close to his family, and to learn so much from him over the years.

Some years ago, Jack introduced me to Terri Lyne Carrington with the aim of planning an educational endeavour, a summer camp, a school program, something that would bring the three of us together to, as Jack put it at the time, 'to work with kids and the power of music'. <sup>14</sup> That project did not come to fruition; however, I learned more about Jack's relationship with Terri. Already very much aware of Terri Lyne Carrington's professional accomplishments, I also learned more about her exemplary teaching and long history of mentoring younger musicians, something she shared in common with Jack DeJohnette.

Mentoring has a long history in the jazz tradition, one that has been explored at length in music education research<sup>15</sup> and jazz history research.<sup>16</sup> In the early to mid-twentieth century, jazz music was developed and learned by and among jazz musicians. Andrew Goodrich, who has written much about mentoring in the context of contemporary jazz education, explains:

Jazz musicians originally learned to play jazz in a variety of ways: listening to and transcribing recordings, listening to live performances, and asking questions of each other. From this aural and verbal communication with

each other came the development of mentoring, or the social language of jazz. As jazz musicians hung out with each other, they shared ideas for learning that increased their knowledge of jazz music and elevated their level of musicianship. This type of conversation, both verbal and aural, occurred before, during, and after gigs. These conversations centered around *how* to learn. (emphasis added)<sup>17</sup>

In the United States, during the latter part of the twentieth century, jazz education programs became a staple among collegiate and university music departments, professional associations such as the *International Association for Jazz Education* formed, and music publishers began publishing jazz charts and method and instrumental technique books expressly for school jazz contexts.<sup>18</sup>

Although speaking in the early twenty-first century, some seventy years since jazz music first entered the academy, the participants in this study described learning in many of the same terms as those described by Andrew Goodrich and the others I have referenced. In describing their experiences with learning the drum kit, the participants kept returning to the following themes: (a) the importance of mentors in their lives and in the jazz tradition, (b) challenges of learning to play the drum kit, particular to the instrument itself, (c) the unique place and space of drummers, behind kits, on band stands, and in the role of leader or leader / mentor, and (d) 'something bigger than just the music', the larger contexts of learning to play, of connecting to a community and lineage of jazz drummers. The following sections explore those themes as they emerged in the responses of the participants.

#### The Importance of Mentors

Throughout our conversations, Jack DeJohnette repeatedly expressed gratitude that he was 'fortunate enough to be around other musicians, players, and you know, a mentor that' could teach and inspire him. <sup>19</sup> DeJohnette explained his early musical life in his hometown: 'I got guidance, what you're calling mentoring, from Chicago musicians, let's see, Von Freeman, who else, yeah, Muhal Richard Abrams was really good, a lot of others too'. As Jack recalled other Chicago area musicians, he noted some of the players he had only heard on recordings, viewing them as de facto mentors. Similarly, DeJohnette counted many of the musicians whom he had observed playing live or had worked with on bandstands as mentors:

You know, a lot of that guidance came from listening to musicians, recordings, going to hear people play, and then playing with Roscoe Mitchell, almost every day, free improvisation, drums and piano. Playing with Muhal

[Richard Abrams], Joseph Jarman, a variety of music professionals that were just very helpful in my development, and inspired me to do my very best, and playing with musicians of, you know, the best quality, top quality, and playing also with some of the greatest jazz artists and musicians on the planet. That helped a lot. Jackie McLean was a great help for me, of course Coltrane, and, who else, Miles Davis, of course, Bill Evans, just to name a few.

Much of Jack's drum kit learning, however, was self-directed. He started as a piano player, taking lessons, and playing that instrument with a combo of his own. The drummer in that combo left a drum kit at the DeJohnette household and between rehearsals, Jack would sit behind the kit:

So, I got started playing the drum kit when I had a combo and I had a drummer who was a part time drummer, so we used to rehearse in my house in Chicago, and he left his drum kit there. My uncle was a DJ so I had access to the latest jazz LPs and so, it took me about a month, I would go down in my basement, in a studio, and play with the LPs, jazz LPs and It took me about two weeks to get my coordination together and the other two weeks, I would actually play pretty decent. Drums came to me very naturally.

Mentoring also figured prominently in Terri Lyne's biographical narrative. She explained, 'drumming ran in the family. My grandfather was a drummer and my dad played sax and drums. So, the drums were there and the music was always playing in the house'.

Carrington's father, Matt Carrington, introduced Terri to a slew of iconic jazz musicians, including Dizzy Gillespie and Clark Terry, among many others, affording her the opportunity to sit in and 'learn while doing it'. Many of Matt Carrington's associates became mentors for young Terri Lyne. She recalled the importance of those mentors during a particularly musical childhood, 'learning from mentors is the *most* important way to get the needed inside information. You learn by default just by being around the *right* people'.

In addition to those de facto mentors, Carrington mentioned some of her teachers, each of whom transcended their role, going above and beyond teaching how to play the drum kit to becoming important life mentors, 'my Dad was my first teacher, but I also studied with Keith Copeland and Alan Dawson, as well as Tony Tedesco and John Wooley'. Owing to her precocious talents, Terri Lyne began studying at the Berklee College of Music as early as ten years of age. As noted earlier in this chapter, Ms. Carrington is a well-regarded and innovative educator at her alma mater. During the interviews for this chapter, Mr. DeJohnette regularly remarked on Terri Lyne's 'amazing' expertise in teaching drum kit at Berklee. Despite her commitment to and expertise in jazz education,

Carrington described an extra 'element', unique to the mentor / mentee relationship, that often eludes institutionalized jazz education contexts:

And now we have institutionalized jazz education, so people are getting a lot of the things more quickly. But there's still that element of apprenticeship in the art form, that element of *needing* to be apprenticed, and needing to be mentored to really get into the nuances of the music that you won't necessarily get in jazz education.

Terri Lyne described the importance of Jack to her development as a drummer, musician, and 'most importantly, as a human being'. Carrington has a nearly forty-year relationship with Jack DeJohnette, whom she identified as, 'my biggest mentor . . . critical to my development'. She explained:

For me, Jack was definitely, and still is, that person who came to be so important on so many levels when I was 17 or 18. I remember being pretty close-minded about music, life, things in general, and I remember Jack saying, 'we have to open you up,' because I was really a jazz head, in a way, which was great to start, but there were all these other things about music and about life that I really needed to embrace. I moved to NY when I was 18 and I had some friends, people that were a little older than me, but nobody who took that much interest who could pass the important things on to me, other than my parents, or that I could go to if I needed advice or help. And, I think that for me this was crucial to my development and it also made me see how important it is for me to do the same thing. I know that in my own way, I'm trying to do the same for some other young people. And because I'm teaching, seeing so many young people, I can't do that for everybody, but I do pick a few. And another thing I really learned from Jack is *how* to pick the ones you help. You know, it's not something that you just give away. You can't give a gift to somebody that doesn't know what to do with it.

At this point, as Carrington and I began discussing the vast numbers of students we see each academic year, the conversation switched focus to the specific challenges posed by teaching and learning to play drum kits in jazz education.

## Challenges of Learning to Play the Drum Kit

In discussing the 'learn while doing it' approach, the nature of the drum kit and the particular role of drummers became points of focus. The drum kit is essential to much of contemporary jazz and improvised music. Drummers are relied upon for time, support, and direction. While all instrumentalists must learn a fair amount before hitting the bandstand, the participants agreed that drummers had to contend with being more of

a critical focus while learning on the bandstand. Terri Lyne summed up this challenge:

I don't think you can go on stage and play without a certain amount of experience, but then you're right, you have to *get* the experience. If the drummer's horrible, then the band's not great. You could have a mediocre bass player or soloist, but a good drummer, and the band still sounds and feels good, for the most part. So, there's a lot of weight on the drummer for making a band sound good.

The participants then recalled the ways in which they dealt with this conundrum in their own lives. Some of their approaches are likely familiar to readers of this volume and echo those that have been documented in the literature: listening to recordings, watching more established drummers, asking questions, and transcribing parts. One approach, however, stood out.

Both participants recalled learning to think about time from listening to instrumentalists charged with phrasing, such as horn players, other front-line instrumentalists, or singers. Jack DeJohnette explained, 'I listened to the melodies. Learning the melody can actually improve your time because you have to follow the phrasing, understand where things end up'. Terri Lyne Carrington concurred, 'to this day, I listen to the horn soloists, the singers, sometimes more than I do the bass player. In fact, I don't even really want to listen to the bass player so much, at least not as the start'.

Honing in on melodic instruments or singers, as a gauge to mark time, figured into the learning processes for both participants. Terri Lyne Carrington recalled taking this approach in her earliest days, while playing with records:

When I would play with records, and even today, I would listen to the phrasing and the rhythm of the horn, so if I'm playing with somebody who's phrasing and time is impeccable, I'm playing with *that* and it makes me play different. So, it's all kinds of elements coming together. When you're playing with great records, you're playing with great people that had great *time*, and that helps you to learn what to listen for. And if you're playing along with great pianists, that comp in the right places, you know what it sounds like when somebody's comping good.

These discussions led the participants to think about other approaches to learning that helped them develop on the drum kit prior to 'learning by doing it' on bandstands.

Jack DeJohnette noted that the drum kit does not have explicit melodic or harmonic capability, which could make developing players think of the instrument as 'just about rhythm or time'. Terri Lyne Carrington repeatedly turned to the concept that practicing along with records, had to have 'playing musically, like a great singer or a great accompanist' as its ultimate

goal. DeJohnette interjected, 'if it's possible, I would encourage young drummers to also get experience on a melodic instrument, like a guitar, or vibes, or piano'.

As noted earlier, Jack DeJohnette started playing piano before taking up the drum kit. Throughout our discussions, DeJohnette repeatedly emphasized the influence playing melodies and understanding harmony had on his own development on the drum kit. Terri Lyne Carrington, concurred, recalling the importance of singing melodies in her own education. She recounted how Alan Dawson, one of her teachers and primary influences, encouraged singing while practicing:

If you don't have access to an instrument, maybe you don't have a piano, there's singing. When I studied with Alan Dawson, he made us sing while we played, sing the melodies of the standards while we played them, and that really helped because I actually learned *how* to learn them. I learned the intervals and I had to have that kind of razor-sharp understanding of pitch and intervals because I didn't want to be [chuckling] embarrassed.

At this point, I shared my own experiences studying composition along with the drum kit, inspired by my own interest but strongly encouraged by each of my primary drum kit teachers, noted drum pedagogue Sal LaRocca and iconic jazz drummer Max Roach. Mr. Roach used to say, 'don't be just a drummer. Other musicians will hold it against you for the rest of your life'. His point, as I understood it, was that development as a drummer required development as a musician in the fullest sense.

Jack DeJohnette returned to a topic from earlier in the conversation, one referenced at the start of this chapter section, the challenges posed by learning to play the drum kit on the bandstand with minimal experience:

Still, at some point, you have to *do* it and you can't play just what you practiced, you have to do it with other musicians, on the bandstand, in real-time and get that feedback, keeping time, supporting, but also encouraging or directing a bit. That's a very different experience and it's just as important to learning, but it's hard because you're in the back surrounded by drums but you're also kind of the center of everything.

Our discussions then pivoted to the drum kit's status as a backline instrument and the unique place and space of drummers within jazz performance practice.

## The Unique Place and Space of Drummers

The drum kit which, in a sense, isolates its player, enclosing the drummer in a formation of metal, wood, and reinforced hardware, is generally

considered a backline instrument. Consequently, the instrument is often placed in the back, centre or off-centre, on bandstands and stages positioning the drummer further from the rest of the ensemble. With frontline instrumentalists facing the audience, eye-contact can be limited. Both participants noted these tendencies and described the ways in which they countered them

Jack DeJohnette noted that a competent drummer can lead from wherever, and although eye-contact is essential, good drummers 'can still communicate and direct, whether leading the band or as part of the band. Where you set up is second to good communication, you know, between all the instruments, based on cues that you give on the drum kit'. Both DeJohnette and Carrington described taking pains to position themselves for optimal communication, facilitating eye contact with their ensembles, and respecting the desire of audiences to feel, as Jack put it, 'part of the group'. DeJohnette explained:

We kind of deal with that position of the drums in relation to the other musicians by setting up to have the best possible eye contact. I set up my drums almost facing the instruments, bass in the middle, if there's piano so I can see it. You know, when I play with Ravi [Coltrane] and Matt [Garrison], we kind of face each other so we could have the eye contact, and not necessarily have the drums facing the audience. I want to be comfortable, where I can have eye contact and hear, and it's also, you know, people will see, they like the players to be intimate with each other, you know, so they can see the eye contact and the *sound* contact as well. And it's not dissing the audience because I can turn to the left and look at the audience, sort of on an angle.

Jack's description of how he sets up, and the reasons for why he sets up in the described manner sparked an exchange with Terri Lyne, in which they shared how they position their drums to balance their needs as leaders, the needs of the musicians they work with, and the needs of audiences. Terri Lyne Carrington positions her drum kit in a particular manner, whether serving as leader or as a member of another leader's ensemble:

I make sure that I can see everybody I'm playing with, whether I'm the leader or not. I also make sure I'm not in the back, no matter who the leader is. When I get to a venue, whatever the stage plot is, I normally move the drums up some. So, the best position for me is when the drum throne is parallel with the bass amp and, therefore, I'm getting some sound from the bass amp, and it's not so far away. I don't want it way behind me either. And then the piano to the right of the bass, generally, and kind of at an angle where he or she would be looking at me, and making sure the bass player is not standing right in that view, and often I have guitar on the left, on the hi-hat side, and horns, kind of in front but to the left so nobody's standing directly in front of me

because we wouldn't be able to have any eye contact like if a horn player's standing right in front of the drum set. So, those things are all super important, and the closer, the better, ultimately, in a jazz setting.

Jack brought the conversation back to the ultimate goal of positioning and placement, eye contact with other musicians:

I mean, I think eye contact is crucial. It's very important, as well as the listening, you know, to be supporting and leading at the same time, simultaneously, and having an interchange or interaction with the ensemble and someone who's soloing too. In other words, you have that sort of democratic kind of, reciprocal interaction with everybody, even though somebody's soloing, the drummer can still, not dictate, but sort of direct. Ultimately, you want everyone, the musicians, the audience, to feel like they're part of something, something bigger than just the music.

Terri Lyne concurred, returning to the role of mentoring, explaining how Jack had taught her about life as much as about music or how to play drum kit. Jack agreed, recalling, 'it was funny because we didn't talk about drums all that much, right? We didn't talk about the technical aspects of the instrument. We just hung. We talked about music, about life, right'? The notion of something bigger returned. Something mentors impart beyond the particulars of the drum kit, beyond jazz drumming or technique or how to play well.

## Something Bigger than Just the Music

Terri Lyne picked up on the notion of 'something bigger', recounting discussions about musicality with Herbie Hancock, 'the one thing that the musicians that I like the most have, well it comes down to things that aren't related to music, things that make you a good musician, like compassion, sensitivity, empathy'. One something bigger was the notion of belonging, of connecting to and becoming an enduring part of a community of musicians, the lineage of jazz drummers. Carrington identified belonging as a motivation for mentoring:

I think that anybody that cares about the music has to take it upon themselves to mentor, at some point, or I don't know how you really care about the music. I think we spend a lot of our earlier years trying to get it together, trying to learn enough and don't really think of ourselves as teachers or mentors but, at some point, you want to see the music move *forward*. You want, also to, and even thinking selfishly, about your own legacy, you want to leave one that connects, like we talked about lineage earlier, the only way you have lineage is if you embrace others that are still learning how to play. Teach them as much as you can about what you know.

They'll never be you, of course, but that influence ends up being part of the lineage. That extra step of encouragement, and insight and wisdom that you pass down, can be the tipping point that makes somebody go from good to great.

Jack DeJohnette summed it up beautifully, 'we're talking about humanity, you know, teaching *that* aspect, which is ultimately what's important, as we all agree, in the music'. Jack continued, observing that he has found teaching part of his own lifelong learning. He explained, 'you know, students can mentor us too. It's a two-way street. That exchange is priceless'.

#### **Conclusions**

Mentoring has played a central role in the development of jazz musicians for some 100 plus years. The drum kit players presented in this chapter represent two leading figures firmly established in that tradition. Not surprisingly, their statements and expressions chronicled here underscore the importance of mentoring, in general, and, more specifically, in the participants' personal histories, experiences as bandleaders, and teaching practices.

Further, both acknowledged a particular set of challenges associated with mentoring drummers and with learning to play the drum kit, rooted in the instrument's size, location on bandstands, and essential role in jazz ensembles.

Finally, both participants saw mentoring other drummers and other musicians as a part of a something bigger. Mentoring served a larger mission, to help their mentees develop as human beings, and as an essential part of their life's work and contributions to a jazz lineage.

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- 19 Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the participants that appear in this chapter come from two sets of interviews, one conducted with each individual participant and another conducted with both, in simultaneous conversations. Their words appeared as they said them with some editing for clarity. Italics in quoted statements reflect natural emphasis in the participants' voices.