

Joe Morello

Joe was one of my big three influences as a kid in the early 60s. I loved Max Roach and Art Blakey, but Joe had such a beautiful technique, tremendous dynamic control and this odd-meter thing happening. I was a young teenager when 'Time Out' first appeared, and couldn't believe someone could solo in 5/4! He also was the first to develop and extend the idea of modulating metrically within songs, so he and Brubeck would sometimes be in different meters. We've come a long way since those groundbreaking days. And 'Take 5' was a hit which you could hear on the radio all the time, so we lived in happy days.

Then I spent a lot of time with Joe's 'Master Studies' book to get a better technique, but never got close to the master. I knew the follow-up album 'Time Further Out' better, and loved the sound of his drums on 'Far More Drums'. I even did a tribute to Joe thirty years on my album "If Summer Had Its Ghosts" (Summerfold BBSF 002CD) in which I revisited the 'Far More Drums' motif on the track 'Some Other Time'. And his early influence in the time-signature area came through into progressive rock through the filter of people like me, after Joe had paved the way.

Born of his brilliant stick control, Joe's dynamic control was also legendary. Playing in a minimally amplified environment with minimal monitoring, it is easy to drown out the pianist or bassist, or play too loudly to hear him. But if you listen to Joe live at Carnegie Hall, with minimal micing, he allows the piano and bass plenty of audio room while nevertheless being able to explode when he wants to. That has a lot to do with drum tuning – and note the hefty Ludwig bass drum with front head on and very little dampening.

The 1959 'Time Out' album itself has little support from the label, who were reluctant to release it, in part - I imagine - because of these 'weird' new time-signatures and the all-original compositions. It subsequently went platinum. If had had a 10 Euro every time the record company got it so wrong, I'd be a rich man. It also got it lousy reviews too, so no change there, then!

I never met Joe - it would be a privilege to do so - but I feel I've known him all my life.