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# Drummin' Men: The Heartbeat Of Jazz, The Swing Years



## Synopsis

In the 1930s swing music was everywhere--on radio, recordings, and in the great ballrooms, hotels, theatres, and clubs. Perhaps at no other time were drummers more central to the sound and spirit of jazz. Benny Goodman showcased Gene Krupa. Jimmy Dorsey featured Ray McKinley. Artie Shaw helped make Buddy Rich a star while Count Basie riffed with the innovative Jo Jones. Drummers were at the core of this music; as Jo Jones said, "The drummer is the key--the heartbeat of jazz." An oral history told by the drummers, other musicians, and industry figures, *Drummin' Men* is also Burt Korall's memoir of more than fifty years in jazz. Personal and moving, the book is a celebration of the music of the time and the men who made it. Meet Chick Webb, small, fragile-looking, a hunchback from childhood, whose explosive drumming style thrilled and amazed; Gene Krupa, the great showman and pacemaker; Ray McKinley, whose rhythmic charm, light touch, and musical approach provided a great example for countless others, and the many more that populate this story. Based on interviews with a collection of the most important jazzmen, *Drummin' Men* offers an inside view of the swing years that cannot be found anywhere else.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book has served me well as a research tool. I have cited it more than a few times on my page *Music for Drummers*, and have discovered facts about my own idols and influences that I have not found elsewhere. Examples: Ray Bauduc assisted in the design of the venerable Speed King bass drum pedal, as well as assisted Zildjian in the design of the swish cymbal. As for biographies, I have

found every one to be devoid of hyperbole or questionable assertions in the swing edition, and am pleased by the drummers who were included. By the way, Bauduc cited above was a swing drummer (this according to Louis Bellson in Legends of Jazz Drumming), although he is mainly remembered as a "Dixieland" drummer. Personally, I hold this book in high regard and strongly recommend it as a source for research. As for the companion book that covers the bebop years I cannot vouch for that one because I do not own it.

This is an outstanding account of the Big Band Era from the standpoint of the individuals who literally provided the beat. They're all here in the story of the best of the big band drummers: Chick Webb, Buddy Rich, Gene Krupa, Davey Tough, Ray McKinley, Big Sid Catlett, and more. This was clearly a labor of love for author Burt Korrall, who is an amateur drummer himself. Following his references to recorded material the reader can become absorbed in the topic in a way he or she never thought possible. The fact is, this book is well written and makes great reading for anyone interested in the Big Band Era or swing/jazz drumming.

I am a drummer and I loved reading "Drummin' Men The Heartbeats of Jazz...the swing years. I've always admired the drummers of this era and wondered about some of their secrets. I learned how Gene Krupa got his cool rimshot sounds and why Burt Korall knows of what he writes. I couldn't put this book down. He confirmed some of my own opinions and let me feel what it was like to be in the Savoy Ballroom for a drum battle between Chick Webb and Gene Krupa. If you drum, read this book. If you like music, read this book.

Fascinating history of some of the greats of the early big band era. Extensive interviews with the drummers and those who heard them. Pro tip: You'll be going through a chapter and the author will mention a recording that demonstrates some particular aspect of the drummer's skills. When they're not available here on, I've found a lot of the more obscure recordings on YouTube. Fortunately, Korall is very specific about recording dates and labels. (Hint to the publisher: Publish this along with CDs of referenced recordings!) The experience is a lot more immersive with the recordings and the book side-by-side - as good as his descriptions are, it's no substitute for hearing a recording, since "live" is no longer an option. I just wish recording techniques in the 20's and 30's were better!

This book really helped to understand the early jazz scene as well as many great musician's perspective. The author does a good job of putting the reader back into the swing period with its big

bands.

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