

Art Blakey

The beginning career of jazz music legend Art Blakey was amazing. He took piano lessons at school. When he was in the seventh grade he played music full-time and was leading a popular band. Not too long after, he started playing drums in the style of such players as Ray Bauduc, Chick Webb and Sid Catlett. He taught himself how to play.

He played with Mary Lou Williams at Kelly's Stable in 1942. Next, with Fletcher Henderson for the next two years, and he toured with. Art then went to Boston to lead a big band, then joined Billy Eckstine's band in St. Louis. Art stayed with that band from 1944-1947.

Art was considered to be among jazz music's finest musicians such as Fats Navarro, Miles Davis and Dexter Gordon. In 1947 when Eckstine's band broke up, Art started the Seventeen Messengers. He would go on to have several other groups with this same name. He then went to Africa to learn all about Islamic people for over a year. By the 1950's he performed with Clifford Brown, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and Horace Silver.

After they performed together many times, he started another group with Horace which included Kenny Dorham, Hank Mobley with the name Jazz Messengers. Horace left a year later. He was the known leader of the band. The Jazz Messengers played hard-bop jazz music. The roots of which were blues music. Hard bop is a mixture of bebop with gospel and soul music. An example of this is his album Moanin' recorded on Blue Note Records in 1958. They fought hard to keep black people interested in jazz, when the ballroom jazz music disappeared. Many young musicians during the years have been influenced by this style. Jazz musicians such as Keith Jarrett, JoAnne Brackcen, Woody Shaw , Donald Byrd, Delfeayo, Branford and Wynton Marsalis.

In 1971 to 1972, Art world toured with the biggest names in jazz music such as Kai Winding, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk. He also performed a lot at the Newport Jazz Festival. The best performance was when he was in a battling performance with Buddy Rich, Max Roach and Elvin Jones in 1974. Art continued to tour nonstop with help from Donald Harrison and Terence Blanchard, along with younger musicians such as Benny Green.

Art never thought of his music as similar to African style, although he did use some of their techniques such as using his elbow on the tom-tom to alter pitch. His trademark, the forced closing of the hi-hat on each second and fourth beat was created in 1950-1951, which many jazz musicians copied.

A major jazz musician and innovative in his drum style, he was unique and performed with power. The way he played was loud and aggressive. The jazz critics basically ignored what he did in the 1960's. American audiences left him behind in the 1970's when rock music took over the scene.

He always made time for young jazz musicians, listening to them, and helping them with their jazz music careers.

About the Author

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