

Ari Hoenig for Italian jazz magazine “Plug n’ Play”

How old were you when you started playing drums? Why specifically drums and do you also play other instruments?

- I started playing drums at age 12. Before that I had violin lessons at age 3 and piano lessons at age 6. My parents are both classical musicians so those instruments were pretty standard. When the pandemic hit I had some extra time and I practiced piano everyday. I learned to play my own songs as well as jazz standards. Now I play piano in trio and we have a weekly gig at a local bar.

Your drumming is very melodic, when did you start working in this direction?

- My teacher at the University of North Texas, Ed Soph, suggested I play along to some bird heads to really internalize the phrasing of what he was doing. I started with the song Confirmation. Before long I realized I could get the contour of the melody on the drums by playing lower and higher sounds. This later turned into actual pitches. I’ve been doing this since the summer of 1993 and I recorded my first 2 records which are solo drums called “Time Travels” and “A Life of a Day” (from 1997-2000).

Your music is full of concepts like metric modulations and polyrhythms. When and how did you develop these concepts?

- I’ve always loved rhythm. In Philly I remember listening to live bands go into long rhythmic phrases and then come out together releasing the tension. It was like an inside joke or a secret language. I wanted to be a part of it and challenge those around me with some new vocabulary as well. I later developed the method “Rhythm Training”, available on the website mymasterclass.com. I use this method to teach my students to develop their timing and hear longer rhythmic phrases. It’s very much based on the way I practiced these concepts myself.

Who were some of your greatest influences early on in your career?

- I recently made a post to Patreon about all my influences. It includes drumming influences of course but also compositional influences and teachers who most influenced me. I’d prefer not to leave anyone out of this question so I’ll provide a link so you can see them all here. <https://youtu.be/yYK1mICsLHA>. There is also a PDF provided on the original Patreon post. It’s worth noting that I go into a lot more detail in the video series ‘Lockdown Tracks’ where I talk about how each drummer influences me. This is exclusively for my Patreon members

Please talk about your approach to composing.

- Well I never studied composition so feel like I’m self taught in that area although I have been composing since I was able to sing. I recommend starting with one thing. I most frequently use a harmonic progression, a rhythmic idea, a bass line or a melody. That’s also the order of what I start with from most to least often. Compositionally I’m most influenced by John Williams, Keith Jarrett, 80s TV show themes and video game music.

What do you think about the contemporary jazz scene? Which are the artists you follow the most?

- I love it! I think the music continues to progress. I prefer to remain focused on developing my own music rather than closely follow other artists in detail but I have been really digging some of the newer works of artists I have collaborated with such as Nitai Hershkovits, Tigran Hamasyan, Jean Michel Pile, Shai Maestro, Orlando le Fleming, Gilad Hekselman, Kenny Werner, Jacques Swartz Bart, Ben Tiberio, Gael Horellou etc...

You are a very versatile drummer, you move from more delicate and refined atmospheres to rougher tracks. I think for example of your collaboration with Wayne Krantz. What is your musical background?

- Haha. Well yes I'm glad you noticed. I have always believed strongly in creating contrast in the music. Of course I am influenced by and have studied a variety of music from Classical greats such as Mozart and Beethoven to punk and heavy metal like Bad Brains and Meshugah. Having a variety of influences is crucial but not enough. You also have to actively think about creating and maintaining interest of the listener. I do this most often with contrast. Volume, density and sound are some examples of contrast.

Here is a list of some more that I compiled for a Patreon video where I demonstrate these.

Things to use with contrast:

Dynamics
Note length
Note attack
Tempo
Density

Sound quality/timbre:

Pitch/Drum tuning
Emotional contrast

Phrase length
Intensity
Touch
Muffling

Utensils (brushes, hands, mallets, etc...)

Playing motivically

Adding/Subtracting voices

Visual contrasts:
Looking at the audience vs. not looking at the audience
Sitting vs. standing
Removing/adding item of clothing.

Today, music is listened to digitally, selling records is increasingly difficult. How do you see the profession of the musician in the near future?

- True, these have been trying times for musicians. It's hard to really see where this is going now but I'm just going to focus on creating art until I can't anymore.

Here's a little historical overview and true story of how I adjusted to these times and finally ended up as a clothing designer.

2000-2012 my primary income was from playing concerts; selling records and playing as a sideman on other peoples records but changes were on the horizon.

Enter 2012 - The downfall of the record industry. Music consumption has gradually moved to digital streaming platforms and the overall value of recorded music and music videos has been decimated.

Me: "No problem, I will adjust. At least I can still do live concerts, tours and teaching". 😊

Enter: 2020 - Covid:

Me: 😬 Oh well I guess I can't do tours or live indoor shows anymore. I will have to adjust. At least I can still teach lessons and give remote masterclasses. 😊

Enter 2021-Hurricane Ida:

Basement flooded, drums and piano damaged, amps destroyed bass damaged: welcome arrival of black mold etc. No more studio. 😞 "Will have to adjust. But hmm 🤔 how can I adjust? What do I have left??"

Me: 💡 "I know!!

I'll create and design a line of clothing of course!!"



Please check out my shirts, hats, I phone case and underwear here!

<https://www.arihoenig.com/store>

What are your plans for the future?

- Develop my Patreon even more and add to the 140 video tutorials that are already there. Keep composing and practicing piano. I would like to make a record on piano someday, maybe even with vocals.

I have just released a big band record with 7 of my songs ([Ari's Funhouse](#)) and a trio record ([Golden Treasures](#)). Touring with these projects is a priority and I already have plans to tour with my group in October in the US and Canada and in Europe in November.

Please sign up for my newsletter to keep up with what I have upcoming.

[Newsletter](#)