

Drummers Of The Swing Jazz Era

Contributed by Webmaster

By Victor Eband

Rock and roll artists have a tendency to think that they invented the concept of rebellion. That before their genre came along, everything was goody-two-shoes and Miss Manners. What they forget is that the music industry has always been a place of innovation a source of social uproar. Even the waltz, when it was first introduced, was considered an outrage at first because of how close couples had to get to dance to it! Yes, rock and roll artists are just following in the industry's grand tradition of scandal, a tradition that at no time has been more prevalent than in the era of swing jazz, or swing music. In its day, swing music was the ultimate revolution, a violent break from the Charleston of the previous decade. Swing music was characterized by a strong rhythmic drive and, and the bands that played it were anchored by equally strong rhythmic sections. Such sections tended to be led by drummers whose personalities were as big as their music, and a number of the jazz drummers of swing remain legends even today.

Sonny Greer (1895-1982) is

best known for his work with the legendary Duke Ellington. A native of New Jersey, he eventually became Ellington's first drummer in 1919 at the age of 24. Greer was not only a drummer; he also designed the instruments with the Leedy Drum Company. This job enabled him to put together a drum kit worth over \$3000, the equivalent of nearly \$36,000 today. This gentleman did his part to live up to the image of jazz music as a genre of debauchery. He was a heavy drinker and a pool-hall hustler and unfortunately, these qualities eventually led to a permanent estrangement between him and Ellington. He continued to work as a freelance drummer and briefly led his own band, but Greer's association with Ellington marked the pinnacle of his success.

Gene Krupa (1909-1973) was known for his highly energetic and flamboyant style of drumming. He was a member of a number of bands, although the biggest name he ever played with was undoubtedly Benny Goodman. Krupa's drumming is featured in the flagship of swing music, Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing." His association with this song made him an immediate national celebrity. Although he, like Greer, had a falling out with his band leader and left the group as a result, his career did not falter. In spite of the occasional stint in jail due to possession of marijuana, Krupa continued to perform into the early 1970s.

William Henry Webb, aka Chick Webb (c.1905-1939) was a precocious child who saved up enough money from his paper route to purchase a drum set; he first played professionally at the age of 11. In addition to being a drummer, Webb was the long-time leader of his own band, which was the house band at the famous Savoy Ballroom. The Savoy often hosted "Battle of the Bands" contests, in which Webb's band was pitted against the likes of the Benny Goodman and Count Basie Orchestras. The biggest name associated with Webb is Ella Fitzgerald, who he began to feature as a vocalist in 1935 when the singer was 18. After Webb's early death (due to complications from a childhood bout of tuberculosis), Fitzgerald continued to lead his band for four years before leaving to focus on her solo career.

Bernard "Buddy" Rich (1917-1987) was billed as "the world's greatest drummer" and was known for his power, speed, and experimentation with technique. He, like Webb, was drawn to drumming at an early age, and when he was 18 months old, he made his musical debut in vaudeville. He never received any formal drum education, and may have had more raw talent than any other drummer of his generation. During his career, he was associated with a number of famous names, including Tommy Dorsey, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong.

Victor Eband is an expert consultant for guitars, drums, keyboards, sheet music, guitar tab, and home theater audio. You can find the best marketplace at these sites for drums, jazz, swing, sheet music, guitar tabs, and home theater audio.