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The Artistic Process
Ed Shaughnessy Speaks Out
Survey of Synthesizers & Drum Machines

Ed Shaughnessy

An energy force reflects on his life and music

By Dave Black

Ed Shaughnessy has been called "one of today's greatest drummers." He is best known for his long-time position with Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show." He has performed with every major symphony in the United States, as well as the big bands of Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Oliver Nelson and many others. In addition, he has recorded with such artists as Quincy Jones, George Benson, Jimmy Smith, Wes Montgomery and Gary Burton.

Being very dedicated to music education, he has been on the faculty of New York University and Cal. State University, Northridge, and is one of the most in-demand drumset clinicians in international music education circles. He is the respected author of two books, **New Time Signatures in Jazz Drumming** and **Big Band Drummers' Reading Guide**.

Q: How did you get the position on the Tonight Show?

ES: They asked me to join the show in New York in 1963 while it was still in its first year. At the time I turned it down, because I was extremely busy as a free-lance player and had a very good situation playing jazz in clubs, making a lot of jazz albums, and doing enough commercial albums to make a good living. However, I thought the band was so sensational with players such as Clark Terry and Doc Severinsen, that I thought the gig would be fun. They asked me to try it for a couple of weeks to see if I liked it and I've been here ever since. I liked it that much.

Q: Has the personnel of the Tonight Show changed much since it moved to Los Angeles?

ES: No, not really. Doc is a very loyal person and the band is basically the same one that started here in L.A. 12 years ago. I would say it's because Doc

is the fine type of guy he is that the band has remained consistent.

Q: When doing live TV such as the Tonight Show are there certain things of which a drummer needs to be more conscious?

ES: Absolutely. In playing for live TV you have to really be exceptionally alert because everything moves very fast in television. I would say it's quicker in television than in any other field in which I have worked. Recording is a vacation by comparison because you do things so many times. As with anything else, if you have something that's fairly difficult, you've got a lot of shots at it when you record. In television you don't. I would say on the average that we play a tune maybe twice, and the third time is on the show while the tape is on. So generally speaking, you're not going to have more than about two cracks at it before the actual performance. I'm certainly not demeaning



Photo by Dorsey Hudson

Ed Shaughnessy thrilled NAJE convention goes in Anaheim last year with the Tonight Show Orchestra. Fellow bandsman "Snooky" Young is seen in the background.

chairs.

Obviously, the lead player in the section must have several qualities including technique, musical understanding, consistency of execution, leadership character, respect for others, and sensitivity to the ensemble. It is the section leader's job to interpret the music and pass on ideas to the other section members. The section leader must also work closely with the leaders of the other sections to produce a sensitive, cohesive ensemble sound.

Next to the section leader in importance for making a good saxophone section sound, is the baritone voice. This chair fulfills so many functions within the jazz ensemble, it is impossible to overemphasize the role of the baritone player. Often, the baritone voice is written with great independence in the ensemble and, for this reason alone, the baritone player should be a strong, assertive player, capable of independence, but aware of all that is happening aurally. Also, the baritone player often doubles the lead player an octave lower so that the baritone player's close attention to the lead's interpretation can have a decisive effect on the ensemble sound of the section. Another important duty for the baritone player is providing a good bass pitch foundation, since without this, the upper voices will be insecure.

The second alto player can also be pivotal in the overall sound of the section. Since this is closest to the section leader in voice, complete accord between these two voices will set the style and make it easier for the other section members to hear. In addition, the second alto player often performs the function of section leader in passages where the first also is resting or soloing.

The first tenor, usually assigned a role as soloist, must also fulfill a function in the saxophone section. Usually, first tenor parts are written in the upper register where the tone color of the tenor saxophone has a great effect upon the general sound of the section. A strong, focused, but full sound in this voice is a must. In addition, the sense of ensemble must be strongly imbued,



Hiroshi Isaka Photo

Toshiko-Tabakin 1979 sax section included Lew Tabakin, Gary Foster, Dick Spencer, Tom Peterson, Bill Byrne.

since the tenor sax voice is usually an inner voice, and it takes a great deal of sensitivity and control to match note for note volume, articulation, and manner of the lead player.

This sensitivity to ensemble sound is perhaps most important in the lower tenor voice, since it is seldom independent, but generally plays an important blending, reinforcing role. This tenor voice is often written in a low tessitura, and demands great control and discipline on the part of the player. The low tenor voice can make or break any saxophone section, but seldom receives melodic attention. For this reason it takes a player of amenable disposition and attitude to fulfill the role adequately. This should be taken into consideration when selecting players.

DOUBLING

Much of the recent literature for jazz ensembles contains parts for additional instruments of the woodwind family, usually written in one or more of the saxophone parts. While there are some similarities in playing the saxophone and other woodwinds, these other instruments require much study and practice. This presents a dilemma. On one hand, it is to the player's advantage to be capable of playing more than one

instrument; on the other, there may be players who would like to perform in jazz ensemble but do not play the saxophone. The decision might hinge on the level of proficiency of any one player on any one instrument. If the saxophone player can convincingly play the woodwind part fine, but otherwise, that saxophone player might benefit more from close exposure to playing of the instrument by another player. However, doubling skills should certainly be encouraged.

IMPROVISING

The saxophone is ideally suited for improvising. In ease of fingering, range of expression, and vocal quality, the saxophone is unsurpassed. This is good cause for encouraging all students of jazz ensembles to study improvising. For these reasons, saxophonists are often expected to improvise. Also for these reasons, an unfortunate number of saxophonists, especially inexperienced players, mistake rapid technical displays for cogent, exciting solos. There are several excellent improvising methods available for all levels of players. Most effectively, improvising should be explored by group effort. Voicing exercises, the playing of tunes by ear, and

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the requisites of recording; I'm just saying that television is probably the fastest medium of all. You've got to make it happen quickly and that goes not just for the music, which is relatively easy after you've done it a long time, but also getting the sound that you need for that particular tune, learning how to "flatten" the drums quickly if it's real funky, and how to open them up when it's a big band Basie sound with a lot of drum breaks.

Q: Briefly, what is a typical day like for you at the Tonight Show?

ES: We arrive at the studio about 3 o'clock and rehearsal usually starts at about 3:15 p.m. Doc isn't allowed a whole lot of time. He's supposed to get everything together within about 45 minutes to an hour and he does that very well. If we have a light day, aside from rehearsing whatever acts we have to play, we might play some new charts. Doc is very big on bringing in new music for the band. He thinks it helps to keep the band fresh, and we all agree. So we might have a combination of rehearsing the acts, and maybe running 2 or 3 charts down that Doc has brought in. So that's a typical day, with a break anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour, while they let the audience in. The show technically tapes from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., then I'm done. So I'm really only there for about 3½ hours a day.

Q: Over the years you've had the opportunity on the Tonight Show to have worked with many of our greatest entertainers. Is there anyone that you've always wanted to work with, but haven't gotten a chance to yet?

ES: Well, I haven't played for Frank Sinatra and I would enjoy that. I'm a big admirer of his. He's got a wonderful drummer by the name of Irv Cottler who does a great job for him. I've been lucky enough in all aspects of my work to have played with most of the people that I would like to play with. I'm sure there are some that I haven't worked with, but right now I can't really recall any.

Q: Is there any entertainer that

you've worked with over the years who made you nervous?

ES: I remember having to sub for Jimi Hendrix' drummer when he was sick, and I thought that Jimi Hendrix was really a pioneer in his type of playing. I was a little concerned about that because I knew that his drummer, Mitch, certainly played a style far different from mine, but I kind of knew what he did, so I think I did a reasonable job. I didn't play in the band — I had to go over on another set of drums and play. Jimi was great. It was highly specialized and a different type of playing for me. I think the fact that I knew what it was about helped me to do a reasonable job. Nobody expects that you're going to get up and play exactly like Harvey Mason, Steve Gadd, Jeff Porcaro or anybody else who might have made that particular record. The point, aside from some of the things I mentioned about being fast and quick and getting things done, is the ability to assimilate what you play into that particular chart, which often might be a record chart. So I do a lot of listening. I certainly can't hear everything, but I do a lot of what I call "defensive" listening like the top 40 and pop stuff because it helps enormously when somebody comes in with something like that. There's no better term I could use. On the Tonight Show we play a lot of our own roaring stuff. On those tunes that's Ed Shaughnessy playing that stuff. When people come in with a fairly preconceived idea of what they would like, especially because it has been a recorded arrangement, the idea for you is to try to get that going for the entertainer. You're there to really please them — you're not there to sell you and your style. That's not the time for that. So in a sense, I think a certain amount of humility is necessary to realize that you're just a cog in a wheel to make that particular circumstance happen for the artist. That's important for young readers to remember.

Q: Is there ever a time before taping the Tonight Show when you feel you don't have enough

rehearsal time for a particular act?

ES: No, I wouldn't say so. If there's a lot of doubt because the artist lacks proper music or the artist is coming in without music — which occasionally happens and it's a "make-me-an-arrangement-over-night," we do the best we can to find out as much as we can, at least about specifics. "You want a different rhythm on the bridge? Fine!" I'm not adverse to taking some blank manuscript paper, which I keep handy, to write out a sketch part. I've also got a good memory. Still, I don't trust that there might not be a couple of punches or a couple of accents that are critical and I want to make sure I have a reminder on the paper. Or in the case of a poorly written drum part, I sometimes get the first trumpet part and put in a lot of punches and accents that really should have been there already.

Q: Are there many performers who bring their own drummers?

ES: You could say that about 50% do. There's no problem because those are the people who work on the road with those entertainers all the time. It's fun for me, because I get a chance to meet and talk with a lot of drummers.

Q: When Buddy Rich is on the show, and you two do a feature together, is anything worked out or rehearsed, or is it all spontaneous?

ES: It's all spontaneous. We might say we'll end up playing something together, like I might say to him, "I'll go into the single stroke, and you join me. How does that sound for an ending?" And he'll say, "great." That's about the limit of it. The rest of it is completely spontaneous.

Q: Is Johnny Carson a good drummer?

ES: I'd say he's a very good amateur drummer, but he plays strictly at home. He really likes to play at home and put on his big earphones. He says it's good relaxation therapy.

Q: Could he actually go out and play a club date?

ES: Yeah, I think he could.

Q: Outside of the Tonight Show, what else are you involved with?



Steve Houghton (left) (very successful L.A. drummer) on the occasion of winning the Ed Shaughnessy scholarship at N. Texas State a few years ago.

7 a.m. tennis before morning clinic at Jazz Festival.



ES: I don't do a lot of record dates because most of them conflict with the Tonight Show, and as a result, a lot of contractors don't call me anymore. I can't be away from the Tonight Show very often; I try to save my leave time, which Doc is very generous about, for my clinics and my road work. I would say that most of my time outside the Tonight Show is spent traveling and doing clinics.

Q: What about your big band?

ES: For the last year I've had the band on ice because I got too busy traveling, and you know, you can't do everything at once. Plus I have a family that I like to spend time with at home. It's kind of the same thing that Louie Bellson does when he gets too busy with other projects. We were just talking about this last week when he came down to the Tonight Show to pay a visit. If he gets busy with other projects such as going around the country for Remo Inc., he doesn't get to play with his band as much. As for me, I hope to get the band cooking again in the fall.

Q: As an educator and clinician, do you think it is important for teachers to be honest with their students as to their potential for making it in the music business?

ES: I think they should be very honest, but not to the point of being discouraging. I found this to be true through trial and error as a young teacher of 24 or 25 in New York. I always liked teaching, and even taught when I was doing the Tonight Show there. I wasn't really doing it because I had to pay the rent — I had a good job, and I was doing a lot of other work. I found that sometimes drummers even with a fairly low potential, who are hard, dedicated workers could achieve enough ability to become good show drummers etc., even though they might not have ever been a really outstanding rock drummer in a hot rock band, or jazz drummer in a combo or big band. I don't mean they weren't good at that — they were extremely good. It's just that they might not have had that little extra level of creativity to put them at the top. But I tried to think, "can I help that particular individual if he's dedicated and sincere about earning a living at his craft?" So I would say "yes" you want to be honest, but not to the point of discouraging that individual.

There were a few students of mine that I thought might be wasting their time, but they fooled me. They came

along quite well and became pretty good at some facet of the music business. It's not what you would call top level drumming, but good professional drumming. Even if it was just a night club situation, they were working.

Q: Do you think that just being a good player is a guarantee for making it?

ES: I absolutely do not. I think the competition today is greater than it was 25 or 30 years ago. People are being turned out of music institutions at a rate far beyond that of 20 years ago. They're better trained, I believe, but I don't think that makes them more talented. It's only the people that have that extra amount of talent, training and luck that will rise to the top. I don't honestly believe that just because a person is talented and is well trained, that everything's going to fall into place. I simply think that there are too many people out there for the amount of work available. I've come across some extremely superior players who are in some small towns that you've never heard of, and believe me they're as good or better than some guys that are making it. They really are!

Q: Should students with an affinity for music consider choosing other aspects of the business such as music marketing or music education, instead of performing?

ES: Well, I don't want to make it sound like you should be scared and always do that. I think if a person could manage to prepare himself for some adjunct of the business, such as music marketing, music copying, or music education, it would be a good background in case a performing career were to fall through. This way he's not forced into pursuing a career unrelated to music.

Q: Do you think that young people growing up in the bigger cities such as Los Angeles, Dallas, New York and Chicago have a better chance of making it, than those players growing up in the smaller cities and towns?

ES: Well, I have two ways of looking at it. I think, yes, they do in one way because there's so much more music and work happening, but the negative side is that there are so many other people. If you've ever looked at the union paper and seen the number of new drummers coming in every month, it's staggering. Sometimes I've seen

players come into town who are good players and they are quite good. But because they never happened to get connected to the right people to get them going, they went back home. Sometimes, they even realized that they had more going for them at home where they were the "big fish in the small pond." I've known some very good players who tried making it here in town and gave up, but still were not unhappy that they tried. I firmly believe in giving it a shot.

Q: Should parents encourage their musically inclined children to go into music with the business being as it is?

ES: Well, I've had boys of my own and had they wanted to go into a field such as music, I would have tried to support them. It's hard to say whether parents should encourage their children. I think it depends on the individual because it's often only the person with the extra amount of drive who's going to make it. That drive has to come from within. If it comes from the parents it's not the right kind of drive.

Q: Does "being at the right place at the right time," and "who you know" play a more important role in that person's chances for success, moreso than just the talent that he/she might have?

ES: I can't say that it plays a more important role, but it plays a big role. If a person happens to meet some of the right people, and he isn't a good player, I doubt if that is going to lead him very far. Occasionally you'll see somebody who is what we call a "good politician." He knows how to do the right kind of talking or buy the right kind of gift in order to get in. That person occasionally comes along and fits in, but they're not the majority.

A fine player such as Steve Schaeffer, who I don't claim as a student, but who did study with me in New York for awhile, is a good example. Steve is a very talented and more than a capable player who I thought would do well. Here was somebody who I felt was definitely headed towards a successful career. Obviously, I was right!

Q: Do you think young drummers today are original in what they're trying to do, or do you think they're trying to imitate older, more established players?

ES: I don't think that there are a ton

of original players out there today. I find that younger players are trying to imitate the newer names in the business who have established themselves over the last 5 or 10 years. These players include the likes of Steve Gadd, Harvey Mason and David Garibaldi. In the more straight ahead jazz field I hear a very strong Tony Williams & Jack DeJohnette influence in some of the younger players, but not in the rock players — they seem to go more toward the Steve Gadd approach.

Q: What do you think of the level of players today as opposed to when you were growing up?

ES: I think the level of players is much the same, in that there are some highly talented players, and a great many players who are good players, but who are not terribly individual. The one criticism that I have and I recently discussed this with Louie Bellson, who agreed, is that I find less players among all the younger players who know how to get a really good sound out of the drum. Don't get me wrong, there were a lot of players back then who played into the drum, but I find a preponderance today. Many of them are misled into thinking that they're going to get a flat or funky sound by playing into the drum, and that's fine if that's what you want to do at a particular time, but you should have the technique and the ability to draw a full sound out of the drum when you need to. So I would say that this would be my biggest complaint about younger drummers.

Q: What did you get while growing up that young players aren't getting today?

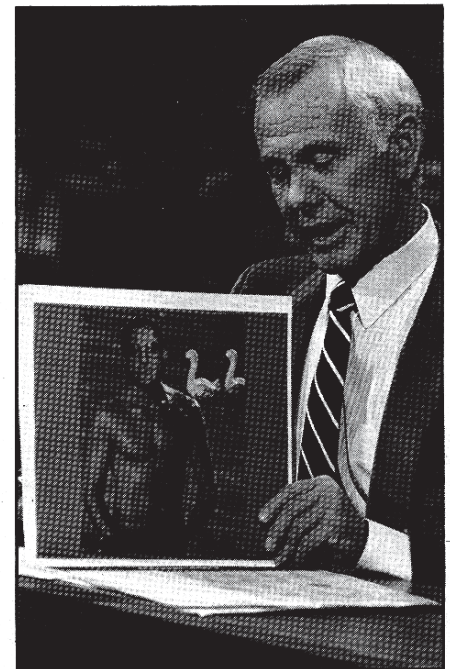
ES: I had the opportunity while living in New York to hear a lot of great individual artists whose sounds on the drumset were as completely unique as the difference between Dizzy Gillespie and Clark Terry on trumpet. I don't think that players today are exposed to quite as many drummers who have as much of a highly individual style, and that I think, was an advantage in my time. This is not by any means to say that I think all drummers today sound alike, they don't. Take for instance the difference between Steve Gadd, Bill Bruford and Terry Bozzio. You're talking about three highly individual artists. I just don't think a lot of drummers get a chance to be exposed to as many different players. They might if they could get to all the concerts

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Solo spot on "Tonight Show" 1985.

Here's a 1985 bit where Johnny Carson showed a few band members with "The Perfect Body."



ED SHAUGHNESSY

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play for three or four hours. I'm almost making an economic difference, but that's a hell of a big difference. Who can afford to go to every concert of every band? So that I think was the advantage in my time.

Q: Who are some of your favorite young drummers?

ES: I'm a great fan of Steve Gadd because I admire his flexibility. I also think that Steve Schaeffer who is probably underrated outside of L.A., is a great young drummer. I like Harvey Mason a lot. I have had the opportunity to hear Harvey live on more than one occasion, and feel that he's an extremely creative drummer. I also like Bill Bruford because he tries to take different directions and I enjoy that.

Q: With the merging of the electronic and music industries becoming so apparent, do you feel that educational institutions should make their students aware of this new technology?

ES: Yes, I think that students should have a real working knowledge of all the electronic drums, drum machines, synthesizers and all the different ranges of sounds and things that are available to them. I feel that by not teaching courses on electronics, music institutions would not be preparing their students for what's out in the real world. So, I not only think it's a good idea, I



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think it's mandatory.

Q: Where do you see the music business heading within the next ten years?

ES: I find this a hard question to answer. Technology is almost like a stone rolling down a hill. I don't mean it's out of control, but more or less "snowballing." I think we're going to see so much more with the technology, in addition to the refinements that will be made on existing drum machines and synthesizers. I think it's extremely important for younger and older players to stay as current as they can with what's happening. But I do find it hard

to make a prediction. The only constant factors are love and dedication to one's craft — this will never change.

Percussionist/composer Dave Black attended California State University, Northridge where he studied with Joel Leach and Louie Bellson. He has traveled to many parts of the world with a variety of entertainers and shows, backing up such artists as Alan King, Robert Merrill and June Allyson. As a published composer/arranger he has written for the bands of Louie Bellson, Bill Watrous, Bobby Shew, Ed Shaughnessy and the C.S.U., Northridge Jazz Ensemble. He is co-author along with Louie and Henry Bellson, of *Contemporary Brush Techniques* (Alfred Publishing Company, 1985) and has written articles, book & concert reviews for such magazines as *The Instrumentalist*, *Modern Drummer*, *Modern Percussionist*, *Grammy Pulse*, *Jazz Educators Journal*, *Music Connection* and others.

2. "There is perhaps no better way of measuring the natural endowment of a soul than by its ability to transmit dissatisfaction into a creative impulse. The genuine artist is as much a dissatisfied person as the revolutionary, yet how diametrically opposed are the products each distills from his dissatisfaction." From "The Passionate State of Mind" by Eric Hoffer, Harper and Row, 1955, pg. 14.
3. "The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in being united together, and to set up in place of the existing reign of force that kingdom of God, i.e., of love, which we all recognize to be the highest aim of human life." From "What is Art" by Tolstoy.
4. "The count's (DeMorphy) teachings, as I have indicated, were by no means confined to musical subjects. He undertook to teach me everything he could about life and the world in which I lived — language and literature; art and geography; philosophy and mathematics; the history of music, yes, but also the history of man. The count contended that in order to be a fully developed artist, one had to have a full understanding of life. He regarded art and life as intimately inter-related. They cannot be separated, he would say." From "Joys and Sorrows" by Pablo Casals, Simon and Schuster, 1974, pg. 60.
5. "Art no doubt is most elevating, but at the same time it contains form; poetry has words, names, suggestive of form; it is only music which has power, beauty, charm and at the same time can raise the soul beyond form." From "Music" by Sufi Inayat Khan, Sufi Publishing Co., England and Samuel Weiser, Inc., USA, 1977, pg. 3-4.
6. "The symbols only dreamed about by most human beings are expressed in graphic form by the artists. But in our appreciation of the created work — let us say a Mozart quintet — we also are performing a creative art . . . something unique is born in us. That is why appreciation of the music or painting or other works of the creative person is also a creative act on our part." From "The Courage to Create" by Rollo May, W. W. Norton and Co., 1976, pg. 15-16.
7. The ancient Chinese list eight qualities which should be present in a tone: happi-

- ness, sweetness, elegance, subtlety, sadness, softness, resonance and strength.
8. A discussion of the harmonic "grafting" from classical to jazz is included in another section of the book. Examples of instrumental grafting in jazz are the saxophone type of lines which trumpeter Woody Shaw uses in his improvisations; and also guitarist John Scofield.
9. One of the great examples of this "neo-classic" influence in jazz is how tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp incorporated characteristics of tone and phrasing from the older school of Bechet into the avant-garde context in the 1960's.
10. This is not meant to denigrate the achievements of myself or these musicians; but only to point out what I consider a valid principle in researching the past.
11. An excellent book on this subject is "The Seasons of a Man's Life" by Daniel J. Levinson, Alfred A. Knopf, 1978; pgs. 4-7 give an overview.
12. Some titles from the first stage were "Troubled Peace," "Forgotten Fantasy," "Got to Work." From the societal stage, "Hiroshima Memorial," "Look What We Do To Ourselves," "The Power of the Ages."
13. "And the true creator may be recognized by his ability always to find about him in the commonest and humblest thing, items worthy of note. He does not have to put forth in search of discoveries: they are always within his reach. He will have only to cast a glance about him. Familiar things, things that are everywhere attract his attention . . ." From "Poetics of Music," by Igor Stravinsky, Harvard University Press, 1982, pg. 54.
14. "Creative people, as I see them, are distinguished by the fact that they can live with anxiety, even though a high price may be paid in terms of insecurity, sensitivity.

David Liebman, soprano, tenor saxophones, and flute has worked and recorded with Elvin Jones and Miles Davis among others. He has had his own groups, including his present quartet, "Quest II" with recordings on Storyville Records. This article is excerpted from a future book, "Quest — A Portrait of a Jazz Artist," to be published by Advance Music of Rottenburg, Germany.