The Life and Music of Drummer Jeff Hamilton

Brian James Claxton

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF DRUMMER JEFF HAMILTON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Arts

Brian James Claxton

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
Jazz Studies

December 2016
This Dissertation by: Brian James Claxton

Entitled: The Life and Music of Drummer Jeff Hamilton

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Arts in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Music, Program of Jazz Studies

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ABSTRACT


This dissertation is a biography on the life and career of jazz musician Jeff Hamilton. The story begins with Hamilton’s family, continues with his introduction to music, and explores his musical development in great detail. The story is told through the lens of Hamilton himself, along with accounts from family members, close friends, and professional colleagues through excerpts from interviews and other author-conducted research. The content is organized chronologically and guides the reader through snapshots of Hamilton’s entire life up to the present time. Each story was a special moment graciously shared by each interviewee, and great care was taken in organizing this material into a logical timeline that traced Hamilton’s life and music to the current time.

The goal of this dissertation was to help tell the story of one of history’s greatest jazz drummers. In addition, it helped realize the scope of Hamilton’s success through the quality and variety of his accomplishments and through testimony from the greater jazz establishment. Furthermore, it showed why and how he has achieved said success through the study of his early development, work ethic, and life experiences.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very indebted to the many people who supported me throughout this process and made this dissertation possible. Without the support of Jeff Hamilton himself, this project would not have gotten off the ground. Not only has he been an incredible inspiration for study, but he has also become an invaluable mentor and a great friend. The life that he has lived has proven to be worthy of study, and his story documented in these pages will serve as an inspiration to all who read it. I want to thank my wife Mary, my niece Emily, and my parents Deb and Don Claxton for their unwavering support throughout this entire process. Surely I would not be here without them, and they have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams every step of the way. The same is true of my extended family, and I feel very blessed.

Finally, I am grateful for the wisdom, patience, and guidance of my dissertation committee and all of my teachers who helped this project come to life. Dana Landry, Jim White, Erik Applegate, and Steve Luttmann: thank you so much for your assistance and encouragement throughout.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to research and assemble a comprehensive history of Jeff Hamilton’s musical development and career from his birth in August of 1953 until the current time (September of 2016) in the form of a biography. This information is relevant because Hamilton is one of the greatest jazz drummers in history and has performed with jazz legends such as Woody Herman, Monty Alexander, Count Basie, Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson, Gene Harris, Eugene “Snooky” Young, Harry “Sweets” Edison, Benny Carter, and many more. Hamilton has been the drummer on twenty-one Grammy Award–nominated albums and ten Grammy Award–winning albums, and he has won four Modern Drummer awards for Best Jazz Drummer. Hamilton co-leads the prominent Los Angeles big band the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, leads the Jeff Hamilton Trio, and remains an in-demand sideman and producer for a variety of artists.

Hamilton is an accomplished performer and a leading innovator in percussive design and technology, in which he has developed his own line of brushes, drum sticks, drum heads, and cymbals. In addition, Hamilton helped discover and launch the careers of several prominent jazz musicians: Diana Krall, Kristin Korb, Graham Dechter, Akiko Tsuruga, and Katie Thiroux.
Need for Study

In his long career, Jeff Hamilton has recorded and performed with some of the greatest musicians in the history of jazz music. He is an important part of the jazz history cannon, connecting the musicians of the past to the musicians of the future.

During the course of research, the author found that only a few short interviews exist that provide biographical information, some in jazz periodicals and others online, but no scholarly writing exists on Hamilton at this point in time.

In general, there is little scholarly work that documents the oral history of jazz drummers. Of the ten dissertations found relating to jazz drummers or jazz drumming, only one includes Hamilton’s contributions: *The View from the Back of the Band: The Career of Mel Lewis*, a D.A. dissertation by Christopher Smith at the University of Northern Colorado.

This dissertation only includes short contributions from Hamilton regarding his relationship with Mel Lewis and Lewis’ life, and the content does not address Hamilton’s life or his musical contributions. In fact, of the dissertations found, only three others address a specific drummer, and these studies focus on musicians who have died:


Furthermore, the authors of these works never had any personal contact with the artists and had to acquire material through secondary sources or recordings. Although these resources are valuable, they increase the chance of misunderstood or inaccurate information.

Fortunately, the author secured permission from Hamilton, saw him perform on numerous occasions with different groups, studied with him, and became acquainted with him personally. Hamilton has a very good relationship with the University of Northern Colorado and its faculty. This was very important because it allowed Hamilton to trust the work the author was doing and share his experiences candidly and openly. Hamilton has a great memory, and by interviewing him, the author represented his story accurately, corrected any mistakes in previous documentation, and updated the record of his opinion on certain matters. Fortunately, Hamilton was in great mental and physical health, and it was important to document this information while there was plenty of time to do so.

**Scope and Limitations**

This study covered a sixty-three-year period, which made it nearly impossible to discuss every significant event that has occurred in Mr. Hamilton’s life. However, the author made every effort to research and include as many stories, personal accounts, and experiences as possible that contributed to Hamilton’s musical and personal growth and development. This included information about his family and life growing up,
interactions with his first teachers, first musical groups, dream gigs and/or gigs with his musical heroes, and gigs under his leadership. It was important to include interactions with musical mentors and how they impacted his musical and personal growth. Although there is a brief commentary on musical contributions, the majority of this project is biographical instead of featuring transcriptions and transcription analysis.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Interviews

The author found seven interviews published in musical publications. These articles are still in limited circulation, and the author has attained hard copies through the University of Northern Colorado library or digital copies through Interlibrary Loan. Jazz journalist Robyn Flans contributed four of the seven interviews for Modern Drummer magazine. Authors John Killoch, Laurie Lewis, and Kirk Silsbee contributed the other three for Jazz Journal International, Cadence Magazine, and Jazz Times. All of the interviews are similar in size and scope and function primarily as profile articles in jazz magazines. Therefore, the information contained therein is aimed at entertaining its readers rather than a comprehensive biographical study. Nonetheless, in each of these interviews, Hamilton discusses his own history in good detail, and they are the most helpful source of biographical information that exists.

It is worth noting that there is great consistency from one interview to the next, and the author has confidence in getting the correct information because these interviews document Hamilton’s experience in multiple places and at different points in his life.
Album Reviews

The greatest body of literature that exists are album reviews featuring Jeff Hamilton in publications such as *Jazz Times, Modern Drummer, Downbeat, Jazz Journal International, Cadence, Percussive Notes, Crescendo, and Jazz Podium*. The articles are still in limited circulation, and the author has attained hard copies through the University of Northern Colorado library or digital copies through Interlibrary Loan.

These reviews evaluate Hamilton’s work as both a leader and a sideman, and a small number feature limited biographical information. Although they helped to give the author a small amount of context to his recorded output, they were not pertinent to this project.

Recordings

Jeff Hamilton has been featured on over two hundred and fifty commercially released recordings. The author has also acquired two of Mr. Hamilton’s recordings that were not released, which document his time with The Count Basie Orchestra and The Tommy Dorsey Band.

A few discographies of Hamilton’s work exist, including the discography on his own website and personnel credits on allmusic.com. However, the most comprehensive list of Hamilton’s recorded output is the online Tom Lord Jazz Discography. This tool is especially useful because it gives recording dates and session information. Hamilton has contacted Mr. Lord to correct some of his performance credits, personnel information, or recording dates, ensuring that the current listings are reliable.
The recordings, and specifically the recording timeline, were integral to the project because they helped to direct the chronological order of the dissertation. In limited cases, liner notes were used to document historical information when relevant.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Historical Research

The historical research for this project is compiled from published literature, journal articles, newspaper articles, album liner notes, and musical recordings. In addition to the literature and media that already exists, special emphasis was placed on interviews conducted by the author with Hamilton and the other subjects. The process of conducting these interviews was approved by the University of Northern Colorado’s Institutional Review Board, and the interviews were completed using an MP3 recording device. Every effort was made to gather this information in person. However, when this was not possible, the author recorded interviews over the phone.

Prior to any interview, the following steps were taken:

• Research the recorded history between the interviewee and Jeff Hamilton.
• Research the personal history between the interviewee and Jeff Hamilton.
• Research the recorded history of the interviewee and gain basic knowledge into each interviewee’s career and style of playing.
• Compile a list of questions that need to be answered for the research.
Before the conclusion of each interview, the following questions were asked:

• Do you have any specific stories you would like to share about Jeff Hamilton?
• What do you think makes Jeff Hamilton such a unique drummer?
• Do you have any favorite recordings of Jeff Hamilton?

The author organized these events logically and chronologically when possible in order to trace Hamilton’s musical and personal development throughout his life.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Family

Jeffrey Ray Hamilton was born in Richmond, Indiana, on August 4th, 1953, to parents James Richard Hamilton and Harriett Jane Hamilton. He was the youngest child in the family with two older sisters, Melanie Sue Hamilton and Joyce Ann Hamilton, who goes by Ann. Hamilton’s parents first met in high school in the small town of Boston, Indiana. His mother Harriett’s family moved there because her father Clayton secured a job as a sharecropper on a local farm. His father Jim was an only child and was raised by his grandparents after his mother tragically passed away when he was nine years old. Jim was a star athlete, and his uncle, who was the basketball coach in Boston, strategically moved Jim there in order to win games and help keep his job.1

Jim and Harriett fell for one another and were married before Jim was placed in General Patton’s Army in World War II. Hamilton notes,

They got married when Mom was right out of high school. Dad would come home from a leave, have a daughter, and then come back and have another daughter. After four years, he came back to two daughters who were four and two. I am the afterthought. I was almost ten years after that.2

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1 Jeff Hamilton, interview by author, tape recording, San Pedro, January 26, 2016.
2 Ibid.
Harriett’s family was very close. She was the youngest of six children, which included two older brothers and three older sisters. Many of them lived in Richmond and kept a close eye on Hamilton. Hamilton states,

We were a tight-knit family, and I had to stay out of trouble because I had so many relatives in my hometown. They would say, “Is Jeff supposed to be in at 11? I saw him out at 11:15 the other night.” As a high school kid, I was “walking the line.”

Harriett loved having her family over to the house. They would host spur-of-the-moment picnics and family gatherings, and fifty people would show up. Hamilton was especially close with his grandmother. He recalls,

My grandmother was my best friend. I used to spend Saturday nights with her, and we would watch the Lawrence Welk Show. She would say, “Now Jeffy, some day you are going to be on this television show, aren’t you?”

Although that was not what Hamilton had in mind for a career at that time, he felt love and support from his grandmother. Furthermore, Hamilton recognized that he was mature for his age. He says,

I have been an old soul since I was a kid. Growing up, I related to my grandmother more than anybody else in my family, and I had a better time with my older relatives than the kids I was in school with. I was this forty-year-old high school student.

Music was an important part of Harriett’s life growing up, and her father Clayton acquired an upright piano through winning a contest. Hamilton’s sister Ann recalls,

They had a jar of beans, and whoever guessed the nearest number of how many were in the jar got this big upright piano, and he won! That was the piano my

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3 Hamilton, interview by author.
4 Joyce Retz, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, February 20, 2016.
5 Ibid.
mom took lessons on, and then she got married and took it to her house, and that was what we all learned on.\textsuperscript{7}

Harriett became quite accomplished on the keyboard and would accompany the school choir in Boston. She became the church organist for Four Mile Church of the Brethren and then First Baptist Church in Richmond for well over twenty-five years.\textsuperscript{8}

As music was an important part of Harriett’s life, sports were an important part of Jim’s life. He held records in track in the 220- and 440-meter races and a basketball scoring percentage record up until Boston High School closed in the sixties.\textsuperscript{9} His speed helped keep him alive during the war because he was a wire man under Patton. His job was to go ahead of the army as it moved and lay down wire for radio communications. He was often required to venture to the edge of the front lines with wire, usually while under fire. Patton’s army was not a defensive one, as he did not believe in defensive tactics, and often told his soldiers, “When in doubt, attack.”\textsuperscript{10}

Jim did not like talking about the war with his family, but Ann recalls that during combat “he could have reached out numerous times and grabbed the ankle of the enemy. He was that close to them.”\textsuperscript{11} According to Hamilton, Jim’s athleticism served him well after the war, as he was able to secure a job at the Eaton Yale gear company factory in Richmond. Hamilton states,

He got the job because they wanted to win the softball league championships. One of his buddies said that he had just gotten back from Patton’s Army. He was

\textsuperscript{7} Retz, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{11} Retz, interview by author.
their star hitter and star center fielder. They had a basketball team as well, and
played up into his early forties.12

Although Jim enjoyed playing sports with his co-workers, Hamilton remembers that his
father’s job was difficult.

If you worked in a factory, you were a man. He would come home every night,
sit on the back step, soak his hands, and then pick steel out of his hands. Then he
would wake up at 4:30 the next morning and go back to work. That’s a tough
guy!13

Jim never missed work and dedicated himself to supporting his family. He was the type
of person who commanded respect.14

Hamilton’s sisters were both talented students. They each took piano lessons and
learned how to play string bass in the orchestra by standing on folding chairs to reach the
notes. Jeff’s sister Melanie continued to play bass in orchestra but eventually fell in love
with the piano, while his other sister Ann switched to saxophone.15 Melanie was the
piano player of the family, and Hamilton thinks she could have pursued a professional
music career. He says, “She did not feel confident enough to go to Ball State to study
music and started working at Belden Wire Company.”16 Even though Melanie did not
pursue music directly out of high school, she did continue to play and eventually taught
piano lessons, starting with thirty students and ending with sixty-six. She took over for
her mother as church organist at First Baptist church in Richmond when Harriett retired.17

12 Hamilton, interview by author.
13 Ibid.
14 Retz, interview by author.
15 Ibid.
16 Hamilton, interview by author.
17 Ibid.
Although Ann enjoyed playing the saxophone and had perfect pitch, she did not want a career in music.\(^{18}\) Upon high school graduation, Ann went to Ball State and wanted to go into social work.\(^{19}\) However, a mistake with registration led to her enrollment in advanced upper-level classes as a freshman, and she was unable to switch the courses before the registration deadline. Feeling overwhelmed, she took a year off with the intention of going back and finishing school.\(^{20}\) However, the prospect of starting a family became more important, and both Melanie and Ann got married within two months of each other. In fact, Melanie got married in the first week of December 1965, and Ann got married in the last week of January 1966.\(^{21}\) Although it was stressful on their parents at the time—especially considering Christmas and the holiday season between the wedding dates—the daughters were happily married, each with three children.\(^{22}\)

From an early age, Jeff followed in both of his parents’ footsteps and pursued sports and music. Hamilton notes,

> My dad was an athlete, and I inherited his competitive spirit. I have vivid memories of shooting at a basketball goal nailed to the back of the garage and throwing a baseball in the backyard around the same time. Those were my two loves: basketball and baseball. I was a decent athlete as a kid, and I, along with one friend, were the only fourth graders allowed on the fifth- and sixth-grade basketball team.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{18}\) Hamilton, interview by author.  
\(^{19}\) Retz, interview by author.  
\(^{20}\) Ibid.  
\(^{21}\) Ibid.  
\(^{22}\) Hamilton, interview by author.  
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
Hamilton had a similar exposure to music at an early age as well:

I learned the keyboard by lying on the floor and playing the organ pedals. My mother would say, “Count four pedals up and that is an F.” That was my introduction to the keyboard.24

Harriett and the family would gather around and sing songs out of songbooks she received through the mail. Hamilton recalls,

Since she was a church organist, she would get sacred songbooks in the mail. In the back of the package there would be a popular songbook, which would include songs like “Satin Doll.” We would sing around the piano and learn all of those songs as a kid. We were in our car on trips singing these old songs, and I had no idea what “Bicycle Built for Two” meant, but little did I know, I was accruing the American Songbook into my vocabulary without realizing it.25

Although Hamilton’s father was not a musician like the rest of his family, he loved music and would still participate by singing with his deep booming voice.26 In addition to singing, the family would have jam sessions where Harriett would play organ, Melanie would play piano, Ann would play saxophone, and Jeff would play drums. This was a very familiar experience during the kids’ upbringing.27

Richmond, Indiana

The town of Richmond itself has a vast musical history. It was home to the Gennett Record Company, which was where the New Orleans Rhythm Kings recorded in 1922, Jelly Roll Morton recorded in 1923, and King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band with Louis Armstrong recorded in 1923. Bix Beiderbecke recorded there first with The Wolverines

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24 Hamilton, interview by author.
25 Ibid.
26 Retz, interview by author.
27 Ibid.
in 1924 and later as the leader of Bix and his Rhythm Jugglers featuring Tommy Dorsey on the trombone. Hoagy Carmichael, who was a fan of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, recorded the first version of “Stardust” at Gennett Records. Earl Hines, Muggsy Spanier, Red Nichols, Billy Butterfield, Mary Lou Williams, Lawrence Welk, and Wingy Manone all recorded there as well.28

Besides the famous Gennett Records and Starr Piano Company, Richmond had a strong music education program with gifted teachers. Will Earhart started the first organized scholastic orchestra in the United States here in 1900. Hamilton’s teachers were exceptional, and their school band placed in the top five every year out of eighty plus bands at the state fair band competitions. Hamilton’s high school drum line performed clinics across the state because of its popular and forward-thinking ideas.29

The number of notable musicians from Richmond is striking. Drummers Harold Jones, Joe Hunt, and bassist Andy Simpkins all called Richmond home. Jones played in the high school orchestra with Hamilton’s sister Mel.30

Musical Beginnings

Hamilton started piano lessons with local teacher Esther DeBus when he was five years old. DeBus also taught piano lessons to Jeff’s sister, mother, and aunt.31 Although he enjoyed singing and sitting around the piano and organ, Jeff did not enjoy playing the piano in lessons. Hamilton notes, “My teacher was a real taskmaster. She said I had

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29 Hamilton, interview by author.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
good rhythmic ability, but I hated the piano. I came home crying after every lesson.”

Although his studies did not last long on the keyboard, Hamilton knew what he wanted to do with music. He recalls,

> When I was five, I saw Gene Krupa on a black and white TV variety show playing “Sing Sing Sing,” and I said, “That’s it; I’ve gotta do that!” By the time I had convinced my parents to let me play drums, they could see how serious I was. They bought a little toy drum set that looked like it was made of cardboard, and I didn’t break it.

Another reason Hamilton was drawn to the drums was due to the popular marching band culture in Richmond, and even though he was young, he was able to get into the fifth- and sixth-grade summer band program as an eight-year-old.

His first director, Ralph Burkhardt, had already worked with Hamilton’s older sisters and knew that they were talented students. Burkhardt recognized Hamilton’s passion for music and encouraged him to join the band. Hamilton not only made it into the summer band program, but was also first chair as an eight-year-old and had a short solo feature on the concert. Hamilton’s family supported him in his musical endeavors. Hamilton remembers, “One of my dad’s buddies said, ‘How do you stand him practicing the drums all the time?’ My dad said, ‘I always know where he is.’”

Burkhardt was an exceptional teacher and grew the orchestra from twenty-five students when he first started to one hundred twenty-five at its peak. He taught many great students over the years, including Harold Jones and Jack Everly, former conductor

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32 Hamilton, interview by author.
33 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ralph Burkhardt, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, February 17, 2016.
of the American Ballet Theatre and conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.\textsuperscript{39} During his time at Butler University, Burkhardt was one of the original members of the Four Freshman but did not want to tour because of his desire to get married and teach music in his hometown of Richmond.\textsuperscript{40} He made a great addition to the musical community of Richmond, and Burkhardt recognized Hamilton’s love for jazz and encouraged him to pursue his dreams of becoming a great jazz drummer.\textsuperscript{41} Burkhardt was a talented musician and did not get caught up in complex pedagogical methods, but saw the value in teaching core musical fundamentals. Burkhardt argues,

\begin{quote}
I know my music very well and I think rhythm is one of the essential things in music. I get upset with a lot of the modern day teachers because they teach either by rote or sing it to them or explain it to them, and they do not teach them how to count. I only did what I thought was the right thing to do. I am finding now in later years that a lot of people respected that and related to that, but I was only doing what I was supposed to. I just gave the correct basics and expected the same in return.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

After making the school band, Hamilton remembered when his parents rented him his first snare drum, which came with a pair of sticks and Gene Krupa Red Rubber Slingerland brushes. “I remember getting brushes with the first snare drum I got. The salesman said, ‘Well nobody is playing these,’ and threw them in for free with the snare. Those are the brushes I first learned on.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Hamilton, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{40} Burkhardt, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{41} Hamilton, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{42} Burkhardt, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{43} Hamilton, interview by author.
Lessons with John McMahan

Burkhardt, who recognized Hamilton’s natural talent and work ethic, recommended him to a local teacher named John McMahan who had recently moved to the area to work at the Hoosier Store, which was a well-known local men’s clothing store in Richmond.\(^{44}\) McMahan was an orphan who was raised in an air force family and went into the air force himself. He sold clothes at the department store during the day, taught drum lessons at night, and worked with the Richmond High School Drum Line. According to Hamilton, McMahan was a local musician who never received national attention but was way ahead of his time. He was an air force drummer who mastered the snare drum and auditioned unsuccessfully for a spot in the Benny Goodman Band.\(^ {45}\)

McMahan refused to take students who were under ten years old because he had quite the stable of older more experienced drum students.\(^ {46}\) However, Burkhardt convinced McMahan to make an exception and accept Hamilton as a student.\(^ {47}\) Going into lessons, Hamilton knew that he had to come prepared to every lesson or else he would be immediately dropped. Hamilton recalls his first lesson with McMahan:

He had little yellow note pads that read “Memo from John McMahan” at the top. He had mashed his thumb in a car door and had poor handwriting, which reminded me of a doctor writing a prescription. In my first lesson, he asked me to play a long roll, which I could, and then a paradiddle, and “Let me fix your traditional grip.” In my left hand I was squeezing too much on the stick and did not have the fulcrum back far enough in the \(\nu\) between my thumb and hand. The right hand was just natural, pick it up like you are picking up a hammer and throw it. He didn’t talk about tight grip too much, as his guy was Frank Arsenault. McMahan was teaching sort of whipping arm, not the Moeller method, but “Just

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\(^{44}\) Burkhardt, interview by author.

\(^{45}\) Hamilton, interview by author.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Burkhardt, interview by author.
stay loose, and bring the stick up as far as you need.” The technique McMahan had was like shaking water off your hands and then snapping finger control.\textsuperscript{48}

Hamilton’s early lessons focused on rudimental snare drum. Hamilton says, “McMahan was a real disciplinarian. He stood right behind me with the butt end of a 3S marching stick and tapped the tempo between my shoulder blades while I played “Lesson Twenty-Five” out of the Haskell Harr \textit{Drum Method} book.”\textsuperscript{49} From the beginning of his musical development, Hamilton was surrounded by discipline that came from his father and his drum teacher. Hamilton states,

\begin{quote}
I had discipline all around me that I loved. If I walked the line, I could see I was getting better and would win solo contests and be the first snare drummer in the band. It was a great upbringing to have from such a loving family who got it right away.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

Hamilton knew that this attitude was paramount in his success, both as a young student and today as a professional musician. He recalls,

\begin{quote}
I understood in the late fifties and early sixties in America that if you worked hard and you loved what you did, you would achieve what you were going after. There were not a lot of distractions or outer interference to not make that happen like there is today. The “American Dream” or the “American Way” was when you work hard you achieve your goals. I bought into that, and every step of the way it happened for me. If I work hard, I get this. If I love this enough to work hard enough, this is going to happen. Every step of the way it was happening.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

This belief inspired Hamilton to invest in both sports and music, and this work ethic has positively impacted all areas of his life.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{quote}
Hamilton typically worked through the twenty-six standard American drum rudiments, the two Haskell Harr \textit{Drum Method} books, and Benjamin Podemski’s
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
Hamilton remembers, “I could sight read my lessons because of my piano training. I would practice my rudiments like crazy and be able to play them faster the next time.”  

Although Hamilton was still involved with sports and music, it got to a point where McMahan felt that Hamilton’s interests in sports were conflicting with his talent in music. Hamilton recalls,

One of the discussions McMahan had with my father showed me how serious he was and that he thought I had talent. My dad was taking me out of drum lessons from the beginning of June until the middle of September because I showed promise as a baseball player. I would have to start over in drum lessons because I was months behind in my practice. McMahan put up with it for two summers, and he finally pulled my dad in and said, “Look, your son is talented, and I want him to continue to do drum lessons. If you feel it is necessary for him to be a baseball player, we have to start over every summer. Pulling him out is wasting your money and wasting my time.” He asked my dad, “How old are you, Jim?” Keep in mind this was like my dad talking to my dad because their personalities were very similar. McMahan asked, “Jim, do you still play basketball?” My dad said, “No, I hung it up a couple years ago.” “Do you still play softball?” “No I hung that up, too.” McMahan said, “Well, I know sports are important to you, and we are the same age, but I can still play drums,” and he played a perfect long roll right there on the practice pad. I was thinking, “Oh my God!” McMahan just looked at my dad, and my dad said to me, “Alright bub, no baseball in the summer. Is that alright with you?” I said, “Uh…yeah.” He said, “Okay,” and that was the end of baseball. In their own way they were both fighting for what they thought was good for me, and they had different paths, but they both had the same goal.

McMahan made Hamilton stay on snare drum for five years because his rule was to build his students’ hands up to a point where they were good enough to get into the high school drum line. McMahan required participation in the solo ensemble contest.

However, Hamilton could not compete until he was twelve years old. Nevertheless,

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53 Hamilton, interview by author.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
Hamilton was being pushed hard by good teachers and loved the process of working towards being the best drummer he could be. As a result, he was playing advanced music at a high level even though he was young. Hamilton remembers,

I played “Bunker Hill” from the Haskell Harr book as a twelve-year-old for my first snare drum contest, which I won. It had a great shout chorus that was all ratamacues, and I was twelve years old standing there and blowing it out. That experience is when I started seeing that I could play the drums, which propels you to the next successful audition or contest. I started believing then that I could do what I wanted to do. I was achieving everything I set out to do.57

Hamilton remembers that McMahan’s lessons not only taught him how to become a great drummer, but also taught him humility. Hamilton recalls,

I was getting a little cocky at one point. When I won the snare drum contest, I thought, “Well, why do I have to do it again? I won it.” Then McMahan said, “You are getting a little too big for your britches. You have to be nice to the people on the way up, because you will meet them on the way down,” which stuck with me and was one of his big things. He could take you down quick, “You can play that? Let me put the Cirone book Portraits in Rhythm up in front of you.” He kept me humble, which I guess is a chore in itself. He preached, “There is always somebody that can do something better than you can. Keep working hard and get as good as you can.”58

According to Hamilton, his lessons with McMahan gave him the foundation and confidence he needed to pursue music at a professional level. Hamilton says,

I am thankful for that training. I think you can go anywhere from that; as long as you have the facility, you can pick and choose anything you want to play, and it gets you out of jams all the time.59

Hamilton’s success continued in school when he earned a spot in The Richmond High School Drum Line, which was directed by McMahan. The ensemble was accomplished and innovative because it incorporated different instruments and sounds into the group, and area universities took notice. Hamilton recalls,

57 Hamilton, interview by author.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
McMahan was such a good director that we went on tour with just the drum line and gave percussion clinics at Indiana University, Indiana State, Ball State, and Butler. We made our own “timp toms.” Now they call them “quads or tenors,” but at the time it was three timp toms and two large timpani-like drums. The Wuertemberger brothers, who were both in the drum line, lived on a farm and welded timbales together to make them. McMahan heard all of these other voices, and he was a local guy that was ahead of his time.\footnote{Hamilton, interview by author.}

After Hamilton had five years of dedicated snare drum study, McMahan started working with him on drum set. Although his hands were well trained, Hamilton recalls that he had to get his feet working.

I worked out of the Chuck Flores book \textit{Independence for the Beginner} and played up beats on the snare drum or bass drum while keeping the ride cymbal and hi-hat going. That book helped me more than anything, and once I got out of that book, he put me in the Jim Chapin book \textit{Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer}. I hated that book because I thought it wasn’t musical. McMahan said it was just for coordination, so I held my nose through it and did it. Later on, as an adult, professional, and friend of Jim Chapin’s, I openly told him I hated that book after one of my clinics at a Percussive Arts Society convention, and he just laughed at me and said, “You don’t need that book anyway.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Another component of lessons with McMahan was listening to music. McMahan was a fan of Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Louie Bellson, and Roy Burns. A lot of the listening in or after lessons consisted of either recordings of these drummers or various drum corps. Hamilton recognized similarities between the two disciplines and fervently practiced those ideas on his practice pad.\footnote{Ibid.}

Soon after, Hamilton received his first drum set, a 1963 Red Slingerland Sparkle model that was a surprise gift from his father. He remembers,

My dad said he needed some help to get something out of the trunk of his car, and there they were! I had seen the drums in Hood’s Music Store, and I was going to try to save up the money to buy them. I took the set up to my bedroom, put a rug under them to protect the floor, and set them up right next to the hi-fi. The snare
drum had a calfskin head on it, and it came with the flat base hi-hat stand that would wobble all the time. The floor tom had push button legs on it, which were the worst, because you would hit them by accident with your knee, and the drum would fall over. It had an L-shaped cymbal rod coming out of the bass drum, which always fell over on the tom, because the set’s twenty-two-inch A. Zildjian cymbal was too heavy for it. The bass drum pedal was wide with a big S on it under the ball of your foot.63

Hamilton worked out of the Philly Joe Jones book Brush Artistry with McMahan in lessons. He recalls, “I bought the book and took it to McMahan, and he showed me how he perceived it could be played. Even though it was different from the way Philly Joe had written the book, it worked to my benefit because I had two different ways to approach it.”64 The last book Hamilton worked out of was Rockin’ Bass Drum by John Lombardo and Charles Perry. McMahan told Hamilton, “You need to learn some of these things. I know you may not like this style of music, but you need to learn how to play it.”65

Hamilton was a dedicated student and enthusiastically absorbed and learned everything that McMahan could offer by the time he was a sophomore in high school. Hamilton recalls, “McMahan wanted me to quit taking lessons. He said, ‘I have taught you everything I can teach you, and I don’t know what else to teach you. You need to get ready to go to college for music.’”66

Consequently, McMahan started grooming Hamilton to go the Eastman School of Music and recommended that he study with Erwin Mueller, who was a professor at Ball State University and a percussionist with the Indianapolis Symphony. Hamilton began studying marimba and timpani with Mueller.

63 Hamilton, interview by author.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
Richmond High School

John Parshall was Hamilton’s high school band director. Parshall was a talented teacher from Richmond who was a student of Burkhardt’s and wanted to come back home and teach music at the high school.67 Hamilton admired Parshall’s discipline and leadership and recalls,

Parshall was a hell of a band director, and he reminded me of McMahan. We would do push-ups if we didn’t perform properly, and he would say, “Give me twenty-five push-ups with your drum strapped on your back.” We just did what he told us to do, and we would sound great and win competitions.68

The band curriculum consisted of marching band and concert band competition material, and Hamilton was competitive with his drumming cohorts. Hamilton recalls, “While we all had a common goal, we were all trying to beat each other at that common goal.”69

The competitive spirit that Hamilton learned from sports motivated him to become the best drummer in the school. In fact, when McMahan was offered a position to teach in the town of Anderson, Hamilton took over the leadership and writing responsibilities for the drum line.70

Hamilton spent a lot of his time in high school playing and listening to music. In fact, he had a couple of friends that listened to jazz, such as Jeff Roller who played clarinet and turned Hamilton onto pianist Errol Garner.71 However, after the Beatles appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show, Hamilton remembers that he was one of the few students in his school that did not like rock and roll.

67 Hamilton, interview by author.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
I saw the Beatles on Ed Sullivan, and I wasn’t sure what all the “hoop-la” was about. My dad and I laughed at them, because I was already listening to Count Basie with Jo Jones and Ed Thigpen with Oscar Peterson. I thought to myself, “This isn’t music. It’s three chords, and the lyrics don’t mean much to me.” My dad, being a military guy, thought that they all needed hair cuts. I went to school the next day and realized my life was going to be different because I was the only one at school who didn’t like the Beatles. I had to follow my own path.  

Although Hamilton’s friends recognized he had a great deal of talent, they often did not understand the full extent of his ability. The same was true of his teachers, who nonetheless respected and admired Hamilton as a student. Burkhardt recalls,  

With Jeff there’s no flaw in his growing up. I could not tell you one thing wrong about him, or bad about him, or negative; it’s just all positive. He has a good personality, he’s taken advantage of all of his experiences, and he’s well rounded. I admire him very much, and I am fortunate to have been a part of his growing up.  

In addition to the excellent band program, Richmond offered a music theory class that began Hamilton’s junior year, and he achieved a strong foundation in theory and composition, which allowed him to place out of his first year of music theory in college. Furthermore, Hamilton developed good relative pitch with which he could quickly identify different intervals and set pitches by relating them to an internalized reference note, which for him was a concert F.  

Although Hamilton was a talented student, he felt that he was “merely tolerating high school.” He was above average academically, but did not care for his non-music classes and was ready for life on a bus with a touring band. His music classes were

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72 Hamilton, interview by author.  
73 Ibid.  
74 Burkhardt, interview by author.  
75 Hamilton, interview by author.  
76 Ibid.  
77 Ibid.  
78 Ibid.
band, orchestra, music theory, and choir. The choir was exemplary, and although
Hamilton enjoyed singing, he said that he was mainly in choir for the social aspect.\textsuperscript{79}

When his friends were auditioning for the annual high school musical, Hamilton thought
he would throw his hat into the ring. Hamilton recalls,

\begin{quote}
I had played in the pit for \textit{How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying}, and
I didn’t want to be in the pit again because all of my friends were going to be up
on the stage. It was my senior year, and they were doing \textit{The Music Man}. I thought I’d want to be the goofy mayor. I went out in jeans, an oxford button-
down shirt, and horn-rimmed glasses with my hands in my pockets. The girl I
was dating was a good piano player and the accompanist, and we finished the
audition to much applause. The choir director, David Davenport, said, “Jeff take
your glasses off, and take your hands out of your pockets.” There it was, I got
cast as Harold Hill, the lead role in \textit{The Music Man}.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

Hamilton’s performance was memorable for the entire community. Burkhardt
remembers, “He had the lead role in \textit{The Music Man}, and it was outstanding. It was made
just for him. He was able to handle that role with ease and authenticity. Those are fond
memories for me.”\textsuperscript{81}

\section*{First Gigs}

Hamilton’s teachers worked out an arrangement that after one of his band concerts,
he could go sit in on one of the local jazz gigs in Richmond at a restaurant called
Dinnie’s. Carol Woodward was the piano player, and her husband at the time, John,
played bass. They would play duo on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and then bring
in a drummer named Jack Barton on Fridays and Saturdays. Hamilton remembers sitting
in for the first time,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{79} Hamilton, interview by author.\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.\textsuperscript{81} Burkhardt, interview by author.
\end{flushright}
I went in and we played “Just Squeeze Me,” and they were knocked out that I knew the song. I was framing it and setting everything up, and they were saying, “Wow, he can play brushes, and he’s only fourteen years old.” Carol and John took me under their wing, and they liked me.82

Carol was friends with another local pianist, Leo Ryan. Ryan was well known in the area for being a band leader during the big band era when territory bands were popular. Ryan had many colleagues in his band, and they played dance band music. Ryan and his brother Dean, an upright bass player, had a weekly gig at another restaurant in Richmond called Elizabeth Parker’s. Leo would play a Spinet piano while Dean played his gut string bass. Katie Ryan, who was Leo’s wife, sang a few songs during each set, and their previous drummer Floyd Brown was a mentor for Hamilton early on.83 Hamilton recalls, Floyd Brown was my drafting teacher in junior high and was a great drummer who had studied with Jack Kurkowski, who taught drummer Harold Jones. Floyd went to school with my sister Ann, and he knew I was into playing the drums. After class he would say, “I’m playing at the Leland Hotel, and you can only go into the bar area if you sit next to my floor tom.” I said, “Okay.” My parents let me go a couple times, and I would sip on a Coke all night. I learned a lot from him, and he was my first live influence on playing the brushes. Floyd is where I got the idea for the bent hoop on the brushes, because he bent the end of the brush handle at a right angle in order to lay it over the tension rod of the floor tom. Although his brush playing wasn’t anything fancy, it felt right, and he swung his butt off. Floyd needed to support his family, so he taught drafting, history, and civics instead of playing full time, which gave me an opportunity to play at Elizabeth Parker’s.84

The opportunity to consistently perform in front of an audience with talented musicians was very formative for Hamilton.85 The other drummers that Leo and Dean employed were Harold Jones and Joe Hunt, who also went on to become jazz legends.86 Leo was particularly impressed with Hamilton’s brush playing, that he could play brushes all night

82 Hamilton, interview by author.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
and be excited about it.\textsuperscript{87} The wait staff at Elizabeth Parker’s and Hamilton’s parents were tremendously supportive. His parents would go watch many of his Friday- and Saturday-night gigs, and the band would give him extended drum solos.\textsuperscript{88} Hamilton recalls,

That’s where my drum solos started to develop. They would say, “Play ‘Caravan;’ that’s a good one to play a drum solo on!” They would just play the head and get off the bandstand to go have a couple drinks. I would just play all of my Buddy Rich and rudimental stuff.\textsuperscript{89}

**Growing up Listening to Jazz**

Listening to music on records has remained a huge part of Hamilton’s life since he was a young child. Although his sisters were listening to music of the day and teaching Jeff how to do the jitterbug, Hamilton loved listening to his parent’s big band records.\textsuperscript{90} Oscar Peterson’s *The Trio Plays* and *Night Train*, as well as many Basie, Ellington, and Buddy Rich records were his among his favorites.\textsuperscript{91} Moreover, he was listening to the music with great attention to detail while only in elementary school. Hamilton recalls,

I had a Montgomery Ward cabinet stereo with a turntable, and I would just sit in front of the speakers on the floor. I repeatedly dropped the needle in the same place to memorize musical passages. I remember my mom standing in the doorway before realizing she was there, and she would say, “I sent you up here to clean your room, and now you are listening to music.” I’d say, “But Mom, listen to this third trombone part; let me play it for you.” That’s what I was doing. I was listening to all of the parts and inside the music and asking myself, “What else can I learn about this music?” She just turned around and said, “Okay” and walked out of the room because she understood. She knew I was staying out of trouble.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{87} Hamilton, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{90} Retz, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{92} Hamilton, interview by author.
Even before he owned a drum set, Hamilton would play the parts he heard with sticks on his practice pad or with brushes on an album cover. He would spend a great deal of time visualizing and imagining what the musicians were playing and how. For example, he would visualize how Ray Brown’s fingers were coming off the strings while looking at Brown’s picture on the album cover. Hamilton says,

I was envisioning it even before I had a drum set, singing passages, and figuring out how it was going to feel with the limbs and then transferring those things and other rudiments to the drum set.

Hamilton’s musical instincts only continued to develop amidst a supportive family and supportive musical community. Hamilton frequented the Specialty Record Shop, a local record store in Richmond. The store was owned by two African American families: Mr. and Mrs. Henry and Mary Bass and Mr. and Mrs. Harold and Elizabeth Kelly. Hamilton recalls,

I was ten or eleven when I started buying records at Specialty. I remember buying my first Count Basie records and all the Oscar Peterson stuff there and being in the listening booths. They actually made me go in because I didn’t think I belonged. I thought that it was for serious adults listening to music. They were kind and encouraging, and you could try out every record in the store. I bought a lot of forty-fives in order to stay current with a lot of my friends. Everybody was exceptionally nice in there, and they actually turned me onto some other music as well.

Specialty was a unique store in the rural community because they sold every style of music and would make a point of ordering anything that they didn’t carry. Furthermore, they were one of the only stores in Richmond owned by African Americans that openly

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93 Hamilton, interview by author.
94 Ibid.
96 Hamilton, interview by author.
served both black and white customers, even though segregation didn’t officially end in Richmond until 1965.  

Another important musical influence for Hamilton was Buddy Rich. Hamilton was part of the Columbia record club, which would send records through the mail. He was eleven years old when he started buying all of the Buddy Rich Big Band records, and he continued to buy them throughout high school. Listening to these Buddy Rich records helped Hamilton make connections between what he was learning in lessons and the music he was listening to on records. Hamilton states,

I started seeing how the rudimental training I was getting with McMahan could emerge into the music when listening to Buddy. I thought this was incredible because there was a direct relationship. From this, all he did was start the six-stroke roll on the mounted tom, and he ended it on the floor tom, leaving his left hand on the snare. All throughout elementary, middle, and high school, I was a Buddy fanatic.

It soon became easy for Hamilton to begin transcribing his favorite drummers and learning everything they played on his favorite records. Hamilton recalls,

I remember feeling after everything I transcribed that I was getting this information, and it’s doing me so much good that I am going to be ahead of the game because I care enough about this to get it exactly right. I know I’m not going to sound like this person, because it isn’t possible, but I’m going to get that influence into what I do and get the right phrasing and feel. I just felt like every time I transcribed something, I had a leg up on learning this music.

Hamilton would write all of his transcriptions at the turntable away from the drums. He began writing down the solos of Shelly Manne, Max Roach, Jimmy Cobb, and Philly Joe Jones. Hamilton deftly recognized the rudiments being used by each drummer and only had to figure out which drums were being played at a given time. His process of

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97 Dowdell, “The Specialty Record Shop.”
98 Hamilton, interview by author.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
transcription became so fast that he could hear what drummers were doing
instantaneously and transfer it to the drum set without having to write it down or double-
check his work.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{The Earlham Jazz Ensemble}

Hamilton, who had a passion for jazz music, frequently asked his band director
John Parshall to put together a jazz ensemble and even offered to help him get it started.
Fortunately, the director of the jazz ensemble at Earlham College, Don Chan, was
looking for a jazz drummer for his group. Hamilton, who was fifteen at the time, jumped
at the opportunity.\textsuperscript{102} The group was a perfect fit for Hamilton because they played a lot
of Buddy Rich Big Band charts, which Hamilton knew meticulously. Hamilton recalls,

\begin{quote}
I didn’t open the book because I knew the charts better than the band. I was
telling them how each section went into the next section. I’d go out with the
director to get a Coke after rehearsal, and he thanked me for accepting the
responsibility for holding things together. He was glad I was there, and I got the
responsibility of what a big band drummer was at an early age because that was
the first big band I played in.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

\textbf{College Auditions}

Hamilton worked diligently to prepare for college auditions starting in early high
school, learning percussion pieces with Erwin Mueller and taking piano lessons with his
mentor Carol Woodward.\textsuperscript{104} Hamilton recalls,

\begin{quote}
I said to Carol, “I’ve got to get into music school, and I hate piano, but I love the
way you play. Since we’re friends, would you help me with my audition?” She
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
said, “I’ll get you good enough to play ‘God Bless America’,” and I started piano lessons with her. She was such a nice person and teacher.”

Hamilton picked out a number of different schools at which to audition, such as Baldwin Wallace, Ithaca College, Butler University, and University of Houston. However, all of his work and practice was directed towards being admitted into the Eastman School of Music. Hamilton remembers his audition at Eastman,

In 1970, I flew to Rochester on a Delta flight from Dayton’s Vandalia Airport by myself, which was the first flight I’d ever taken. Then I got to Rochester and auditioned for John Beck at Eastman, which is what McMahan had been grooming me for. We looked at Julliard, and I didn’t want to go to New York City. We looked at Oberlin, and I didn’t want to be in Cleveland, and Eastman was prestigious at the time. If you went to Eastman, you could go anywhere from there. I took six pieces, a four-mallet marimba piece by Kraus, a multiple percussion piece, a classical snare drum piece, “Stamina” by Mitch Markovich, a written-out drum set piece, and then a timpani piece. I don’t think I even played all of them. John Beck said, “We’re only accepting four freshmen on percussion, and you are one of them.” I thanked him and then cancelled all of my other auditions.

Although Hamilton was being recruited at Houston and Butler, he turned down all of their offers because his goal of attending Eastman in the fall was realized. This was big news in the town of Richmond and the surrounding area, and Hamilton’s accomplishments made headlines in the local newspaper.

Before Hamilton graduated from high school, he had one more solo and ensemble competition to participate in, and word had gotten around of his talent. In fact, there was a line of people going out the door waiting to hear him play his snare drum solo,

105 Hamilton, interview by author.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
“Stamina” by Mitch Markovich. Hamilton was surprised to see so many people there to watch him but was not nervous because he was just going to perform to his own high expectations.

However, his judge, Wilfred Parigo, was a trombonist who seemed to “want to take Hamilton down a notch,” possibly because of a marching band rivalry. The band Parigo directed placed behind the Richmond High School band, and the rivalry in marching band was as strong and competitive as basketball at that time. Parigo, noticed the big turnout and did not seem to be affected. Hamilton remembers,

I was there to play my snare drum solo, and Parigo asked me to play some rudiments, which was a normal part of the contest. I was prepared to play all of them, and he chose the easiest ones. While I was playing I was thinking to myself, “Why did they send a trombone player to judge a drum contest?” After I was satisfied with the way I played the rudiments, I played the Mitch Markovich solo and got a standing ovation. They scored lowest to highest, and in order to get a first place the top score was a seven. The cut-off before second place was a ten, while eleven to fifteen was second place and so on. Parigo gave me a first place but gave me a ten, and I was insulted. The only comment he gave me was that “your rudiments were too clean.” I looked at that, walked over to my band director John Parshall, and said, “I’m driving home.” I had five other entries to play because I was going to perform all of the material I had ready for the Eastman audition, but I said, “I’m not playing any of these today, and this is the last contest I’ll ever enter because I’m through playing for a judge. I’m only playing for people who love and appreciate this music.”

Hamilton hasn’t participated in a musical contest or competition since. He argues, “I just don’t think there’s a best. Every band, every musician, has something great, and it’s just pointless to pick one winner.” Hamilton certainly showed his maturity and resolve in that situation, even as a senior in high school. He let his work ethic and competitive

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109 Hamilton, interview by author.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
spirit fuel him to perform to his own high standards and expectations, rather than let a subjective voice determine his musical future. Unfortunately for Hamilton, there were more difficulties ahead. Hamilton recalls,

I was all set, and my life was going just the way I wanted it to go, but then I got a letter on the first May during my senior year. I was going to graduate in June, and I get the letter from the Dean of Admissions saying, “Because of your need for financial aid, you are being put on next year’s list. You don’t have to re-audition because you are accepted, and you have a year to get your finances together.” I couldn’t believe it. My parents were in Michigan on a vacation with their cousins. I was going to drive to my friend’s house to tell them what happened, except I skidded on a wet street and rear-ended a guy who didn’t move from a stop sign at the bottom of a hill. Because of insurance, nothing came of it, except I had a broken bone in my hand, and I couldn’t play for three months, and I was not going to Eastman. I called John Parshall, and he said, “I’m getting you in somewhere, my band captain is not sitting at home for a year.” He pulled some strings with the music supervisor and got me an audition at Indiana University the second week of August, a week before classes stared at IU.\textsuperscript{114}

Although it was devastating at the time, Hamilton used the opportunity as a learning experience. Hamilton states,

I realized this is not the way things worked. They had worked well up to this point, but I had to get with it. Eventually things worked out, and they worked out perfectly, but not according to what I had laid out for myself. Everything happens for a reason, and opportunities present themselves, and it is up to you to make the right decisions in how you handle them. That is when I started thinking about that, rather than thinking I am just going to work hard and everything will be “rosy.”\textsuperscript{115}

In August, when his hand had healed, Hamilton drove to Bloomington to audition for the percussion department at Indiana University. As fate would have it, Hamilton recognized the man conducting his audition. Hamilton recalls,

The person who ran the audition was Richard Johnson, who was a percussion professor at Indiana University. I recognized him because he was the adjudicator when I played the Firestone solo “Etude for Drum.” At that time, I was using brand new Pro Mark oak sticks from Japan. We received a bad batch, and guys

\textsuperscript{114} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
were breaking them frequently because they were warping on the boat coming over from Japan. I got about a third of the way through the solo when the tip broke off, and I kept playing and flipped over the broken stick and played the butt end. Johnson looked up because he noticed a difference in sound and said, “Hold it, Jeff. Stop right there. Is there anyone who has another Pro Mark 2B stick that they can give Jeff?” Fortunately, one of my friends looking in through the window gave me one of his sticks to use. I started back up right exactly where I broke the stick, and he gave me an eight, with the perfect score being a seven.\footnote{Hamilton, interview by author.}

The audition went well, and Johnson said that they were going to make a spot for Hamilton in the program. The only drawbacks were that he had to participate in marching band because they needed another body, and he would have to enroll as a music education major because the studio was full. In fact, Hamilton was the fifty-second percussionist in the department.\footnote{Ibid.} After being accepted at Indiana University, Hamilton moved into his dorm three days later to start marching band camp.

**Indiana University**

Hamilton’s first experience with Indiana University was band camp for the Marching One Hundred, which the university looked on with great pride. However, Hamilton was not impressed and recalls, “It was all men and no women and only one hundred people to make it a ‘special’ thing. If it was so special why didn’t we sound very good?”\footnote{Ibid.} From high school, Hamilton was used to a higher standard of performance that just was not matched at Indiana University. Hamilton learned there were politics at play, and although he earned a spot as the section leader, the teachers had already promised the spot to a returning senior, which moved Hamilton to second snare.
drum. To make matters worse, the director of the drum line, Wilbur England, was hostile towards Hamilton. Hamilton states,

What I didn’t know was that after the high school drum line did our clinic at Indiana University, the band directors got on Wilbur’s case and said, “How come our drum line doesn’t sound as good as that high school?” So I had a target on my back.

Although his professor didn’t embrace his talents, his peers admired his experience. In fact, his nickname at Indiana University was “Chops,” and Hamilton remembers that he was eager to help the drum line improve.

The other guys asked if I could write some cadences, because they hated what we were playing. I played them some of the material I had written for my high school drum line, and they liked it, so I began writing cadences for the IU drum line.

Although his peers wanted to perform his cadences, Hamilton remembers that England was reluctant. “I went to England and asked, ‘Is it possible we can play these?’ He said, ‘We’ll see, maybe once in a while.’” Although hesitant at first, after Hamilton left school, England had the group perform the cadences regularly and tried to take credit for writing them himself. Hamilton states,

I went back the year after I left to see some of my friends, and England didn’t even bother to recopy my cadences. He covered my initials with his W.E. and took credit for them. Later on, England expected some credit for my career. Even if we don’t always see eye-to-eye, every experience is helpful.

Although the marching band was a disappointing experience, Hamilton was eager to begin his studies. On the first day of school, all of the percussionists had to meet for a

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119 Hamilton, interview by author.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
lesson placement audition with percussion professor George Gaber. The faculty at
Indiana University were intense, and a lot of them had been recruited from New York
orchestras. Professor George Gaber had been in the NBC Orchestra, which had been
directed by the notorious taskmaster Arturo Toscanini.125 Hamilton recalls his
experience,

There were fifty-one of us lined up ready to go meet with him one by one. Gaber
showed up a little late, and we could smell a cigar coming toward us in this
enclosed building, and I thought to myself, “Are you kidding me?” You could
smoke inside in 1971, and Gaber often did, and he was trying to intimidate us
saying, “Well this is a motley looking crew,” and so on. Then we heard someone
running down the hallway, and we all turned around and it’s this disheveled
hippy-looking guy who runs right up to Gaber. They embrace, and he says,
“Peter, how are you?” I think to myself, “I don’t know who this is, but he’s
apparently the golden boy,” and he walked right into Gaber’s office. We all
looked at each other and said, “We’re toast!” Gaber had recruited Peter Erskine
at a music camp, and I assumed that he was number one of the fifty-two
percussion majors. It was about ten to fifteen minutes with Pete, and I was
number twenty-nine or thirty in line. I realized that everybody besides Peter came
out with their heads down. I walked in, and Gaber had the cigar going in the
small, enclosed space, and he said, “Hamilton? Why did you audition so late,
Hamilton?” In my head, my dad came out in me and I thought, “Be straight with
him, and tell him what is on your mind,” and I said to him “I was accepted at
Eastman School of Music, found out beginning of May that I didn’t have enough
financial aid offered to me to go there, and my band director got me an audition at
Indiana University at the last minute, and I auditioned for Richard Johnson.”
Gaber said, “Oh, so we’re second fiddle to Eastman, is that it?” I said, “My drum
teacher chose Eastman for me, and knew John Beck, and that’s why I auditioned
there first, at the advice of my drum teacher.” “Who’s your drum teacher?”
“John McMahan,” and he says, “I’m not familiar with him.” Immediately in my
mind, Gaber went down a notch. Gaber asked, “So tell me Hamilton, you any
good?” I said, “Dr. Gaber, I prefer to let my playing do the talking for those kinds
of questions.” He said, “Walk over to the snare drum,” and I walk over, and I’m
ready to blow the windows out because he is treating me like this. He said, “Play
me something,” and I nailed “Stamina.” I get about sixteen bars in, and he said,
“Oh yeah, okay, okay.” He says, “Go over to the timpani,” which was a timpani
that you tuned by hand without a pedal. He said, “Raise that drum up a minor
third,” and I did. Whatever pitch he asked me I got it, because I had good relative
pitch and I’ve always been able to hear intervals pretty clearly. After that he
asked me to sit down and said, “Alright it looks like you’re predominantly a snare

125 Charles Nenneker, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, February 16, 2016.
drummer and drum set enthusiast. You need to catch up with marimba and
timpani. You’re a music education student, and I don’t take music education
students. I’m going to put you with Richard Johnson on marimba, and I want you
to get those skills up to where your skills are with the drums. Good day,
Hamilton.” I got up and said, “Thank you, Dr. Gaber, and walked out.” I realized
my head was down, and I thought, “This is awful. No wonder everyone is walking
out like this.”

Unfortunately, Hamilton’s jazz audition did not go well either, and he did not make a jazz
ensemble. Hamilton recalls,

I didn’t make a band my first semester. Peter Erskine was selected for David
Baker’s Jazz Ensemble One, Tom Goldbach in the second band, and Bill
Molenhof in the third band. I went to David Baker to see why I didn’t make a
band or what I could do to improve.” He said, “Hamilton? Oh yeah, you swung
too hard.” I was just crushed. I walked back to my dorm, and I said, “Wait a
minute, that’s what I’ve been trying to do my whole life. I guess he actually paid
me a compliment.”

The transition to Indiana University proved to be frustrating and disappointing for
Hamilton. The musical experience in the marching band was lackluster, he did not feel
supported by his teachers, he was only going to be studying marimba for the foreseeable
future, and worst of all, he would not be playing in a jazz ensemble.

Considering Hamilton’s achievements to date, all of this seems hard to believe.
Hamilton was one of four students accepted at the competitive Eastman School of Music.
He had been winning state solo competitions since he was in eighth grade and had
received an excellent high school music education. He even had experience playing in a
college jazz ensemble. Regardless of the circumstances, things started to look up for
Hamilton when he began private lessons. He remembers,

I went to my first lesson, and Jack Gilfoy was sitting in Richard Johnson’s studio
waiting for me. Jack Gilfoy was an Indiana musical hero who was a great show
and big band drummer. He was Henry Mancini’s regional drummer around the

126 Hamilton, interview by author.
127 Ibid.
Midwest because he’d have certain guys. Shelly Manne was on the west coast, and Jack Gilfoy was in the Midwest. I walked in, and I saw him, and I asked if I was in the right room. He said, “If your name is Jeff Hamilton, then you’re in the right room. Richard Johnson is on sabbatical this semester, and I’m teaching for him.” I looked at the marimba and asked Gilfoy, “Do you play marimba?” He said “No, but there’s a drum set over there.” I was so excited that I was going to take drum set lessons instead of marimba, and it was just fate that Gaber hadn’t put it together. I thought, “Okay, this is going to be great!” 

Gilfoy was a supportive, helpful, and practical teacher whom Hamilton embraced right away. Hamilton recalls,

In my first lesson, I played a little bit, and he asked me, “What is supposed to be the loudest thing on your drum set when you’re playing time?” I said, “The cymbal…” and as I said it, I realized I had never thought about this before. “The next loudest would be the hi-hat, snare drum, and the softest would be the bass drum.” Gilfoy asked, “Now what was your order?” I answered, “Bass drum, snare drum, hi-hat, and then cymbal.” He said, “Let’s fix that.” Gilfoy owned and operated the recording studio in Bloomington where John Von Ohlen recorded The Baron album. He was coming from an engineer’s point of view on sound and would always say, “There are going to be a lot of bad engineers that you come across in the world, but as long as you have your balance, the less they can mess with it. Always have your own balance and be your own sound engineer where you’re sitting.” That was my first lesson, and I thought, “Wow, Indiana University is going to be okay!”

Furthermore, Gilfoy helped Hamilton understand and navigate the musical climate of the school at the time. Hamilton states,

I talked to Gilfoy about not making a band, and he said, “Well, it’s a little different here. The top band is David Baker’s music, and you’ve got to play his style of music. It’s modal, and it’s coming from George Russell. It’s not swinging you know? If he told you you were swinging too hard, that’s what he meant.”

Hamilton played in the second concert band and the percussion ensemble in addition to his private lessons and marching band. Hamilton’s concert band director was Fred Ebb, who had a reputation for being a taskmaster, and at times, Hamilton felt he could be

128 Hamilton, interview by author.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
mean.\textsuperscript{131} Unfortunately, Hamilton felt he had a target on his back in the concert band as well. He recalls,

Well, I think Ebb thought he would be the guy to “take me down a notch.” I was the only freshman in the percussion section in his concert band. We were playing a new piece where the baton comes down and you hit a woodblock with a Musser M2 mallet and then a triangle with a triangle beater, and it specified “Musser M2 mallet” in the part. I didn’t have a lot of money, so I only had the Musser M3 mallet; I didn’t have the M2. I play the part, and Ebb stops the rehearsal and says, “Hamilton, what mallet are you using? Hold it up so I can see it.” I say, “It’s a Musser M3.” He asks, “What does it say on your drum part? Let me hear the Musser M2.” Meanwhile, Fred Opie, a graduate student who is playing in the group, makes his way over to me from the timpani and says to “Just turn around and stir some things around in your briefcase and play the same mallet a little harder.” I said okay, and Ebb asks, “Do you have the right mallet? Ok, then let’s hear it.” He stops the band again and turns to them and says, “Do you hear what a difference that makes?” Opie and I exchanged looks, and that was the beginning of me making the decision to leave Indiana. I knew I had to get out of there if this treatment was going to continue.\textsuperscript{132}

Although Hamilton wasn’t playing in a jazz ensemble in school, he continued to play with Leo and Dean Ryan at Elizabeth Parker’s on the weekends. While home, Hamilton would teach private lessons. He states,

I started teaching when I was in high school, working on the same stuff I learned with McMahan, rudiments and Haskell Harr. I think my first student was my cousin Wayne Stubbs, who ended up being band captain and winning first place at state fair as band captain. He went to Ball State as a music major and was a good percussionist. I taught a couple other guys that were in the drum line at the same time. David Hardman, who is about five years younger than me, was another one of my students, and he was the section leader and wrote music for the drum line when they got second place at the state fair band competition. Hardman went on to play on Woody Herman’s band later and is now teaching at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. A few guys I started early did well, and it was just snare drum and what McMahan showed me. I taught all through high school and as much as I could on weekends in college when I came back to play with Leo on Friday and Saturdays.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{131} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
Fortunately, Hamilton’s hard work and determination paid off, and he made the third jazz band his second semester when percussionist Bill Molenhof decided he no longer wanted to play in a big band and chose to concentrate on mallets instead. Molenhof became an expert in the field by inventing five-mallet playing and is a percussion instructor at the Hochschule Fur Musik in Nurnberg, Germany.134

The third band was directed by teaching assistant Bob Hores.135 Hores was a gruff and candid leader and insisted that the group play Basie charts and other hard-swinging arrangements, saying, “If you can’t play that music, you can’t play anything else, period.”136 Hamilton was right at home playing music he loved.

The following year was perhaps one of the most important years of Hamilton’s musical development. Hamilton made the second jazz ensemble, which was directed by tenor saxophonist and teaching assistant Harry Miedema. Hamilton recalls,

> During the first rehearsal, we played an arrangement of “Confirmation,” and there was a thirty-two bar drum solo. When it got to the drum solo, I closed my eyes and played a “rock ‘em sock ‘em” Buddy Rich-type solo, and Harry’s trying to stop me while I’m soloing. At the end of the chorus, the band is turned around and looking at me. I’m starting to bring them in, and they are all laughing at me, so I just stopped. He said, “Jeff, Buddy Rich never played with Charlie Parker, man,” and the whole band fell out. At the time I didn’t know enough to say that he did, but I got his point; that isn’t the kind of solo needed for this bebop tune. Buddy didn’t play like that when he did play with Charlie Parker. Play the music for what it is; don’t just drop your solo in there. That helped me.137

Miedema helped expose Hamilton to Mel Lewis, Art Blakey, and Indianapolis-based drummer John Von Ohlen.138 Hamilton states,

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134 Hamilton, interview by author.
135 Ibid.
136 Nenneker, interview by author.
137 Hamilton, interview by author.
138 Ibid.
Miedema told me, “You’ve got all the chops thing together, but you should hang out with Von Ohlen. He’s a national treasure that deserves wider recognition. Go listen to him, and it may not be your cup of tea, but he has a lot to offer. Just hang in there with him, because he is not a technical player in the style of Buddy Rich.”

Miedema programmed swinging music, and Hamilton remembers that he was thrilled to be in the ensemble.

When I made the second band I thought, “Well, I made my top band; we’re swinging in here!” It was a lot of Thad Jones and Mel Lewis Orchestra and Oliver Nelson. I realized I didn’t want to be in David’s band playing a lot of original music. When I started playing to Thad and Mel, it made me relax more. I realized I couldn’t play along with those records unless I backed away from the Buddy thing. It just felt like Mel had his hands on my shoulders while standing behind me saying, “Just cool it.” I would have that mental image when I was playing. We played so much of that music that I just fully immersed myself into all of it. I didn’t know Mel played with Terry Gibbs or Stan Kenton at that point because I was into The Thad Jones and Mel Lewis Orchestra. I would play along to “Big Dipper” and “Groove Merchant” every morning, and we were playing them in jazz band, so I learned every note Mel played on all of those recordings.

Gaber began to recognize Hamilton’s talents and proposed that he switch to a performance major in order to train Hamilton as a timpanist and classical percussionist.

Hamilton switched lesson studios and spent most of his second year working on timpani, orchestral snare drum, and some marimba. Hamilton’s schoolmate, drummer Kenny Aronoff, recalls,

Jeff was talented. He had the hands, and I know Gaber is the type of guy that when he saw good hands, he was drooling. Any teacher [would be] that gets a student with hands like Jeff Hamilton had and who can read and is musical; this makes it fun for a guy like George Gaber. By the same token, I can imagine that it drove Gaber crazy because Hamilton didn’t want to embrace being a percussion performance major. He followed his heart, just as I did. Gaber loved Jeff, but wanted him to embrace the classical thing.

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139 Hamilton, interview by author.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Kenny Aronoff, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, April 12, 2016.
Hamilton remembers Gaber trying to convince him to become a classical percussionist and not pursue the drum set as a career.

Gaber had given me this speech about, “You might want to reconsider being a drum set player for a career, because after you get out on that gig there’s gonna be a guy that comes out after you, and he does everything you do, but he shakes a tambourine with his ass, and you’re out. That’s the way the business is.”

Fortunately for Hamilton, more opportunities as a drum set artist began to present themselves. Hamilton, with his cohort from the second jazz band, bassist Chuck Nenneker, had a regular gig with his roommate Alan Billingsley at a new resort on Lake Monroe called The Inn at the Four Winds. Billingsley had approached Nenneker about finding a drummer, and Hamilton was his first choice. Hamilton got the gig and worked every weekend with that trio.

That summer, Billingsley had arranged work for the band in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in a club called Stan’s Lounge. Although excited about the gig, the trio didn’t realize it was a mafia-operated club until they arrived. In fact, the manager, Trevor, carried a gun, and on the first night told the band, “I thought you did more top-forty hits. I don’t want you fellas to end up in the intercoastal waterway.” For that reason, the group learned two hundred pop songs in a week, starting that night. On the gig, Hamilton flexed his vocal chops, singing songs such as “Right Place, Wrong Time” by Dr. John and “Don’t Let Me Be Lonely Tonight” by James Taylor. Hamilton recalls,
My whole family can sing, and we were all pretty good singers, so it wasn’t a big deal to us because we were just singing. I know I can sing, and I’m glad I’ve got the talent because it helps me at the drums, but I don’t love it, and I don’t abuse it. The drums are my instrument; the voice isn’t. It’s like funk drumming. Some people like the way I play that music, but I don’t love to play it. I want to do something I love. I never considered singing as a career, but at the time it was just a way to get through that gig without getting shot.149

Back in Indiana, the gig at The Four Winds led to Hamilton meeting and playing with John Clayton, who would become his longtime best friend and musical companion.

Clayton, a Los Angeles native, had gathered attention from everyone at Indiana University when he arrived. Clayton had studied with Ray Brown and was even subbing for him on the Henry Mancini television show. Hamilton’s new colleague had also studied electric bass with Carol Kay. Clayton recalls,

I had started college in Los Angeles and left to go to Indiana University because I was gigging too much, and I wasn’t practicing enough. My classical teacher was on me, saying, “We’ve got to get you out of here.” That’s what brought me to Indiana University.150

Upon arrival, word spread quickly of Clayton, and crowds of people were at the first jazz band’s rehearsal just to watch him play.151 Hamilton encouraged Nenneker to contact Clayton when he had a conflict with a Four Winds gig and needed a sub. Hamilton remembers the exchange,

Nenneker had to play for the opera at the university, and he couldn’t do one night at The Four Winds. I recommended he call Clayton, but Nenneker thought he wouldn’t be interested since he was a big jazz guy from Los Angeles. I said, “I’ll talk to him. It can’t hurt to ask.” I went up to him and asked him, “Can you sub for Nenneker on this gig we have? I’m the drummer in the second band, and I would love to play with you.” He asked, “Do you have a car that the bass will fit in?” I said, “I have a ’68 Ford Galaxy; it will fit in there,” so I picked him up and drove him to the gig.

149 Hamilton, interview by author.
151 Hamilton, interview by author.
The performance and events that occurred that evening marked a crucial turning point in Hamilton’s life and laid the entire foundation for how he pursued his professional career. Hamilton recalls the pivotal experience,

We played “Satin Doll,” and I had the feeling that I wanted to hear everything he played. I wasn’t thinking about myself because I wanted to lock in with what he was doing. I thought to myself, “I’ve never felt quarter notes like this ever, and I may never feel this again. It’s probably the closest to Ray Brown that I’ll ever get,” and I wanted to soak that up the whole night. During a set break I walked up to him, and I said, “Okay, you’ve heard me play. You sound incredible, and you’ve got more experience than I do. What do I need to work on? I want to play with you more often, and I want to know what I need to do in order to get that together.” He told me, “Your time is good, but your feel is a little stiff.” I asked, “What do I need to do in order to get rid of that?” He asked me, “Who do you want to play with? I told him, “Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Woody Herman, and Count Basie.” John asked me if I could name ten Basie drummers, and I could name eight. He said, “Then you don’t want to be in the Basie Band, do you? How many Oscar Peterson records do you have?” I told him “seventeen,” and he said, “Well, you need three hundred and seventeen.” That conversation showed me how much work I needed to do in order to have a future in this. It came to the point where I either had to turn back and be a farm boy who has Buddy Rich chops or go after it. I had to ask myself, “How badly do I want it?” I adjusted better the rest of that night, and he said, “Stay in touch, and pick out an Oscar Peterson cut. When you learn every note that Ed Thigpen played on it, call me, and I’ll dust off my Ray Brown transcription, and we’ll play it together.” I knew that I wanted it, and I didn’t want to disappoint John. Everybody gave me advice, and I treasured it, and I didn’t want to let those people down. I wanted to show them how serious I was about this. I played along to “Satin Doll” and learned every note, called John, and we played along with the record with two sets of headphones. I yelled out, “We’re playing with Oscar Peterson!” He said, “That’s right!” That was the moment I knew that I could play with Oscar because I felt like I was on the recording. I don’t think I went to school the rest of that week after that gig. I went to the discount record store in town and bought all of the cut-out LPs of the bands I wanted to be on. I went back to my dorm, put them on the turntable, and put on my headphones. That moment on the gig is what opened the door for me leaving Indiana University. I realized that I had set a curriculum for myself, and while I was learning a lot at IU, it wasn’t exactly what I wanted. It was great information, and it was helpful, but it wasn’t going to get me on a band. I had to focus on how I was going to do that, and what better way to learn than from the records of people you want to play with.152

152 Hamilton, interview by author.
Hamilton carefully consulted those closest to him about the idea of leaving Indiana University. Although he received conflicting advice, Hamilton made the decision to leave Indiana University after his second year. Upon coming to this conclusion, Hamilton made an appointment with Dr. Gaber to tell him the news. Hamilton recalls,

I went in to tell Gaber that I’m leaving after my second year, and when I make up my mind to do something, I’m pretty much ready to do it. It wasn’t a discussion, but I thought I owed it to him to go in and tell him that I’ve decided not to come back. He looked at me across the desk with his cigar. I said, “I want to thank you for all that you’ve done for me the last two years, but I feel that I need to pursue my dream of becoming a professional jazz drummer. If it doesn’t happen, then I’ll probably try to go back to school, but I’m pretty set on doing it.” Then he gave me a stern look and said, “Well, Hamilton, let me tell you something. When you leave these hallowed halls of Indiana University you will never make anything of yourself.” I got up, thanked him, walked out, and then stood outside of the room for a minute and thought, “You know what? I will make it just because of that.”

Hamilton recalls having to tell his parents that he was leaving school.

My parents were moderately disappointed since I was the remaining child to possibly get a college degree. When I dropped, out I was working six nights a week with a jazz trio, and I never asked my folks for money. I think I was getting one hundred dollars a night, which was pretty good bread for a jazz gig at that time. I told them, “Alright, I will make you a deal. If for some reason this doesn’t happen in five years, that I am playing with a name band that I want to play with, I will go back to school, finish my degree, and be the band director at Richmond High School.” They said, “Alright,” and I got to work.

**Studying with John Von Ohlen**

Another reason Hamilton decided to leave Indiana University was to focus on lessons with drummer John Von Ohlen. Clayton recalls how he had encouraged Hamilton to find a mentor.

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154 Hamilton, interview by author.
155 Ibid.
I mentioned to Jeff how great having a mentor was. That word didn’t exist the way that it does now, but it was a cool thing that I had with Ray Brown. I asked him if he had heard John Von Ohlen because I had just met him and played with him and thought, “Man, this guy is awesome!”\(^\text{156}\)

Hamilton had been driving an hour to watch Von Ohlen four nights a week in Indianapolis and had already learned a lot from watching him play.\(^\text{157}\) Von Ohlen was a force in the Indiana jazz scene and got his musical start on trombone with local music educator Bob Phillips. Von Ohlen recalls,

I was very lucky to get with him, and now that I look back I can’t believe that I hooked up with him. I mean, he had nothing to do with any goddamn school or anything. I always said you either graduated from Eastman or Bob Phillips. Man, he told us everything, how to play in a big band. I never played drums for him because I was a trombone player, so I did have a little different perspective on drumming. I took piano lessons every week for about ten years, when I was five up through high school; it was Chopin and the classical thing. I didn’t pick up the drums until I was eighteen, but it transferred over. I never took any lessons; I guess I should have, but I was physically acclimated to playing the drums, which I think is all you need.\(^\text{158}\)

Von Ohlen was a heavyweight who had been recruited to Woody Herman’s and Stan Kenton’s bands. After playing with these bands, he wanted to move back to his hometown of Indianapolis.\(^\text{159}\) Von Ohlen states,

When I got off of Kenton’s band, I kind of had a name of my own, and Kenton said, “Well, what do you want to do now?” I said, “Well, my main goal was to play with you; since I was a kid I just loved your music, so now I just want to play good music, and that’s it.” He asked me, “What about living in Los Angeles and New York and all that?” I said, “Well, I don’t want to be in that competitive kind of thing; I’m not like that.”\(^\text{160}\)

\(^\text{156}\) Clayton, interview by author.
\(^\text{157}\) Hamilton, interview by author.
\(^\text{158}\) John Von Ohlen, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, February 22, 2016.
\(^\text{159}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{160}\) Ibid.
In order to make some more money in between gigs, Von Ohlen started teaching lessons at Fred’s Drum Shop in Indianapolis and took Hamilton on as a student. Hamilton recalls,

When I walked in to take my first lesson, I was already well aware of what he did, because I had seen him play so much. I wanted to pinpoint certain things that I knew I wasn’t doing, like the mental approach of the ride cymbal. I asked him, “It’s so deep when you’re playing the ride cymbal. How do I get that?” I loved his fills and wanted to get more of that into my playing. The lesson was in a side room of the music store, and the drums were raggedy. There was an old twenty-two-inch cymbal that was kind of dead, and he asked me to play for him. I sat down and blew the windows out with all of the rudiments and crashing cymbals; I just went into my Buddy Rich mode. I finished with a big cymbal crash and he was standing behind me with his arms folded. He said, “Well, that was impressive.” I thanked him and was thinking to myself, “Wow, maybe I’m over his head” because I knew he didn’t have that technique from hearing him play. He said, “I don’t know what the hell that was, but it was impressive.” I was thinking, “Wow, am I heavy or what?” Then he asked, “Tell me—what do you want from me?” I said, “Your ride cymbal approach and the sound that you get out of your drums and cymbals. What are you thinking when you’re soloing and playing fours? I like your brush technique, but I can’t figure out why it’s so special. It doesn’t look like you’re doing much, but the sound you are getting is great. I want to know how to set up big bands because I love your fills in big bands.” He said, “Okay, but you’re going to have to get rid of all that stuff you just did, because I don’t know what the hell it was.” In my head, I thought that McMahan would come and pull a knife on this guy right now. Von Ohlen said, “Let me tell you something. You have enough technique to last you for the rest of your life. If I were you, I would never practice all that stuff again, ever.” He asked me to get up from the drums, and he sat down with his long lanky arms and legs, leaned his left arm on his knee, and he just brought the stick up and dropped it and got “day-guh-day” from the ride cymbal. The hair stood up on the back of my neck, my knees buckled at the sound, and my eyes started tearing up. I couldn’t believe the sound he was getting; it was effortless and it was so pure and natural. He asked me, “Like that?” I said, “Yeah that’s it.” “Alright then, throw all that other stuff away, and here’s how you do it, bring the stick up and let it drop on the cymbal,” and he said I got it right away.161

Hamilton spent eight months studying with Von Ohlen, and each week they would work on different things. Von Ohlen recalls,

161 Hamilton, interview by author.
Jeff was there every week for eight months and was probably the best student you could ever have. I showed him the other side of the tracks, something besides Buddy Rich. I was talking about big band especially, how to play like Mel Lewis, more musical, not that Buddy wasn’t great. He was great to say the least, but Mel was just as great, but he was only deeper into the jazz feel and small group feel, and yet he had that big band thing, too. I hipped him to Mel and Bill Holman, and I had him playing to Bill Holman records a lot. He took to it like a duck to water, man. No matter what I gave him to do, I couldn’t get him to work on anything because he’d just do it right there, no matter what it was. I started teaching him a little different than other students because he was so deep into it, and he had grown savvy and just understood. You have to know about playing in a big band. In small group, you can kind of just play, but in a big band, it’s kind of a craft, and there’s little things you’ve gotta know, and he was picking up all that.\footnote{Von Ohlen, interview by author.}

Von Ohlen would bring in lead trumpet parts instead of drum charts and make Hamilton sight-read. The sight-reading component was important because it evaluated what Hamilton could do under pressure in a real-life situation. Next, Von Ohlen would give Hamilton advice on how to make each section more musical. Hamilton recalls some of the advice,

He would say stuff like, “Think of the phrase of the band. Every drummer plays a downbeat every time they see a half note, but this half note is right at the end of the phrase. You don’t need to set it up, and it’s on the dominant beat; in fact they’re setting it up themselves with this figure. Just stay out of the way of that kind of thing.” It was stuff like that, which was crucial in being more musical. That was what every single lesson was like, and I thought, “I’m never going to learn this anywhere else. There’s no institution that can tell me this right now, and I just lapped it up.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Hamilton’s progress under Von Ohlen’s tutelage was apparent, and his musical colleagues began taking notice. Bassist Chuck Nenneker recalls,

Jeff came to the band and already had enormous snare drum chops, which he still has now, but after one lesson with Von Ohlen he came back to the band, and we were looking at him thinking, “What is going on? Where did this shit come from?” It was awesome because he went from the tight Buddy Rich crispy snapping thing to the loose flub-a-dub and the feel that was like sitting on a couch. When you combine that flub-a-dub from Von Ohlen, with the chops and
hands of Hamilton, you have a whole different animal, and it defined him for his career.\footnote{164}{Nenneker, interview by author.}

Fellow percussionist and drummer Kenny Aronoff remembers,

After Hamilton studied with Von Ohlen, everything changed. He began to take it way more seriously. His sound changed; he started getting that Von Ohlen and Mel Lewis sound going. He used different cymbals and positioned them differently. His whole sound and approach changed, and he started looking more professional. He took that step, and I remember watching him play in the second band, and I couldn’t believe how great he sounded.\footnote{165}{Aronoff, interview by author.}

Hamilton cites those lessons as a significant stage in his life, and Von Ohlen continues to be one of Hamilton’s most important influences.\footnote{166}{Hamilton, interview by author.} Hamilton recalls,

That was perhaps the most influential period in my development. Not many people know about Von Ohlen, but he’s the big secret. I have to set people straight, and I say, “Look, this is not my thing, it’s coming from him.” Everybody you hear comes out, of course, but he was the biggest influence on me after Buddy as far as big band is concerned. Then it’s Mel after Von Ohlen because later Mel became just as big of an influence. However, Von Ohlen was the most hands-on to what I needed musically, more than anybody I’ve ever come across on the drum set, or I guess anybody period. I think he’s the most direct influence. He definitely had philosophical stuff that was influential to me as well, but sitting at the drums, Von Ohlen was the most hands-on guy with that.\footnote{167}{Ibid.}

Towards the end of their eight months of lessons Hamilton had brought some news to Von Ohlen. Hamilton recalls,

I said, “John Clayton called me, and someone he played with in Palm Springs last summer named Murray McEachern was commissioned to front the Tommy Dorsey Band with the original book.” Von Ohlen said, “Great, when are you leaving?” I had told him I turned it down, and he said, “What did you do that for?” I said, “Well, it’s a ghost band, and I want to play with Woody or Basie.” He asked me, “What bands have you played with, the IU Jazz Ensemble? Why don’t you go out on a professional band to learn how to treat a band? Do you know who Murray McEachern is? Every romantic scene in the fifties in the movies and early sixties before Dick Nash is the romantic trombone soloing of Murray McEachern. He can play alto saxophone like Johnny Hodges, and he was

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\item \footnote{164}{Nenneker, interview by author.}
\item \footnote{165}{Aronoff, interview by author.}
\item \footnote{166}{Hamilton, interview by author.}
\item \footnote{167}{Ibid.}
\end{enumerate}
Benny Goodman’s lead trombone player at eighteen years old. Why would you not want that experience?” I said, “Okay, okay, I’ll see if it’s still available.” Von Ohlen said, “You’ve got to get on that gig, and besides, I don’t know what else to show you. You’re ready to get your feet wet playing in a band.” I called John Clayton up and said “I know that a week ago you called me and told me about that Tommy Dorsey Band opening, and I turned it down. I’m calling you to see if it’s still open.” Clayton said “Well yeah, I didn’t call anyone else because I knew you would call me back, and I knew you’d want to do it.”

Hamilton made the necessary arrangements to go out on the road The Tommy Dorsey Band and had one last lesson with Von Ohlen. Hamilton states,

During my final lesson with Von Ohlen, I was just playing a lot of free rumbling ideas; no time, just play what you think. Then I read a couple of Marty Paich and Shorty Rogers charts, and you could hear the music on the speakers while I was playing. I got out of the lesson, and a Gretsch representative that was in the store says “VO man, you’re blowing the windows out in there—you sound great!” Von Ohlen said, “I didn’t hit a drum that whole session; that was him.” Fred, who owned the music shop, said, “Sign him up; he’s going on the Tommy Dorsey Band!” That was how I got my Gretsch endorsement, because he heard me in a lesson.

The Tommy Dorsey Band

A month later, Hamilton was on a plane to Kansas City with a suitcase and a set of drums. He met Murray McEachern and the rest of the band in the basement of the Executive Motor Inn in Kansas City, which was a large room with a linoleum floor. Hamilton remembers,

Here I am, twenty years old in April of 1974, and I noticed some people sitting listening to the rehearsal, and I’m thinking, “Maybe they’re union guys or people from the Willard Alexander Booking Agency,” which was the group setting up the tour. We started playing “Opus One,” and I didn’t even open the book, and when we finished, McEachern says, “Let’s take a five-minute break, everybody.” We came back from the break, and those guys were gone. I didn’t think anything of it, and about two months later on an all-nighter on the bus, Cass Arpke, the piano player, came up to me and said, “I was just thinking you probably didn’t

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168 Hamilton, interview by author.
169 Ibid.
know what was going on that first rehearsal, did you?” I said, “What are you talking about?” “You remember those guys who were sitting in the audience and then left? They left after Murray heard you play “Opus One.” Those were five local Kansas City drummers ready to step in, in case the twenty-year-old kid wasn’t making it.”

On the night of the first gig, the band opened with “Opus One,” which was the opening tune every night. Hamilton remembers,

I started hanging it out the first night. I was just “Von Ohlening” everything, and it didn’t have a place in the Dorsey book. When we finished, McEachern turned around, and he patted the bass drum three times, and he leaned over and said, “Jeff, just play pretty for the people.” I said okay and switched to the hi-hat. After that the dance floor was full, and it was the greatest lesson I could ever have: “Just play the room, play the music, and serve the music you’re playing. Don’t just come in here and do your own thing.”

Hamilton felt that he belonged on the gig because he memorized the Dorsey book and had done a lot of homework prior to joining the band. Besides playing some of the Dorsey classics, the band played a lot of other material, such as the Billy Byers’ arrangement of “All of Me” and some other Count Basie charts like “Moten Swing.”

Hamilton was the youngest member in the band at twenty years old, and the others were twenty-two and older with four or five professional veterans that were acquaintances of Murray’s. The band was hard at work playing shows most nights, and Hamilton was learning new things along the way. He recalls,

The Dorsey Band played at a lot of Elk's Clubs, and one thing I didn’t know is that they have eleven chimes at the eleventh hour. At eleven o’clock every night, everything stops and there are eleven chimes, and they honor all of their former Elks who have passed on. When you hear the eleven chimes, you stop what you are doing and stand solemnly, and someone gets on the microphone and gives a speech, and I didn’t know anything about this. We were playing, and the band was swinging, and I had my eyes closed, and I heard the band kind of fall out. I looked over and the cats were taking the horns out of their mouths, and I was

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170 Hamilton, interview by author.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
thinking that Murray is giving me some room to blow. I started going for it and just pillaging, because I couldn’t hear the chimes. Murray couldn’t get me to stop because I had my eyes closed. Finally, I stopped, and I hear the tenth and eleventh chimes, and this guy starts his speech, and I thought, “Oh no! They’re going to throw me out of this place!” The guy finishes his speech, Murray points back to me, and we are right back into the tune. That was the weirdest thing because we didn’t get this experience in college. I grew up on the road with those kinds of experiences, what to do and what not to do.173

Hamilton traveled all over the country with the Dorsey Band, including to Indiana, which gave Jeff’s former teachers a chance to see him on the gig. John McMahan came to a show in Richmond in 1974 and gave him the nineteen-inch K. Zildjian cymbal that Hamilton and all of McMahan’s students learned on because of how proud he was.174 That cymbal would be on every recording that Hamilton made for the next twenty-five years, and Von Ohlen recalls seeing him as well.

I got to hear him with the Dorsey Band, and he played the hell out of that gig! It was funny because I showed him a complicated lick the last day he took a lesson, and by golly, he did it right there on the gig, right in front of me. He got it off too; it was great!175

His parents and siblings remained supportive, and they were proud to see Hamilton playing professionally.176 Subsequently, the band brought Hamilton to New York City for the first time, where he got to meet two of his musical heroes. Hamilton reflects on this trip.

My first trip to New York as a twenty-year-old caught me off guard. We came in at sunrise through the Lincoln Tunnel, and I saw the skyline and thought, “You mean this exists?” It was like Oz, and it was just overwhelming for an Indiana boy. It was a surreal moment, and I was thinking, “Look at me—I’m here in New York City. Isn’t that something?” We were staying at the Century Paramount Hotel between Seventh Street and Broadway, and I had to buy a new bass drum pedal, so I looked up Frank Ippolito’s Drum Shop in the Yellow Pages. I had

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173 Hamilton, interview by author.
174 Ibid.
175 Von Ohlen, interview by author.
176 Hamilton, interview by author.
heard that some famous drummers taught and hung out there and that they had a museum with a lot of old drums. The shop was on the second floor, and I walked up the stairs, and I saw this slight figure sitting with his feet up on the desk, reading the New York Times and picking his breakfast out of his teeth as he’s reading the paper. I thought, “I should know who that is; I think I know who that is.” I walk around the corner, and this man with a little fringe around the ears and thick black rimmed glasses shouts out to me, “What do you want kid?” I told him I was looking for a bass drum pedal and asked him, “Are you Mr. Ippolito?” He said, “I am, and what do you need it for?” I said, “I’m in Tommy Dorsey’s band, and we just pulled into town this morning, and I’m playing the St. Regis tomorrow night and out of town the next day.” He said, “Here,” and put a Camco pedal on the counter. I asked him, “Are you sure that’s going to hold up in a big band?” He said, “Yeah, it’s gonna hold up—I designed it. You see that sprocket on it, that gear? I put that on there. I designed that, and I put that sprocket on there with the chain. That’s a bicycle chain, great action. Here look at this!” I said, “Well, okay, how much is the pedal?” He told me the pedal cost fifty dollars, so I gave him the money, but he jerked the pedal away and said, “It’s fifty dollars if you tell Mel Lewis, that miserable son of a bitch, that he never came in and picked up his pedal that I converted from a leather strap to the bicycle sprocket. It’s been here for three months!” I said, “Okay, well this is great, thank you!” I asked him, “Is that Papa Jo Jones over there?” Without any warning Ippolito shouts, “Hey, Jo! Some kid wants to meet you in here!” I walk over and he’s still got his feet up on the old wooden desk sitting in an old wooden chair with slats in it, and he’s picking out his teeth and reading the paper. I said, “Mr. Jones, it is an honor to be in your presence because you’re such a big influence, and it’s a pleasure to meet you. Is it possible that I could get a lesson from you? I’m in town today and play tomorrow and leave the next day.” Jones takes his feet off of the desk very slowly, folds the paper, puts it on the desk, and turns to me and leans over and says “Young talent, I don’t teach.” He picks up the paper, and he puts his feet back up on the desk, and he continues to read, and I thought, “Wow, now what?” I said, “Uh…okay. Being a young drummer, twenty years old from The Tommy Dorsey Band, my first professional gig, is there anything you can share with me that might help me?” He folds the paper up again and puts it on the desk, and he deliberating pulls his feet off the desk and turns to me again and says, “Young talent, I’m going to tell you the two most important things that I could possibly ever tell you that will help you.” I’m thinking to myself, “Oh man, here it comes.” “Number one: always carry a ham sandwich in your coat pocket on the bus because you never know when the bus is going to stop and you’re going to get your next meal. Number two: always wear white socks when you play on the road. Your feet sweat, and you get athletes foot, and you never know when you are going to get rid of that stuff. Good day, young talent.” He puts his feet back up on the desk and reads the paper, and I said “Good day.” I walked down the stairs and thought to myself, “Well, that’s Jo Jones.” If that weren’t enough, I saw him again on the street two hours later, and I thought, “Now I know what I should’ve asked before.” I said, “Mr. Jones, I just saw you at the drum shop. I don’t mean to bother you, but real quickly I should have asked you if
you’re playing anywhere tonight; I’m off tonight.” Immediately, he got this drill sergeant look with his chest out and his chin up, and he said, “Young talent, am I playing anywhere tonight? Why would you think that I would be playing anywhere tonight? Do you think that I want to keep playing music with these people that are the imposters? I played with the real people: I played with Lester Young, I played with Walter Page, I played with Dickie Wells,” and he named everybody in the Basie Band that had died. I thought, “Just let me crawl into a hole here; it’s just not working with this guy.” He said, “Good day, young talent,” and he walked away from me. I felt like two cents, but I didn’t know he was going to react that way. Later that night, I went to see Mel Lewis at the Vanguard, and I went up to him and said, “Hi, my name is Jeff Hamilton, and I’m on The Tommy Dorsey Band.” He said “Well, no shit!” and turned around and walked away. I never told him about the bass drum pedal, either. I knew that if he wanted it, he would have gone down and gotten it himself.177

Hamilton recalls that his professional career started to move quite quickly after joining the Dorsey Band, particularly when his roommate on the road got sick.

Our trombone player, Don Mikkelsen, who went to Indiana University with me, got mononucleosis, and they called Dennis Wilson who played trombone and was the musical director for Lionel Hampton’s band before he joined the Basie Band. He came on the Dorsey Band, and I noticed him looking at me from the trombone section. I looked at him, and he’s urging me on, and I thought, “Okay, he gets what I’m doing!” On the set break, he came over to me and said, “Man, I’ve got to get you on Hamp’s band. We’re talking about getting another drummer, and we need this in the band. Are you okay with that?” I said, “It would be nice to play for a leader who is alive, so yes, by all means!” He said okay and arranged for me to go on Hamp’s band.178

The transition from the Dorsey Band to Lionel Hampton’s band happened rather quickly, and Hamilton had to give his notice to McEachern. Although he was disappointed to hear that Hamilton was leaving, he recognized Hamilton’s desire to work with a living legend such as Lionel Hampton.179 Hamilton made certain that McEachern knew how much he had learned and what a pleasure it was working with him.180

177 Hamilton, interview by author.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
Lionel Hampton’s Band

Hamilton had gotten a warning from Dennis Wilson before he arrived on the band that Hampton put drummers to the test, and Hampton lived up to his reputation.

Hamilton recalls the first rehearsal.

Hamp’s cut-off was that he would jump in the air and raise his right hand. In our first rehearsal, he’s standing right in front of the drums, and the band was playing “Flying Home” all the way through, and he says “Catch me.” He cues the ending by jumping and throwing his right hand in the air, and I caught him when his hand was high in the air by hitting a cymbal crash, and he shouts, “No, Gates, no,” and he stomps his foot and turns around. He called everyone Gates because he wasn’t great with names. I’m twenty-one years old, and Lionel Hampton is shouting at me, “Catch me earlier,” and he made the band play the shout section again, and the trumpets are looking at me saying, “Make sure you get it this time.” They played it again, and I caught him right when he brought his hand down, and he shouts, “No, no, no. Gates, you’ve got to catch me earlier.” I thought to myself, “Alright, I’ve had enough of this.” They play the shout chorus again, and I hit the loudest rim shot that I could, and he never even got his hand up from behind his wallet, and he said, “Okay, Gates, let’s go into ‘Hamp’s Boogie Woogie’”. I thought the band was going to fall on the floor with laughter, and then that was the end of that rehearsal!\(^{181}\)

Besides the cut-offs, Hampton wanted to hear more backbeat, which is big snare drum hits on beats two and four. Hamilton’s equipment was more than enough to support the sound that Hampton wanted. Hamilton was using his big Gretsch drums with a twenty-two-inch bass drum, sixteen-by-sixteen-inch floor tom, and a nine-inch-by-thirteen-inch mounted tom. He used a large twenty-four-inch K. Zildjian cymbal that Von Ohlen had helped him pick out in a lesson before going out on the road with the Dorsey Band.

Hamilton calls that cymbal “The Eliminator” because of its ability to project over the other musicians in the band. He used his nineteen-inch K. Zildjian that McMahan had given him and fifteen-inch Zildjian hi-hats. When his Gretsch 8D sticks, combined with the large drums, were not producing the backbeat that Hampton wanted, Hamilton

\(^{181}\) Hamilton, interview by author.
switched to 5A’s, a larger stick. When that wasn’t enough, he then switched to 3S marching snare drum sticks, which were larger still. The need for more backbeat escalated to the point that Hamilton was developing blisters on his hand from playing so loud, and Hamilton was concerned about destroying his equipment. However, Hampton was still yelling for more backbeat during performances.182 Having had enough, Hamilton remembers bringing it up to Hampton.

I was starting to bury the band and was thinking, “Man, the guys in the band are going to hate me,” and he was yelling at me on the gig for more back beat, when I’m giving him more than enough back beat. I mean, I am quite literally burying the band in sound. When this happened, we were in Cleveland for a gig, and the Minnesota Twins pitcher Jim “Mudcat” Grant was at the gig. I was a huge baseball fan, and I was excited to meet him, but after the first set on the set break, he was talking to Hamp down in front of the stage with his back to me. I was very upset about the backbeat thing, and I needed to talk with him, and I walked up to him and said “Excuse me, Mr. Grant, I’m a big fan,” and I put my hand on Hamp’s shoulder and said, “I need to have a word with you.” Hamp said, “Oh, I’ll talk to you later,” and I insisted “No, I need to have a word with you now.” “Well, okay, Gates, what is it?” I told him, “Gates, I will give you anything you want, and I know that I’m playing this band better than anyone has lately, but don’t ever yell at me on the band stand. Tell me off the bandstand.” He said, “Okay, Gates,” and he shuffled away quickly. After that, we were golden the entire time on the band, and he stopped messing with me. He started calling me “Hammy from Naptown.” Even though I’m from Richmond, he knew Indianapolis was called “Naptown,” and I figured that was close enough.183

Hamilton was amused to find out later that Hampton’s attitude toward Hamilton was no coincidence. He recalls,

Months after I got off the Hampton band, I wanted to introduce John Clayton to Hampton. I went back stage to the dressing rooms, and Hampton comes out of his dressing room, starts to walk down the hall towards us, sees me, and shouts, “Hey, Gates, how you doin’?” and immediately turned around and shuffled back into his dressing room. I asked my former roommate on the band, Seguito “Sam” Turner, “What was that about?” He said, “Don’t you know? You know that night in Cleveland when you talked to him and told him not to yell at you? Hamp was afraid this whole time on the band that you wanted to kill him.” I laughed and

182 Hamilton, interview by author.
183 Ibid.
said, “All I did was have my hand on his shoulder,” and he said, “Yeah, but you must have had a look in your eye or something because to this day, he thinks you want to kill him.” I broke out laughing.\textsuperscript{184}

Hamilton loved being on the band with Hampton and loved how much of a character he was. The band would play all night at gigs because Hampton absolutely loved to play. Hamilton remembers,

Hamp would not stop playing. There was one night that we played at a supper club in Providence, Rhode Island. We came to the end of our set, and Hampton kept playing. After a long while, there was only one couple left in the club, kissing in the back. [They] didn’t care if there was music or not. The club owner came out, and he said, “That’s it…you’re playing over time, and I’m going to lock up.” We played “Flying Home” three times, and he just wouldn’t stop. The couple got up and left, and we just kept playing. The club owner started to shut off the lights, and it got to the point where he cut the power, and every single light in the place was shut off, no stand lights, nothing. The owner came up to the band stand and threw his set of keys up in the air, and they landed on Hamp’s vibes, and he said “Lock up when you finish.” Finally, Hamp finished a couple of choruses, and he said, “Alright, let’s pack up and get out of here.”\textsuperscript{185}

After three months, Hampton got hired to do a Broadway show, \textit{Clams on the Half Shell}, with Bette Midler in New York. The show was a union gig, and only members of the local New York City Musician’s Union could perform, which did not include Hamilton, so Hampton had to lay off Hamilton and a few others. Another reason for this was Midler wanted to use her rhythm section, which were members of the New York City Musician’s Union. However, when Hampton began rehearsals with Midler’s band and rhythm section, he quickly realized that her drummer was not cutting it, and Hampton was asking to get Hamilton on the gig.\textsuperscript{186} Shortly after he arrived home, Hamilton got a call from Hampton’s manager, Bill Titone. Titone told him that they were going to be able to get him a New York Union Card if he could come out and do some rehearsals

\textsuperscript{184} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
with the group. It would take a little time, but after the rehearsals Titone would have Hamilton’s card, and he’d be able to do the run of shows. Hamilton recalls,

I flew out to Philadelphia and did a week of rehearsals and noticed some guy behind me, who never said anything to me, but was just kind of hanging around. I didn’t think anything of it at the time because a lot of people were around. However, I found out that it was Bette Midler’s drummer who was taping everything I did. I couldn’t believe it. After I did the rehearsals, Titone told me that I had to leave at the end of the week because my card didn’t come through, only to find out he never applied for the card for me.\(^{187}\)

After that, Hamilton remembers returning home to Richmond and staying home for a couple weeks before seeing John Clayton and John Von Ohlen.

I was just kind of down, especially because they had taken advantage of me like that. It scared me because I didn’t know what was going to happen next, and I thought that maybe it was the end of my career. I went to talk to both Clayton and Von Ohlen about it, asking what should I do. They encouraged me and told me, “Don’t worry, something else will come up. That’s the way this business is. Something will happen; they don’t deserve you there if they’re going to treat you that way,” and so on.\(^{188}\)

About a month later, Hamilton went to see The Tommy Dorsey Band while they were playing in French Lick, Indiana. That night Hamilton had learned that their current drummer was dealing with some personal issues and had disappeared during the gig, perhaps because he had heard that Hamilton was in the audience. Fortunately for the Dorsey Band, Hamilton was in the right place at the right time and was able to finish out the night, which led to some more gigs and going back on the road with the Dorsey Band.\(^{189}\)

\(^{187}\) Hamilton, interview by author.
\(^{188}\) Ibid.
\(^{189}\) Ibid.
Two weeks after being back on the Dorsey Band, Hamilton got a call from jazz pianist Monty Alexander about doing a week of shows, and the timing couldn’t have been better. He recalls,

Oddly enough, we had a vacation week with the Dorsey Band, and it worked out perfectly. I got off the Dorsey Band and went right into Monty’s gig in Annapolis, Maryland, at the King of France Tavern at the Maryland Inn. It was a popular jazz spot where Charlie Byrd, Herb Ellis, and Barney Kessell all played. They had jazz six nights a week year-round, and we played there a lot, but that was my first week with Monty. I was coming straight from the Dorsey gig, so I had my big Gretsch drums with the twenty-two-inch bass drum and sixteen-inch floor tom. I had my twenty-four-inch “Eliminator” cymbal and all of that and wasn’t sure how that would sound, but I did the gig. The next week I had to get back to the Dorsey Band, which I was on for two more weeks. We were playing some amusement park in Connecticut, and during the last set of the night, the manager of the amusement park came in and pounded on the stage and told Murray, “There’s an emergency phone call for your drummer.” I take the phone thinking someone had died, saying, “What’s wrong?” It was John Clayton calling me to tell me to pack my bags, because “We’re going on the road with Monty Alexander!” I said “What?” He said, “Yeah, Monty wants me to join him, and he asked me if I have a drummer that I’m comfortable with, and you’re the guy!”

Monty Alexander Trio

Hamilton got off of the Dorsey Band in the middle of May 1975 and joined Alexander and Clayton towards the end of June that same summer. Although it seems that this opportunity happened overnight, it was actually a long chain of events that led to Alexander’s relationship with Clayton and then his relationship with Hamilton. It began with Alexander and Ray Brown. Alexander recalls,

I was playing with Ray Brown. In 1969, he had invited me to play a series of nights at Shelly Manne’s club in Los Angeles, which was called Shelly’s Manne Hole. I was playing there with Ray, Milt Jackson, and a drummer named Dick Berk, and Teddy Edwards was the saxophonist. One of the nights, Ray wanted to introduce me to someone, and there was this tall guy standing there. It was John Clayton. Earlier, Ray and I had a conversation where he recommended that I

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190 Hamilton, interview by author.
form a group with musicians that were younger, since I was leading a group with musicians that were all older and were from the neighborhood, so to speak. He was mentioning that it was sort of unusual to be the band leader of guys older than yourself. Ray was a great friendly advisor to me, and he said “You should get some young guys who want to play music and are ready to go in any direction,” and that’s when he introduced me to John. I took Ray’s advice and asked John if he’d want to meet me here tomorrow at the club, “Then we can play some music and get together.” We met up and it was nice; it was okay. Of course I was playing with Ray Brown every night, and it was good to hear a young guy coming along with such a great potential. He stayed in touch with me while he went off to school and gave me a call every now and then. He would send me some of his recitals, and I thought, “Boy, that guy can sure play that bass,” and we stayed in touch. He came through with the Tommy Dorsey orchestra and had come to New York with Jeff playing drums, and they came down to the Village Vanguard where I was playing, and we played something after the night ended. A few months go by, and John had just finished his school year when I had a gig coming up, and the bass player that was playing with me had an injury to his eye. He was helping somebody fix their car to get it to start, and the battery had apparently gotten near his eye, and it was terrible. He had to get emergency medical attention. The next week, I had a job in Annapolis, Maryland, and Clayton joined me to fill in for the other bass player. It was a two-week commitment, and I had Louis Hayes scheduled for the second week but needed a drummer for the first week, and Clayton suggested Jeff, and I said “Sure, let’s try Jeff.” I did, and we hit it off. That is all I can say—it was great, and he played great. We had a nice synergy together, and we just kept playing, and when we played, people enjoyed it, and I enjoyed it. It went on for two years almost every night, just playing all over the place. I’ve got to say, serendipity is a word I find a lot with my life, and I recognize it when that happens. The way I met those guys and how Jeff came on board, it wasn’t some technical thing. Something happened, like the bass player having an injury to his eye. It was the right timing; it was the perfect timing. If it wasn’t that timing, we wouldn’t have gotten together.\footnote{Monty Alexander, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, March 22, 2016.}

The transition from the Dorsey and Hampton band to the trio was natural for Hamilton, particularly because of all of the homework Hamilton had done studying the Oscar Peterson Trio. Hamilton states, “Monty was coming from Oscar a lot, and through playing with Ray, he wanted that feel from the rhythm section. He had it with John, and then I seemed to fit in, too.”\footnote{Hamilton, interview by author.} Hamilton had purchased all of Alexander’s records up to that point, learned everything off of those recordings, and greatly admired Alexander’s
playing. In fact, he felt that he was playing with a younger version of Oscar Peterson.\textsuperscript{193}

Hamilton remembers, “[I] was excited to be playing with Monty and John, and I remember complimenting Monty a lot on how much I loved his playing. He let me know that we are in a band together, and I didn’t need to pay him a lot of compliments.”\textsuperscript{194}

The trio was certainly a great opportunity for Clayton and Hamilton, and it became a unique group for Alexander. Alexander recalls,

> It was an interesting group because I remember when I was on the bandstand with Eugene Wright, Bobby Durham, Bob Cranshaw, Ray Brown, and Mickey Roker. All of those musicians had learned to play this music on their own or from watching other people play and had a lot of professional experience, whereas John and Jeff had just come out of college, and each had great music and jazz teachers. I was a rarity and never went to music school and only had a few piano lessons as a kid. I say this because I think Jeff and John were part of the beginning of people teaching people about music, including jazz.”\textsuperscript{195}

Alexander recalls that the moral fabric of the trio and their passion and integrity for the music was another important component of the group.

> I came to realize both John and Jeff were very particular, and they cared about the music, and I knew that they were well-brought-up guys, and they wanted to do the right things. They weren’t interested in what was common in those days, which was the use of drugs. Monty Alexander, Jeff Hamilton, and John Clayton didn’t do that. I didn’t want to be a part of that, and that was an important thing about why we were what we were. That was something that set us apart."\textsuperscript{196}

The Monty Alexander Trio was certainly well rooted in the jazz trio tradition of Oscar Peterson, Erroll Garner, and Nat King Cole, but as the group developed, they began doing things that were new. Notably, Hamilton would often play the melodies of songs on the drum set, bending the drums to sound the specific pitches of the melody as part of the arrangement. This is perhaps most evident on their recording of “Work Song” from the

\textsuperscript{193} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{195} Alexander, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
album *Montreux Alexander*, which was recorded in June of 1976. These intricate arrangements evolved organically, according to Alexander.

I don’t think we ever had a rehearsal. It all came together on the bandstand because of their intuition, skill, and the trust that was developed. When I started playing something, John and Jeff would pick it up. I didn’t have to make a big deal about it, I’d suggest, “Why don’t you play the melody, or we can play it together,” and they would join right in. They trusted my musicianship because of my records they had heard, and we all bought into the concept of the trio being a band: specifically, a group of musicians who came in to raise the roof with some excitement, some swinging, some ballads, and present a musical performance with variety. I realized when Jeff played the drums, he would play melodies, and I would encourage him in that setting. Maybe he was doing it with everyone else too, but I loved it, and loved that he played the melodies. We would always be encouraging each other and checking each other out. I enjoyed hearing Jeff, watching him and hearing him. We had that visual communication. I brought some tunes with a little Caribbean rhythm because that’s my heritage, and they picked it up fine. Another thing was that John loved to play the bass with the bow, like he was a member of a chamber group, and I loved that because I thought his voice as a bassist was so beautiful, and it made me happy to accompany that. Even on a bad night, when we weren’t in the right mood, it was still special because we would kick up the dust together. Everyone would come, and when we were playing in Europe, the place would be jam-packed. I was playing sometimes on an old beat up piano that didn’t sound good, but that didn’t matter. We would turn it into something fun, and I’m thankful people have enjoyed hearing it as much as we enjoyed playing it. It was all just three guys who came together, and it was a well-oiled machine, as they say.\(^\text{197}\)

Hamilton’s and Clayton’s friendship had only grown and deepened since they were at Indiana University together. In fact, they had toured with the Dorsey Band together for a brief period and were thrilled to be traveling around the world together and getting to play nearly every night together. Becoming best friends, they were enjoying both the musical benefits and the overall experience. Hamilton reflects,

We’d stay in the same place for a month. It was great because we were on the road fifty weeks each year for two years. It would be The Backroom in Chicago for a month and then The Hong Kong Bar in Los Angeles for two weeks. There

\(^{197}\) Alexander, interview by author.
just aren’t gigs like that anymore. The most you get is a week, maybe five nights at some place. We grew a lot, and John and I would get together in the daytime and just play our parts, just bass and drums, and lock in. We couldn’t wait to take it to Monty that night. It was just a huge growing period, and it was a lot of fun. We were young and stupid and felt invincible. We all felt comfortable to just go after what we wanted to do, like everything you wanted to play, just go after it, and we were all very proud of the group.198

Hamilton also grew in awareness during this period. Particularly, Hamilton started meditating as a practical means to improve his awareness and relaxation. He states,

I started to become aware of things in 1975. I got into meditating because I was trying to cool out some anger that I was getting from not getting to play as much jazz in the trio. Heading into the trio’s second year, Monty had started introducing more of Caribbean material, which meant I had to play the proper percussion instruments for that. When I started to get a little bugged, I thought that I’ve gotta cool out before this turns into anything negative. I started meditating for about twenty minutes a day, and I would just close my eyes and breathe slowly; that was about it. I wasn’t trying to get deep or spiritual through it, but it just makes you more alert. If your mind is at ease, and you are rested, you notice everything around you, and I think that helped me to be more aware of everything happening on the bandstand.199

Surprisingly, in over two years of performing almost every night together, there were no major arguments in the band. Remarkably, even during times of conflict, the other musicians would shape any negativity into something positive. Alexander recalls,

Not to get too philosophical, but the bandstand with guys like Jeff, John, and me was that we were going to make this thing special. We are going to make it positive for ourselves and for the people who are there. They’re gonna get the benefit of that, and walk out of the hall feeling good. If we saw one guy dealing with some issue, that’s not permitted. It was the others’ responsibility to get them out of that mood. I don’t know how we did it, but we all have our moods. I’ve got mine and Jeff had his, and probably John least of all, but you know people have got to get around, and that goes with all kinds of associations. Just like a team doing it, like a good basketball team, they need to know how to uplift the other guy. In order to resolve any conflict in a positive way, there’s a rewarding feeling about the whole thing, and I’ve got proof that it can happen on the bandstand.200

198 Hamilton, interview by author.
199 Ibid.
200 Alexander, interview by author.
Clayton shared this sentiment and recalls how well they worked together.

Most musicians usually use the first tune to sort of get settled and warmed up. We didn’t allow each other to do that. On the first tune, if my amp wasn’t right, or I’m just sort of trying to adjust stuff, Jeff would go “Hey,” and I’d look up, and he’d just take a stick and point to his chest like, “Listen to me.” I’d look, and I’d go, “Yeah, that’s right.” Then the next night, playing the first tune, he’s trying to fix his snare or whatever, and I’d go “Hey,” and he’d look at me, and I’d give him a look. We were always doing that kind of stuff with each other.\(^{201}\)

Hamilton made his first records with this trio, and the first was a live recording done between May 2 and 6 of 1976 in Villingen, Germany. Seven songs made it on the record, and it was titled *The Way It Is* and was released through the MPS label.

Fairly soon after *The Way It Is* was recorded, the trio was scheduled to perform and record at the prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival, which proved to be quite an exciting night for Hamilton. Hamilton recalls,

> It was a scary night. Mel Lewis was there playing with the Thad Jones Mel Lewis Orchestra right before us, and I actually got to sit behind Mel and watch him play. I was twenty-two years old, and knowing there was going to be a record and having to follow that band. Then after us was Stan Getz with Joanne Brackeen, Clint Houston, and Billy Hart. We were the throw-away group, and Monty had such a competitive spirit that night. We came out and played “Night Mist Blues,” and from the opening of the tune people just turned around and started listening. This was one of the few times that I don’t remember what I played. The blood was just rushing; I wasn’t in control of what I was doing. I still get a kick out of listening to that recording. I enjoy the excitement that was caused by the trio. I enjoy the intensity of our arrangements and the cleverness of what we did, but I sound like a twenty-two-year-old drummer. I had my drums tuned too low, and they didn’t get a great drum sound on the record. There are a couple of places where I tried to do too much. Some say it was one of the best trio albums.\(^{202}\)

The trio’s music was constantly evolving, and according to Alexander, the *Montreux Alexander* recording was just one of many great nights in a row.

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\(^{201}\) Clayton, interview by author.

\(^{202}\) Killoch, “Jeff Hamilton,” 10-12.
That night was one of the nights in a period of nights where every night was burning, burning harder than the other night. Each night was like the roof would come off when we were playing. If it was going well or not as well, we wouldn’t say anything because we could just feel it. We wouldn’t go, “Gee, Jeff, that was really good.” I don’t know if it was an ego thing or a macho thing, but we wouldn’t say anything; we would just take each night for what it was. It was different every night, and we trusted each other, and it was all with no rehearsal. We just tried stuff, and the next night we tried to play it again and play it better or play it different. The force was with us that night, and yes, I knew that Stan Getz was there and Thad Jones and Mel Lewis were there, and I didn’t care because I remember saying, “Yeah, some fabulous people are around, but to heck with it, I’m gonna go for double here.”

The momentum of the trio only continued to build after the Montreux Jazz Festival. The trio did another live recording in Holland the following spring on March 10, 1977. They had their first studio record, titled Soul Fusion, scheduled with vibraphonist Milt Jackson, which they recorded on June 1 and 2 in 1977. Before they went into the studio, the group had a week of shows to get ready. Hamilton recalls,

We played the Lighthouse for a week with Milt Jackson, getting ready for that Soul Fusion album, and Jackson came up on the bandstand before sound check and grabbed my A. Zildjian Mini-Cup cymbal, which had three rivets in it, and he juggled them. He looked at the front head of my Gretsch twenty-inch bass drum and said “We’re gonna be okay.” That was the first thing he ever said to me, and I said, “Okay!” He says “You got a bass drum with a front head, and you’ve got a sizzle cymbal. Don’t ever leave that cymbal while I’m soloing.” I said, “You’ve got it!”

Besides meeting and playing with Jackson for the first time, Hamilton remembers how he met his musical hero Ray Brown for the first time that same week.

Monty liked to change the bandstand around in order to hear how he wanted to, and for some reason I ended up behind the piano lid. From the audience perspective, the only way you would have known I was there is because you could only see the bottom of my bass drum, and that night was the first time I met Ray Brown. Ray was booking Jackson at that time, and he wanted to come in and see how business was. I was playing my butt off and went after everything, and I didn’t even see Ray come in. I couldn’t see anything because I was looking into a

\[203\] Alexander, interview by author.
\[204\] Hamilton, interview by author.
piano lid. I get off the bandstand, and I’m ready to just go outside and get some fresh air and clear my head, and John says “Hey, Ray, is here, and I want to introduce you.” I walk over, kind of with my head down, and he says “Hey, Ray, this is the drummer I was telling you about, Jeff Hamilton.” I said, “Hello, Mr. Brown,” and he says, “Hello there, young fella,” and he kind of smiled, and I knew he was reading my mind. He asked me, “How do you like being behind that piano lid?” I looked at him and said, “Not very much.” He said, “Yeah I didn’t think so, but you sounded good.” I asked him, “Is there was any way we could have lunch while I’m here this week and sit down and talk with you?” “You buyin’?” I said, “Sure,” and he said, “I’ll see you at Norm’s tomorrow at the corner of Westwood and Wilshire.” I showed up the next day, and he was a few minutes late, and he said, “I’m sorry I’m late, but I was late because I called your piano player, and we had a meeting this morning. I told him Oscar Peterson would never hide anyone in his trio, he was proud of his band, and asked him why was he hiding his drummer? So yeah, we had a little meeting about that this morning; I don’t think it’s ever going to happen again. Now what did you want to have lunch about?” I said, “Well, about my future, I talked to John about this a few years ago, but my goals are to play with you, Oscar Peterson, Woody Herman, and Count Basie.” He said, “Well, have you looked into the Basie band?” I said, “Yeah, they’ve got a guy named Butch Miles who he’s happy with.” “Alright, what about Woody?” “No, I haven’t made any calls or anything,” and he said, “Call him up; do you have any friends in the band? Call them up to see where they stand; tell them to keep you in mind next time they want to make a change. That way they will have you in mind.” I said “Okay,” and thought, “Why didn’t I think of that?” Then he said, “I’ll call Bill in the mean time.” I asked “Bill?” “Count Basie!” “Right, yes,” and he never brought up himself or Oscar, and he asked, “Have you considered studio work?” I told him “Yes, and I don’t want to do that; I don’t think I have the right mentality.” He asked, “You went to Indiana with John, right, and you play mallets and all that?” I said, “Not well, and I don’t really like it.” “Well, Shelly Manne makes an awful lot of money; he goes in at nine o’clock every day and then gets home at ten o’clock. There’s a lot of television music and movie music, and there is a lot of money in it. With the way jazz is now, if you’re not plugging in and playing fusion, nobody wants to know about it. I’ve got The Merv Griffin Show, and I’m doing more studio work and television shows.” I said, “Well, you’re still playing jazz,” and he said, “Well, not as much as I’d like to.” He said, “Here’s my phone number—stay in touch with me, and call me every time you’re going to come into Los Angeles.” I said, “Okay,” and then we just talked about other stuff and enjoyed lunch.\(^\text{205}\)

Following the meeting with Brown, Hamilton went into the studio with the trio and Jackson and recorded the *Soul Fusion* record. Hamilton states,

\(^{205}\) Hamilton, interview by author.
I just kept pinching myself thinking, “Man, am I really playing with Milt Jackson?” Norman Granz was in the booth, and Ray Brown came into the booth, too. I thought, “Wow, this is fun,” and that was the culmination of the week playing the Lighthouse, meeting Ray Brown and having lunch with him and discussing my future. Pretty eventful week, huh?\textsuperscript{206}

Indeed, it seemed a lot of his time with Monty Alexander and John Clayton was eventful. Hamilton was performing all over the world, thereby meeting many of his musical heroes, which would lead in many cases to lifelong friendships. Hamilton, by all accounts, was beginning to make a name for himself. One of the most important meetings and influential moments in his career was meeting the drummer “Philly” Joe Jones. Hamilton remembers,

In 1975 we were in Philadelphia, and Bobby Durham and Philly Joe Jones showed up to the gig. I was a little nervous because Bobby Durham was the drummer I had replaced in the group, and of course Jones was one of the greats of all time. Monty had tried to introduce me to Durham, but he didn’t seem interested in meeting me after hearing me play the first set. After that, John said, “Go say hi to Philly Joe,” and I worked up the courage to go talk to him. I was honestly just trying to form words in order to speak to him, but it just worked out that he agreed to give me a lesson the next day, and I spent the entire day with him. He gave me advice on playing with Monty, saying, “You don’t challenge the piano player enough; you need more interjections in order to make the music exciting. If you’re listening to everybody, and you can hear them acoustically, then you’re playing at the right volume.” He told me that my hands weren’t even, but I think he was talking about my phrasing and how it wasn’t even, and he told me that “I’ve got to swing harder.” We went in depth about translating rudiments to the drum set, particularly from Charley Wilcoxon’s books. Then we worked in depth on brushes and working through his brush book \textit{Brush Artistry}. He showed me how to correctly play the patterns in the book such as the “Palm Up” pattern. He showed me that between beats one and three, he would bring his right hand up across his left all the way up to his head like he was combing his hair. I asked him why he brought the brush up so high, and he said “You’ve got to be pretty when you play the brushes.” Before I knew it, I had to wrap up the lessons because I had a gig that night, and I had taken three busses and a taxi to get to his place, and he offered to run me back to the gig. I got into his 1969 white Chevy Impala with a bench front seat with blue leather, and we talked all the way back, and I just thanked him and told him, “I don’t know how to thank you enough for the day you’ve given me. I’m so knocked out with this to get to spend some time

\textsuperscript{206} Hamilton, interview by author.
with you and for you to tell me everything I asked for, I will never forget this. I’m willing to pay you whatever you want,” and I had my wallet out for him, and he looked down at his gas gauge and said, “Give me ten dollars for gas.” That was it; he wouldn’t take any more, and he dropped me off at the hotel. I went back to the gig and blew the windows out that night. Monty and John turned around and had noticed the difference; it was obviously good advice Philly Joe gave me.207

Clayton remembers how special it was to meet his heroes, who were often coming out to see them perform.

It was always fun, to meet these different musicians that we heard about. That’s when we little by little started meeting the masters to us. Philly Joe Jones would walk in and check us out, or Sam Jones, or Cedar Walton, a long list of players. While we were in Boston playing with Barney Kessel, we were right across the hall from Sonny Rollins. We didn’t get to hear him, but we are here and across the hall is Sonny Rollins. That was a big discovery time, you know, hearing Bill Evans’ trio with Eddie Gomez and Marty Morell. Or having Oscar Peterson come in and sit down and listen to us. It was heavy.208

After over two years with the Monty Alexander Trio, Hamilton was presented with an opportunity to realize another one of his musical dreams and join Woody Herman and the Thundering Herd. The connection had come through his friend, trombonist Birch Johnson from Tommy Dorsey’s band.209 After a lot of thought, Hamilton decided to take the offer and join Woody Herman’s Thundering Herd.

Woody Herman

The opportunity to join Woody Herman’s band was monumental for Hamilton, as he had accomplished the first of his goals that he had left Indiana University to pursue. The agreement that he had made with his parents came to fruition, and at this point, he had already cemented his professional career as a jazz musician. He wouldn’t have to go

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207 Hamilton, interview by author.
208 Clayton, interview by author.
back to school, and he certainly didn’t need an alternative plan to fall back on. It truly showed that his hard work and determination had paid off and would continue to be fruitful.

Although this was an exciting opportunity for Hamilton, he remembers, “Everybody thought I was crazy for leaving Monty’s band to take a fifty dollar a week pay cut to play Woody’s band with a bunch of college kids on a bus.” Hamilton as part of the Monty Alexander Trio had indeed made a name for himself, but he was eager to play in Woody’s band because of the legendary drummers who preceded him.

Although Hamilton was making less money, he had to negotiate for that salary, because they had initially offered him four hundred dollars a week, when he was previously making five hundred dollars a week with Alexander. They eventually came to mutual terms and paid Hamilton four hundred fifty dollars a week, but it bugged Herman, who had financial troubles unknown to Hamilton. Previously, a manager was taking money for himself that was supposed to be going to the IRS. After accepting the gig, Hamilton recalls going to see the band perform.

After I accepted the gig, I went to hear the band, and I feared that I made a terrible mistake. Woody had just come off a car accident, where he had fallen asleep driving and had lost all of his teeth on the steering wheel, broke a leg in two places just above the knee, and had to have his mouth completely re-built. The day I saw him, he was on a walker with a bicycle horn, playing “Blue Flame” and honking the horn. I thought, “Oh my God, I made a terrible mistake, leaving Monty and John for this.” The band was uninspired, and nobody seemed to want to play, and they were all fighting, looking at each other after phrases and stuff. I called Von Ohlen and said “I’ve gotta talk to you.” I went out to meet him and walked through the corn field by his trailer about a week before I went on the band on July 7. He asks, “What’s the matter?” I said, “I think I made a terrible mistake, going on Woody’s band, and I committed to it. I just heard the band, and I don’t think I want to go on the band.” Von Ohlen, in his wisdom, said, “Well, it

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210 Hamilton, interview by author.
211 Ibid.
sounds to me like they need a good drummer.” I stopped in the corn field, and I looked at him and said, “And that would be me?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “You think I can go on and change that?” He said, “The band is only as good as its drummer. You can go on a band, and if they have a lizard drummer and a great bass player, the band is lousy, but if it’s the other way around, and the bass player is the lizard, and the drummer is great, the band is gonna be swingin’! Just go out there and change it; they need a good drummer. What else?” I said, “I guess that’s it.”

Hamilton took Von Ohlen’s advice and decided to honor his commitment and play the gig. The first performance for new drummers was typically a dance; however, they had sold too many tickets, and it turned into a four-hour concert. When Hamilton showed up to play, he quickly realized that Woody was bugged and wanted to see if the new drummer was worth what he was paying him. Hamilton recalls,

Woody had a tall barstool with a back on it, and he came out with the walker and shoved the stool with his good foot against my bass drum, which bugged me. He “threw the book at me” that night. He started with “Four Brothers,” and I didn’t even open up the book. He just called them, and I knew everything because of all the homework I had done. Apparently Woody was having trouble with drummers who couldn’t play “Caldonia” fast enough, which was known for being played at upwards of four hundred beats per minute. Fred Hersch was the piano player on the gig, and I asked him, “How fast are you taking it?” He said, “Just play it as fast as you can.” Bruce Johnstone had a stopwatch and would tell us how fast we were going at the end of every chorus, and we had it going at six seconds a chorus. I was madder than hell. I was thinking “You’re ‘throwing the book’ at me, and you wanna see if I’m worth the extra fifty dollars a week? You got it.” I just crammed it up the band, and I caught all of Woody’s antics at the end of “Caldonia.” Woody turned around right before he got off the bandstand and said, “Not so fast tomorrow night, pal!”

Hamilton certainly felt the tension, and being well aware of the dysfunction in the band at the time, he was determined keep this from continuing. Hamilton remembers,

After the first set I walked up to Bruce and said, “Where’s Woody? He’s hiding from me right?” I thought to myself, “I wanna know who I’m working for if he’s gonna be like this, otherwise this is gonna be another Lionel Hampton incident.”

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212 Hamilton, interview by author.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
Bruce said, “He’s hiding in the corner, but let him come to you,” and I said “No.” I strode right over to him, and I stuck out my right hand right underneath his head, and he looked up, and I said, “Woody I’m your new drummer, Jeff Hamilton, and I want to know who I’m working for.” He didn’t shake my hand, and he looked up at me and said “I know who you are, pal, and you sound marvelous, alright? Now get out of here and leave me alone.” I turned around and walked away, and that’s the only thing he said for two weeks. He was bugged, and I knew it was about the money, because I knew I had played my butt off. You could tell the band was into it.²¹⁵

In fact, after that first night, Fred Hersch the pianist and the bass player Bob Badgley were replaced with pianist Pat Coil, who had been on the band before, and Marc Johnson, who was taking his first gig out of North Texas State University. Although Hamilton felt bad that they were let go, it was a positive move for the band because they quickly became a strong rhythm section. Hamilton recalls,

After we were together for two weeks as a rhythm section, Woody stopped the whole band at a Cleveland Hotel as we entered the lobby, and he turned around and said to the band, “I think it’s about time we give this rhythm section a round of applause. We’ve got one hell of a rhythm section in this band.” Woody would keep giving us a trio feature almost every night that would be like Red Garland kind of stuff. The only other time I think he did that was with Lyle Mays and Alan Broadbent when they were in the band. I knew Woody liked it, and I always appreciated that rhythm section because we were all coming from different places. I was kind of a veteran already, even though I was younger, because I had a lot of experience on the road, and they got theirs in school. We were coming from different places, but it all worked out. Marc’s big dream was to play with Bill Evans, and [he] found this bass when we were on the road in Germany, and he got that bass because he thought it would work well with Bill Evans. Marc left right after I did to play with Bill Evans, which shows the strength of that rhythm section.²¹⁶

Although Hamilton had friends on the band, there were certainly moments of conflict with certain band members. Hamilton recalls,

After one of the first gigs there were three new fusion tunes that hadn’t been recorded, so I couldn’t do homework on those. Woody had turned around and said, “Don’t you have this book memorized yet, pal?” The next day on the bus

²¹⁵ Hamilton, interview by author.
²¹⁶ Ibid.
Frank Tiberi walked down the aisle to come talk to me. He was the straw boss and had been on the band the longest and was possibly bugged because I think we were getting paid the same salary. We played “Giant Steps” on the first set, and Frank and Joe Lovano were doing their tenor battle on the gig. Frank came up, and I had headphones on because I was learning the three new songs, and he hits my shoulder and starts talking about what I should do differently on “Giant Steps.” He was just singing off the wall rhythms and telling me I need to sound more like Elvin Jones. In the middle of his descriptions, I grabbed his arms and said, “Hold it, with all due respect, I know you’re soloing on it, but I’m the drummer in the band. I’m working for the guy sitting in the front seat on the bus. I’m playing the book the way I’ve done my homework on it; now let me get the book down. When I get the book where I want it, I may play behind your solos the way you want me to, but until then don’t forget that I’m playing drums in this band, and you’re playing tenor saxophone.” Frank sort of nervously said “Okay” and turned around and sat back down, and the rest of the band who had been poking their heads out and watching the conversation went back to their seats. He didn’t talk to me the rest of the six months on the band. Even though the band was not all that compatible, we were good. A partial cause of the compatibility issues was probably due to some substance usage on the band. I learned early on back in high school when I saw other guys blow it, and I knew I didn’t want to do that, and I never got wrapped up in any of that. Under the heading of “time heals everything,” at a Woody Herman tribute that Frank was leading at eighty-five years old, he told me, “Man, it was sure great to play that music tonight, and you know you were always one of my favorite drummers in the band.” I almost fell out of my chair, and I couldn’t believe it because earlier he had kept telling me how to play.217

Hamilton had a good connection with tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano and baritone saxophonist Bruce Johnstone who had already played with Maynard Ferguson’s band. Hamilton felt that they appreciated the way he played and what he was bringing to the band.218 Hamilton also realized that Lovano played the drums in addition to being a great saxophonist. Hamilton remembers,

I got sick on the band one night, and I was hanging over the toilet, and I was laughing my butt off, because the band was playing “Deep Purple” or something, and here’s Joe playing the time, and I thought “Man, this sounds great; it’s so loose, kinda Elvinish, and man, this is great! I’ve gotta get sick more often.”219

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217 Hamilton, interview by author.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
Hamilton appreciated the comfortable and calming nature of trumpet players Dennis Dotson and Nelson Hatt. Hamilton says, “There’s a lot of waves on the road in a big band, and Dennis rode the ship in a calm matter, and I always appreciated that. Nelson was right down the middle too.” Musically, Hamilton admired trumpeter Allen Vizzutti. Hamilton recalls,

Vizzutti was nice, and he was a genius right out of Eastman. My first time on the band, I remember walking by one of the dressing rooms, and I thought, “Wow that’s ironic that all five trumpet players were in the same room warming up at the same time.” I poked my head through, and it was just Allen. It was unbelievable. I still don’t understand how he plays some of the stuff he plays. The record Road Father was recorded direct-to-disc, which meant if we had to stop at any point, we would have to restart from the beginning and do the whole side again. You record the entire side at one time. Woody kept going to sleep on the ending of “Firedance,” and I think we did it four times, so what’s on the record is the fourth take, and he just nailed it every time. It was just phenomenal. He was quiet, and he kind of stayed to himself, but we got along okay and connected well.

Hamilton’s relationship with Herman continued to grow and deepen despite the patchy start. Hamilton remembers,

Woody was so great. I felt like a pal once he got over the money issue. He would ask me who I liked and who I listened to, and I would sit on the front steps of the bus, and he was in the front seat. I cherish those moments. That band was his lifeline, and he was thrilled to be on the bus. He was the road father.

While performing with the band Hamilton met Lennie DiMuzio, who was working with the Zildjian cymbal company, and he gave Hamilton his first cymbal endorsement. This happened on the same night he met his musical hero Buddy Rich, albeit under unfortunate circumstances. Hamilton recalls,

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220 Hamilton, interview by author.
221 Ibid.
222 Ibid.
I was kind of shoved in Buddy’s face. We did a battle of the bands with his band one night. Woody’s band and Buddy’s band in Massachusetts. That night we smoked them because he was in a lousy mood, and the band sounded like crap, and he fired a trumpet player during the gig. It sounded so bad that I couldn’t watch it and went back on the bus. I was excited to be sharing the stage with my hero, and Lennie took me backstage to meet Buddy before they played, and it was an inopportune time, and Buddy let us know. I felt bad, but it wasn’t my fault because Lennie should’ve checked to be sure it was okay, but he didn’t and just assumed it was because he was a Zildjian friend. But Buddy got bugged at me for that. After that I couldn’t stand to hear how bad the band sounded because I didn’t want to ruin the inspiration he had given me for twenty years. I was very mad at him that night. Unfortunately, we never connected even after several meetings.\footnote{Hamilton, interview by author.}

Even though Hamilton never had a lasting relationship with Rich, he met and connected with another of his musical heroes, drummer Jake Hanna. Hamilton had studied his playing extensively for his work with Woody Herman’s band. Hamilton remembers,

I first met him in 1977 when we were in London with Woody’s band at Ronnie Scott’s, and he was there with Bing Crosby. We just finished our set with Woody, and he came up to me, and he said, “Well, they finally got a guy on here who knows what he’s doin’!” I asked him if I could buy him a beer, and he said “Sure, let’s hang out.” We hung out all night at the flat just down the street where Hanna and Joe Bushkin, the pianist with Bing, were staying. Those two were just going after each other all night, and I’m just sitting there watching them, just learning and laughing my butt off, and the sun came as I took a taxi back to my hotel at six thirty or something. We weren’t misbehaving or anything, but man, these guys are just hanging, and it was so great to hear all of those stories. I just couldn’t leave, and I think they dug having a twenty-four-year-old guy hanging around and learning this stuff from them. After that night, I was “in” with Jake, and he called me his “ace.” He would say, “My ace, Jefferson Starship Hamilton.” We got along so great, and I loved Jake Hanna, and I miss him.\footnote{Ibid.}

In fact, that meeting was only the beginning of a long close friendship. Opportunities only continued to develop for Hamilton as the band continued to perform all over the world. The band had a gig at Disneyland in Los Angeles in December of 1977, and Jeff
remembered to give Ray Brown a call because he was going to be back in the area. He recalls how important that phone call was,

I called Ray from the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel and said “I was supposed to let you know before I got here, but I’m in town for a week playing at Disneyland with Woody’s band,” and he said “Oh yeah, I’m glad you called me. I got this little band that the drummer just left, and I thought you might be interested in it, and I thought I’d give you a shot at it.” I asked, “What band are you talking about?” He said, “Shelly Manne just left the group, the LA 4. You ever heard of it?” I asked, “Are you serious?” He said, “Yeah, I told you to stay in touch with me.” I said okay, and he asked me where I was staying. I told him the Hollywood Roosevelt, and he said “I’ll have Laurindo send some cassettes over if that’s something you want to do,” and I said “Okay,” and I was stunned but just hung up the phone and said to myself “No kidding!” The next day there was a package delivered, and I started listening to the cassettes. I kept in touch with Ray during our West Coast tour and met up with him while we were recording the first two of the three albums which were Road Father and Flip Phillips Together with Woody Herman. We did Road Father at Capitol Studios. Ray had an office right across the street, so on a lunch break I went there, and he had all of the paperwork drawn up for me to join the LA 4. After I signed the contract, I went back to finish the last three-hour session we had, and I gave my notice to Woody then. I told him, “When we come back to LA to do the record Chick, Donald, Walter, and Woodrow, that will be my last. I’m giving you my notice because I told you I’d stay on for a year, but I’ve wanted to move to LA and play with Ray Brown my whole life, and this is my opportunity to do that.” Woody said “You won’t like that band, pal,” but I said, “Call me if you have any drummer issues, and I’ll come out for a couple weeks at a time because I still owe you six months.”

The records Hamilton recorded with Herman show his versatility and mastery of the various musical demands expected from the drummer of the band. Hamilton remembers,

Woody early on said, “Remember, this is your band, pal!” I thought, “I don’t want my own band; I want to be in your band.” He was saying that because the drums have the most control in directing how the music sounds and feels. Woody’s band was the hardest book for a drummer, because you spanned Davey Tough, to Chick Corea, to arranger John Fedchock, and so on. Arranger Ralph Burns was different; Nat Pierce wrote differently. Really, everybody that wrote for that band had a different thing on it, and they wanted something different out of the drums. I think that’s why they went through a lot of drummers, because

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225 Hamilton, interview by author.
you had over five decades to cover in that band. I didn’t love all of the music but had a great time playing in the band.226

The Road Father record featured music that they had been playing on tour and was a direct-to-disc recording, which was a stressful process because of the risk of someone making a fatal mistake and forcing the whole band to start over and re-record the entire side. Hamilton enjoyed working with Flip Phillips and says, “It was an honor to work with Flip, and I had worked with him at a couple of jazz parties already, but he was in the Apple Honey band, and I loved talking to him about Woody’s band.”227

Hamilton enjoyed working with Chick Corea for the Chick, Donald, Walter, and Woodrow record. That record featured a three-movement suite that Corea wrote specifically for the band and compositions by Donald Fagen and Walter Becker, who were co-leaders of the band Steely Dan. Hamilton recalls the positive experience of working with Corea,

Chick rehearsed us at Berklee while we were on the road, and he asked me if he could sit down and show me what he was thinking of in the middle section. I thought “Okay, here’s another piano player who is gonna show me what to do,” and he sat down and played the drums, and I’m standing with my mouth open, and Joe Lovano yelled from across the room, “I’ll take him,” and I said “Me, too!” Chick was just unbelievable, what a hell of a drummer. Then he took the rhythm section out for lunch and just hung with us, and told us all about playing with Miles Davis and all the bands he was in, just a regular guy.228

Although he would continue to sub occasionally on the band, that period concluded his short but rewarding tenure with the Woody Herman band.

This period was an exciting moment in Hamilton’s life because he was about to move to Los Angeles to join a band with Ray Brown and fill a void that was vacated by

226 Hamilton, interview by author.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
one of the greatest drummers in the history of the music, Shelly Manne. In addition, the move also led to a friendship with Hamilton’s future wife, Joni Lawrence, who was from Los Angeles.

**Living and Working in Los Angeles**

Jeff met Joni while the Woody Herman band was performing at Disneyland in Anaheim in 1977. When Joni found out Jeff was moving to Los Angeles, she gave him her business card in case he needed assistance finding apartments, cars, or similar things, and she would be happy to help since she was a native of Los Angeles.229

Within hours of moving to Los Angeles, Hamilton got a message from Ray Brown about playing a gig at The Baked Potato. He quickly realized that he had no way of getting there and didn’t even know the Baked Potato’s location. At that point, he remembered having Joni’s card, reached into his pocket, found it, and called her from a payphone to ask where the nearest rental car location was by foot.230 According to Hamilton, Joni laughed and said, “Don’t be silly, I’ll take you to the gig.”231 Joni was happy to help out and picked him up in her Opel Kadett.232 Jeff was impressed by her music collection because she had a lot of the top jazz artists of the time on cassette and a great stereo system in her car. Hamilton found out later that after she got his phone call, Joni took her car into the shop to get outfitted with the stereo and then went out to the

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229 Hamilton, interview by author.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
local record shop to buy the top ten jazz records at that time.\textsuperscript{233} That was the beginning of their relationship, which has lasted all of these years since their marriage in 1982.

When Hamilton moved to Los Angeles, he went through a drastic change in lifestyle. Previously, he was used to being on the road almost every day of the year, but now he was off the bus, living in sunny Los Angeles and having the time of his life.\textsuperscript{234} According to Hamilton, having the LA 4 gig was great because it allowed him to control the work he wanted to do, and he got to relax and go hear music that he wanted to hear almost every night of the week.\textsuperscript{235} The LA 4 would only work about three months a year, fly first class to Japan and Europe, stay in five-star hotels, and wear stylish matching uniforms.\textsuperscript{236}

Musically, the transition to playing with Brown was smooth because of all of the homework Hamilton had done. Furthermore, Hamilton had to get in touch with his own voice, because Brown wanted Hamilton to bring his own musical personality to the group. Hamilton recalls,

The first rehearsal was in Ray’s office with Bud Shank, Laurindo Almeida, and Ray Brown. We played a lot of the stuff that they had recorded with Shelly, and I had done my homework, so I was doing exactly what Shelly had played beat-wise. Ray stopped the band and said, “Hey, listen, we hired you for you. I want you to bring to this group what YOU bring to it. I don’t want a carbon copy of Shelly Manne. He’s Shelly Manne, and we love that, but you are one of the four people in this group—we hired you for you. Play what you hear.” It was a huge eye-opener for me and showed that I had arrived. It showed me that I do have my own voice, and that was my beginning with the LA 4.\textsuperscript{237}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{233} Hamilton, interview by author.
  \item \textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The first gig with the group was at the Hong Kong Bar in Los Angeles, and Shelly Manne and his wife, Flip, and Nelson Riddle and his wife came out to see the show and sat at a table right in front of the bandstand.\textsuperscript{238} Hamilton had first met the Mannes while on the road with Monty in Phoenix, Arizona, and they had hit it off when Hamilton moved to Los Angeles. Hamilton states,

> When I first moved to LA, Shelly was the first person who invited me out to his house. It was the first week. He asked me to bring some of my records, and we talked about those. I asked him for advice for playing with the LA 4, and he said, “You’ll know what to do.”\textsuperscript{239}

Unfortunately, their relationship only lasted a number of years, because Manne passed away much too soon at the age of sixty-four. Manne’s wife Florence, who was affectionately known as “Flip,” recalled that Manne had a great deal of respect and admiration for Jeff. She says, “He was coming up at that time, and I remember he and Shelly hung out a lot together, and Shelly called him ‘Youngblood’ because he was quite impressed with Jeff’s playing. He always had so much fun hanging out with Jeff.”\textsuperscript{240}

Hamilton didn’t have many time commitments during the day, and the salary he received from the LA 4 supported him well.\textsuperscript{241} Therefore, he began teaching a little bit, playing tennis, and taking more gigs even though they didn’t pay as much. However, Ray Brown helped Hamilton recognize this wasn’t great for business. Hamilton states,

> Ray started guiding me business-wise. He said “You can’t play Donte’s for thirty-five dollars a night, because I called the owner for a gig there, and he asked me why am I charging so much money, since Shelly is out of the band, and your drummer plays for thirty-five dollars a night at my club.” I didn’t play at the club much after that, but Ray helped guide me through setting your own bar of what you had to get paid; otherwise you should expect people to pay you fifty dollars

\textsuperscript{238} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{240} Florence Manne, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, March 24, 2016.
\textsuperscript{241} Hamilton, interview by author.
for a gig the rest of your life. Besides, it didn’t look good for Ray Brown to have a thirty-five-dollar drummer. It was very helpful. 242

Hamilton rarely practiced, but spent most days listening to a lot of music. Hamilton states,

I’m a believer in osmosis. If you are singing it, and you hear it, and you internalize it, you can visualize how it’s going to lay with your limbs. Then you know you don’t have to practice it because you have the confidence, and then you sit down and play it next time you’re at the drums. 243

Not long after Hamilton joined the LA 4 the group was in the studio and recorded Watch What Happens. This was an important moment for Hamilton because he felt that he had arrived. Ray Brown had hired Hamilton, which was a dream that became a reality. 244

Brown wanted everyone in the group to contribute compositionally, and Hamilton had almost no compositions to his name up to that point. Hamilton recalls,

Ray made me start writing, it was one of the things he wanted me to do in the LA 4. I played bad arrangers’ piano, and I can spell out chords, but it takes me a long time to write. Most of the writing I did came from writing for the drum line in high school. “Hammertones,” which I wrote for the LA 4, was based on cowbell melodies, which they thought was great, and I thought it was horrible. Arranging was kind of funny because Ray said, “Write one of those new things you guys are playing,” and I asked, “What’s that?” “You know like that Chick Corea thing, where everybody is clapping on it.” I said “Spain?” “Yeah, that thing, why don’t you do that?” I said, “Okay, it’s not really in my wheelhouse, but okay.” I brought in my first arrangement, and I was scared to death. They read it, and it was going well, and we get to the unison part, and Ray stops playing. He says “Hold it,” waves his hand, and everybody stops. He says “Hamsky, come here. What’s that note?” I said, “It’s a low D.” He says, “That’s right, what’s my lowest note?” I said “An E,” and thought, “Oh man, I’m sorry.” He says, “That’s alright,” and he puts his arm around me, and he says, “I’m good, but not that good.” I fixed it, and we moved on. That was the kind of love they showed me. The situation could have easily gone south in a different group with different

242 Hamilton, interview by author.
243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
people, but they helped me a lot, and they knew I was just starting out. They were cool about it.\textsuperscript{245}

In addition to recording and touring with the LA 4, Hamilton established a relationship with Concord Records and began doing more freelance recording with musicians such as guitarist Cal Collins, bassist Monty Budwig, bassist Bob Magnusson, pianist Larry Vuckovich, bassist Bob Maize, multiple woodwind artist Ted Nash, and pianist Randy Kerber.

**The Bill Holman Big Band**

Another exciting opportunity arose when Hamilton got a call from Bill Holman asking him to join his big band. Even though the band rarely performed publicly, they rehearsed every week, and Hamilton would go to their rehearsals to listen to the band when he first moved to Los Angeles. Hamilton recalls, “I wanted to hear the band, and Nick Ceroli was playing drums. I loved hearing him because it wasn’t like Mel Lewis playing the Holman band, but Nick brought his own thing to it, and it was great.”\textsuperscript{246}

There was a period when Ceroli was transitioning out of the band, and Holman tried a few different drummers, and then Jeff got the call.\textsuperscript{247} Bill Holman had heard Hamilton perform with Woody Herman’s band and admired Hamilton’s playing. Holman recalls, “To hear him, you want to have him in your band, and that is what I did. It was great having him in the band.”\textsuperscript{248} Hamilton was a little on edge at the first rehearsal because Holman was an arranging institution. Holman had a calm demeanor

\textsuperscript{245} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{248} Bill Holman, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, March 22, 2016.
when rehearsing the band, which made it difficult for Hamilton to get an accurate read on what Holman was thinking.\textsuperscript{249} At the first rehearsal Hamilton recalls,

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I was looking over at Bob Cooper and Conte Candoli who were both at the first rehearsal. I wasn’t sure what to think because they were working through different drummers at the time, but at the same time I had the confidence to know that I was going to bring something to the band that the guys who preceded me didn’t bring. I heard them all with the band, and I had an ace in the hole that Ray Brown moved me out here to be his drummer when he could have had any of these guys. I never swaggered with that, but I always kept that as a way to help me with my musical confidence. The band would always start rehearsals with a tune from the old book, like “Bright Eyes,” “Stompin’ At The Savoy,” or “You Go to My Head” and then would immediately jump into the new stuff. It took me a bit to adjust to the band. I remember during the second rehearsal Holman stopped the band and said, “Jeff, don’t try to make this more than it actually is,” and I said “Okay, got it.” It was an important lesson for me because his swing eighth notes are different, and I was getting the music hot when he didn’t want it hot.\textsuperscript{250}
\end{quote}

Holman loved musical drummers and knew he had found his new drummer at the first rehearsal. Holman states,

\begin{quote}
I wasn’t that familiar with the way he played before. I just heard him out one night with Woody, and he sounded beautiful with that band, and I didn’t stop to think to even ask him to change anything to play with us. It sounded to me what I thought he was doing with Woody would work fine with us, too. I don’t know how much adjusting he had to do, but he knows more about that than I do. I think drummers can contribute to the form of a piece, in the way they select which cymbal they’re gonna play on or approach a section of a piece. Mel was great at that; they talk about Buddy Rich hearing a chart for the first time and being able to play it. Mel had some of that, too, because I did a lot of work in Germany and would go over there with an hour’s worth of new music and have to rehearse it, and Mel was a big help because he knew when to change colors, and he just absorbed the whole chart, and Jeff can do that, too. He’s very musical. The big wrap on drummers is that they aren’t musicians—they’re just timekeepers, and that’s not true. The drummer is as much of a musician as anyone else, a good drummer. They contribute to the sound of a chart, and Jeff has all of those things down, and it was just seamless, I didn’t have to tell him what to do at all. His time was steady as a rock, I have a lot of trouble with drummers around here, because they tend to rush when they’re reading. They get their mind onto the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{249} Hamilton, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.
According to Hamilton, he spent more time studying Bill Holman’s music than he did with most of his other gigs even though the group only rehearsed once a week and rarely performed publicly. Hamilton says, “That’s when I jumped in with both feet with Mel Lewis because I just heard how perfect everything was with Holman’s music. I would say ‘Well, I would do this, but it doesn’t work,’ and I would hear what Mel did and say, ‘That works.’ I had to own up to it.”

Concord Festivals

Meanwhile, the LA 4 recorded their next album, Just Friends, in 1978, direct-to-disc in Capitol’s Studio A. The following year, Hamilton recorded two performances at the Montreux Jazz Festival. The first was with Herb Ellis and Michael Moore, and the second was with the LA 4. It proved to be a stressful event. Hamilton recalls,

That night was a fiasco. Carl Jefferson got a Concord night at the Montreux Jazz Festival, and he brought out Concord artists for the whole night. They would just record everything, and I had never played in a trio with Herb except for one time in Arizona. Carl decided to put Michael Moore on bass with Herb and me. Unfortunately, on the trip over Michael had just put his bass on the plane in a canvas case, and it had gotten smashed on the plane because it wasn’t in a flight case. He had to use Ray’s bass, and he broke a string during the session, and the LA 4 went on right after that. Ray was livid, first of all because Moore put his bass on the plane without a protective flight case, then [because] Moore got mad at the airlines because it got broken. I think Michael Moore is a fantastic musician, and I enjoy playing with him, but most people felt it was a bad decision. Then after he broke the string, the whole night felt kind of uneasy. I feel like Herb’s record is probably the worst record I did as far as having to hold the reins and make sure tempos didn’t get away from anybody because I had so much on my mind that night with worrying about the LA 4 record after that, and I hadn’t

251 Holman, interview by author.
252 Hamilton, interview by author.
253 Ibid.
played with Michael before. If it was me, I wouldn’t have put that record out. Then with the LA 4 record, we were still unnerved about the bass, and Ray wasn’t happy. I felt that throughout the performance, and I hear that when I listen to it, but that is the record that my tune “Hammertones” is on.254

Besides dedicating a night to Concord artists at the Montreux Jazz Festival, Carl Jefferson put on an annual Concord Jazz Festival at the Concord Pavilion in Concord, California. Since all the artists were in town for the festival, Jefferson would often have them go into the studio the following days.255 Hamilton did three records that weekend, and the first was *Live at the Concord Jazz Festival 1979* which featured Ray Brown on bass, Monty Alexander on piano, and Ernestine Anderson on vocals. Hamilton recalls,

I hadn’t played with her yet, but Ray had revitalized her career, which he was very good at doing. He did it with several people, including Gene Harris. Ray and I were in earlier in the weekend to play with the LA 4 for the festival, and Monty was going to come in the next day and do the trio set with Ray, and then we were going to add Ernestine. Now there was a boxing match that day, and Monty is a huge boxing fan, and it went more rounds than expected. Monty got off the plane and heard the roar from the bar and walked into the bar and watched the fight, and it went another round, then another round. He ended up missing his connection from the airport to drive him to the festival. I still don’t know how he got to the festival, probably a taxi. Ray and I are backstage ready to go on in ten minutes, and Monty’s not there, and Ernestine isn’t there. Ray says, “I guess we’re gonna find out how good we are—we’ll just go out and do our own concert.” We were talking about what we could do, and then Carl Jefferson is on stage announcing us, “Jeff Hamilton on the drums,” and I hear someone behind me, and I turn around, and there is Monty coming straight from the airport with his bag on his shoulder, running onto the bandstand as they announced him after me. Ray was bugged, and we got out there, and Monty asks, “What are we gonna play, boss?” Ray says, “Let’s play ‘Blue Bossa’ and let Hammer have it.” We played “Blue Bossa,” and then he called every tune like that, and that’s how we did that set. Ray kept looking over, “Is Ernestine here yet?” We played another one, “Is Ernestine here now?” Then it was, “Ladies and gentleman, Ernestine Anderson,” and she came out, and we went into “Georgia.” She asked, “What key?” He said, “Just sing!” So that is how we did that record, and there is a lot of editing on that, because she wasn’t sure how we were gonna end each song. That’s part of the reason you hear all that extra scatting, but it turned out it was a great record. The next day we were all staying at the Concord Inn, and the motel

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254 Hamilton, interview by author.
255 Ibid.
was spread out. We drove around to pick up Ernestine in the rental car to drive into San Francisco to record, and she couldn’t walk, because she had turned her ankle in the parking lot after the gig the previous night. She was in a lot of pain and was saying she can’t sing and can’t walk. Ray and I got on each side of her and lifted her up and said, “Just take a step—it’s not broken,” and she took a step and said, “Oh,” and then took another step, and then Monty started singing “I’m Walkin,’” and she started laughing. We got into the car and then got to the studio, and we started with “I’m Walkin,’” and she tore it up. That was how we started the session for the Sunshine record. That tune obviously wasn’t planned before, and nothing was planned, just like the concert. That was typical of the Concord sessions; we just went in and went, “Let’s see what happens; we’ve just got to be done by six.” The next day we went in and did Monty’s Record Facets. To this day, it’s my wife’s favorite record. It’s still in her car. She loves that CD.256

Following the Concord festival, Hamilton had more freelance recording opportunities for Concord, including his first recording with singer Rosemary Clooney, recording her album Rosemary Clooney Sings the Lyrics of Ira Gershwin. He also recorded with tenor saxophonist Scott Hamilton on his album Tenor Shoes that features Dave McKenna on piano and Phil Flanigan on bass.

**The Clayton Brothers**

Hamilton was part of John and Jeff Clayton’s first Clayton Brothers recordings: Jeff and John, recorded in 1978, and It’s All In The Family, recorded in 1980. John Clayton recalls the formation of the group,

My brother and I had done some gigs together, but we didn’t play a lot of gigs together growing up. We started doing some local gigs together, not billed as the Clayton Brothers, but just playing little local gigs. Then we wanted to officially do the Clayton Brothers, and then we called Jeff because we already had the time with the Dorsey Band and the years with Monty Alexander, and now I was with the Basie band, and Jeff had been with Woody’s band and was playing with the LA 4, and Ray Brown could organize a deal with Concord records that let me do a record with my brother.257

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256 Hamilton, interview by author.
257 Clayton, interview by author.
Soon after those first recordings, John Clayton moved to Holland to live with his
girlfriend and future wife, Tineke, whom Clayton married in 1980, and Clayton won the
principal bass position with the Amsterdam Philharmonic. Hamilton continued recording
and touring with the LA 4, recording Zaca next in 1980. The album had an Aztec Indian
drawn on the front cover, and according to Hamilton, Brown was always joking that it
was Hamilton on the front with a shower cap.  

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The LA 4 and The Jeff Hamilton Quintet

Hamilton continued to develop his own unique voice on the drum set while
performing with Ray Brown and the LA 4. One thing he is known for is playing
extended drum solos and switching from playing with sticks or brushes to playing with
his hands. His trademark hand solos developed by accident while on the road with the LA
4 in Nanaimo, Canada. Hamilton recalls, “That night was the first night I played a hand
solo. I dropped the sticks by accident and just went for it.”

Later, he had the opportunity to organize a band of his own design and recorded his
first album as a leader in 1982. Hamilton recalls,

My Indiana record came about because Ray, Laurindo, and Bud were established
as leaders, and Shelly had been a leader. The idea to do Indiana and make me a
leader would elevate the LA 4 as leaders, selling them and offering us as a group
instead of three leaders and a drummer. Ray thought about that and thought it
was a good idea, and he suggested it to Bob Golden, who worked for Concord
Records and brought the idea to Carl Jefferson. I put together a group with Bob
Cooper on tenor saxophone and Lanny Morgan on alto saxophone, who I had
played with in Bill Holman’s band. In my head, I thought they would make a
good blend. Of course Clayton had to be on it, and I played with pianist Biff
Hannon on a couple things, and it felt good. He was right off of Maynard’s band,

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258 Hamilton, interview by author.
259 Ibid.
and I liked him on that band, and he moved to LA, and I thought it would be a great addition.\textsuperscript{260}

Hamilton continued his work with the LA 4 and recorded two more records with them, 
\textit{Montage} in 1981 and \textit{Executive Suite} in 1982. However, the writing was on the wall for the group, and it soon folded in 1983. Hamilton remembers,

The group had run its course, and there was starting to be dissention within the band because of the musical direction of the group. Everybody wanted to go a little different way. I was kind of standing on the sidelines, and I wasn’t active in the discussions. I just deferred to the other three original leaders. Ron Eschete did the last three or four gigs with us on guitar to see if that was going to work to go in a more jazz direction, but Bud moved to Seattle, and everyone just thought it was maybe time to let the group go.\textsuperscript{261}

The timing was not ideal for Hamilton financially, because he had just gotten married to Joni and bought a house in Glendale the same month.\textsuperscript{262} However, despite being out of a gig, Hamilton was still happy to be in Los Angeles. He recalls,

I didn’t have any plans to move at that point, because I loved Los Angeles. I thought, “This is the place for me, man.” I bought a house, and two miles up the road at the top of the canyon was a tennis court. I played with Ed Shaugnessy and Monty Budwig. Budwig was my tennis partner, and we played every day. I’d also play with Shaugnessy many days before he went to work at The Tonight Show.\textsuperscript{263}

\textbf{Monty Alexander, John Clayton, Jeff Hamilton}

In this period of transition, Hamilton filled his days by freelancing and reunited for a series of shows in Europe with Monty Alexander and John Clayton. In fact, the gigs were going so well, they decided to do a recording session, which materialized into the \textit{Reunion in Europe} record. Hamilton recalls,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{260} Hamilton, interview by author. \\
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
I called Carl Jefferson and told him “You need to record this trio; we’re on tour, and we’re burning it up,” and Jefferson put me in charge of the project. It turned out to be a drag because we did it in a studio in Stuttgart, and they had these white Gretsch drums that weren’t mine. To make matters worse, the engineer wasn’t jazz knowledgeable, so all the drum sounds are coming through the microphones in the piano. That resulted in me sounding like I’m just a touch behind everybody on that record, and that drives me nuts because I know how I played it. You hear me on any other record with Monty, and it’s not like that, but I just sound a little lazy on everything because the sound is traveling so far. That record bugs me.264

In addition to the reunion tours, Hamilton continued to freelance and record in a variety of settings, including reuniting with Woody Herman for Rosemary Clooney’s record My Buddy: Rosemary Clooney and Woody Herman, which was recorded in August of 1983 for Concord.

**Ella Fitzgerald**

In 1984, Hamilton got a call from jazz impresario Norman Granz about performing with Ella Fitzgerald. The call came because Granz had been keeping his eye on Hamilton and admired his work with Ray Brown.265 Hamilton recalls,

> The first rehearsal was in Beverly Hills, and Ella was very kind. I don’t think she ever made the connection that I had played with Ray unless Norman told her, but she never brought it up. She had a beautiful house with a swimming pool, and there were always kids at the pool. All of them called her Aunt Ella, and I don’t know if they were related or not, but she loved kids. Frank DeLaRosa played bass, and Paul Smith was the piano player. Keter Betts was her bass player for twenty or thirty years, but he lived in Washington, D.C., and DeLaRosa would do the rehearsals here, and we would put together the show that Keter would come in and play. Guitarist Joe Pass actually showed up at the first concert, which was at El Camino College in Torrance, California. It was Paul, Keter, and Joe right next to my twenty-two-inch ride cymbal. I had listened to Ella’s and Joe’s recordings so much that I just couldn’t believe that I was on the bandstand with these people, and Ella was so great. I was playing it a little safe and where I thought I should be, in order to feel things out, and she turned around after the first tune smiling, and said “Give it to me, honey!” I said “Okay,” and in my mind, I went to those

264 Hamilton, interview by author.
265 Ibid.
recordings of Ella with Gus Johnson and started playing like that. She turned around and winked at me, and that was it.\textsuperscript{266}

Hamilton had a ball performing with Fitzgerald and had a tremendous amount of respect for her. He recalls,

\begin{quote}
The one thing that will remain with me the rest of my life was how humble she was. She was like a little sixteen-year-old girl and just so nice. She would walk off the stage first, and she’d be standing there, asking, “Was I okay tonight, fellas?” I thought, “What are you talking about—you’re Ella Fitzgerald!”\textsuperscript{267}
\end{quote}

Hamilton enjoyed spending time with the other members as well. Hamilton remembers,

“Paul and I played tennis, Keter and I played golf, and Joe liked to hang out with me because I’d smoke a cigar with him and listen to him complain. It was fun, and I hit it off with all three of them.”\textsuperscript{268}

The gig with Fitzgerald was enjoyable but only lasted one year because she had some health issues that forced her to cancel some dates towards the end of the year.

\textbf{The Count Basie Band}

Fortunately for Hamilton, great performance opportunities continued to develop.

Soon after working with Ella, Hamilton got a call from the Basie Band. Hamilton states,

I got called with one day’s notice, saying, “You’ve gotta come out. We have a guy out here who didn’t do his homework, so we need someone now. Could you fly out to Kansas City?” I got out of the gig I had locally, and I went on the band, and I loved it. Clay Jenkins was on the band, and Byron Stripling was playing lead trumpet. Basie had died recently about a month or two earlier, so Tee Carson was on piano, but the rest of the band was the same.\textsuperscript{269}

\textsuperscript{266} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid.
Hamilton was thrilled to be playing with the band and had fulfilled another one of his musicals dreams, which now left Oscar Peterson as the final entry on his list of groups he wanted to play with. The Basie band performed concerts and dances all over the country. The concerts would be a bit shorter and featured some of the hotter pieces from Basie, while the dances often lasted more than four hours and featured a lot of the medium swing compositions. Hamilton recalls,

We were walking into a dance, and it was the fourth dance in a row that we played. I said to Freddie Green, “Another dance tonight, huh, Freddie?” He said, “You don’t like dances?” I said, “Well I like dances, but we’ve had four of them in a row. I like the concert stuff, too, when I can get hot and play ‘The Heat is On’ and ‘Whirly Bird.’” Freddie said, “Oh, give me a dance anytime.” I asked him, “Why do you like dances so much?” He said “In the first eight bars I look out on the dance floor, and I find the couple that I’m gonna ride all night. That makes a four-hour dance go by in forty-five minutes. Try it tonight.” He was absolutely right, and the dance that night was over in no time. If I can find a couple that can dance, it feels like I’m playing for them. I still do that on dances, and I think about that when people aren’t dancing, too. I don’t think there’s enough dance in people’s ride cymbal beat, because they don’t understand the swing dance and how it’s supposed to feel when you swing. I’m not talking about old-man dance bands; I’m talking about having a swing in your beat that makes people want to move.270

Hamilton played many classics from the Basie repertoire with the band: “All of Me,” “Shiny Stockings,” “Moten Swing,” “Corner Pocket,” and “Li’l Darlin’.” Hamilton knew every note that the original drummers played on the recordings through his study of the great drummers that preceded him. Hamilton recalls,

I have favorite Basie drummers for different reasons. I like Papa Jo Jones because he revolutionized how the big band should be played and streamlined. I love Gus Johnson because he was like an old rocking chair, and I just loved the way he made the band feel comfortable. I love Sonny Payne for the fire, the excitement, and the fills. I loved Harold Jones too, who was from Richmond, and you have to tip your hat to Butch Miles.271

270 Hamilton, interview by author.
271 Ibid.
After his short stint with the Basie Band Hamilton continued to record and perform with a wide variety of different musicians, and all along the way, he never had to compromise his musical preferences in order to get work. In fact, he was making a great living playing jazz music professionally during a period where rock and fusion dominated the jazz soundscape. Hamilton recalls the climate,

There was a lot of dislike and hate, especially when fusion was the big seller in jazz. If you didn’t plug in, artists were putting you down. Keith Jarrett came out with an article, right after he left Charles Lloyd, saying, “If you have to rely on Gershwin and Cole Porter standards, well how can you consider yourself a true jazz artist, without playing your original compositions and moving the music forward?” I thought to myself, “Hey, we’re out here trying to make a living playing jazz.” Looking back now, what have his last thirty records been? It’s hypocritical, and you were trying to put me out of business. Now you’re playing Disney Hall with what you thought was “not jazz,” so what do you call what you’re doing? I don’t get caught up in that stuff because those are opinions of other people. I have a standard, and if I meet my standard, then I’m pretty sure that I’m going to meet everybody else’s standard of quality for what I’m doing. Whether or not you like what I’m doing, or like me as a person, you’ve got to give it up because it’s a certain quality. If you don’t understand that quality, then I can’t do much more to help you.  

Indeed, Hamilton’s quality led him to more opportunities to perform and record with the masters of the music. In 1985, Hamilton recorded as part of the Bob Cooper and Snooky Young sextet entitled *In a Mellowtone*. It featured Cooper on tenor saxophone, Young on trumpet, Ross Tompkins on piano, Monty Budwig on bass, Doug McDonald on guitar, and Ernie Andrews on vocals.

**Formation of the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra**

Hamilton and John Clayton had been talking about starting a big band since they were in college. Hamilton recalls,

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272 Hamilton, interview by author.
When we were with Monty, we carried a little plastic portable record player that folded up like a briefcase, and we would listen to records while we were on the road. We’d play Thad Jones and Mel Lewis Orchestra records all the time, and that was when we decided we needed to start a big band.\textsuperscript{273}

According to Hamilton, Clayton had started to think about writing more around this time as well and didn’t start until he began working with the Basie band. Hamilton states,

His first chart was not particularly good, as he would tell you. The Basie band didn’t like to rehearse, and they played his tune, and it didn’t go well, and nobody said anything. I think a couple of guys encouraged him to keep working on his writing, but he was determined to get better, and he dove into the classics of the Basie book. He studied the writing of Frank Foster, Frank Wess, Quincy Jones, Billy Byers, and Neil Hefti. The second thing he brought to the band was “Blues for Stephanie,” and at the end, Basie said, “Let’s do that one more [than] once,” so John knew it was okay. After the Basie band, when John moved to Holland, he started working on his writing. He’d send me cassettes of charts he’d do with a student band he was working with. He also got in touch with Quincy Jones while he was out there and kept learning from different composers. He said “We’re gonna stay here for five years, and then I’m gonna move back to Los Angeles, and we can start the band then.” His brother Jeff was most in touch with the personnel because he had been living there and playing and not on the road like I was.\textsuperscript{274}

In April of 1985, after John had moved back, Jeff Clayton put together the personnel for the band. The trumpet section was Snooky Young, Bobby Bryant, Oscar Brashear, and Clay Jenkins. The trombones were George Bohanon, Ira Nepus, Thurman Green, and Maurice Spears. The saxophones were Bill Green, Jeff Clayton, Rickey Woodard, Bob Hardaway, and Lee Callet. The rhythm section was Mike Lang on piano, Doug MacDonald on guitar, Herb Mickman and John Clayton on bass, and Hamilton on drums.

John Clayton recalls,

I knew from the first rehearsal that these were all such heavy weight players, that the only way I was going to keep it together was if I made the music as strong as I could and if possible, as personal. I knew I had to write for the individuals, and that’s what I started doing. I would think, “What can I write for the different

\textsuperscript{273} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.
musicians?” We had a singer early on, so the chart I did on “Georgia,” that now features Rickey Woodard was originally a vocal feature. Little by little, it just kind of evolved. They loved being together as people, and that made a big difference. My brother knew exactly what he was doing when he brought those people together.²⁷⁵

The band’s first performance was at the Hyatt hotel on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. Hamilton remembers,

The nineteen-piece band out numbered the audience, but we played, and we were off and running. We thought afterwards that we’ve got something to build on here, and the responses were great, and we just kept putting it together. We put more money into the band and eventually funded our own record.²⁷⁶

Monty Alexander, Gene Harris, and the Ray Brown Trio

While the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra was starting to gain momentum, Hamilton remained busy with other performance and recording opportunities. He continued to perform with Monty Alexander and John Clayton and recorded three albums: Lil Darlin’, a Japanese release in 1986; To Nat, With Love for the Zanda label in 1986, which featured Harry “Sweets” Edison on trumpet, John Collins on guitar, and Robert Thomas, Jr. on percussion; and guitarist Barney Kessel’s album Spontaneous Combustion in 1987, which featured the trio with Clayton and Alexander.

An important gig for Hamilton was the Gene Harris All Star Big Band, which was formed in 1987 for the recording Tribute to Count Basie. The band developed through Ray Brown’s association with businessman Ben Rubin. According to Hamilton,

Ray had been complaining to Ben about the recording industry, so Ben offered to go into business with Ray and do it right. Ray agreed, and they assembled an all-star big band, and the record turned out to earn a Grammy Award Nomination.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Clayton, interview by author.
²⁷⁶ Hamilton, interview by author.
²⁷⁷ Ibid.
The trumpet section was Snooky Young, Jon Faddis, Conte Candoli, Frank Szabo, and Bobby Bryant. The trombone section was Charlie Loper, Bill Watrous, Thurman Green, Garnet Brown, and Bill Reichenbach. The saxophone section was Marshal Royal on lead alto, Bill Green on alto, Jackie Kelson on alto, Bob Cooper on tenor, Plas Johnson on tenor, and Jack Nimitz on baritone. The rhythm section was Herb Ellis on guitar, Ray Brown and James Leary on bass, and Hamilton on drums.

Hamilton had been well aware of pianist Gene Harris from his trio The Three Sounds because Andy Simpkins, the bassist in the group, was from Hamilton’s hometown of Richmond, Indiana. Hamilton had been watching Harris play in Ray Brown’s trio with drummer Mickey Roker. However, Hamilton didn’t know that Roker had given his notice for Ray Brown’s trio right before Brown and Harris went into the studio to make the Gene Harris All Star Big Band record. Hamilton recalls,

Mickey was about ready to leave, because he didn’t want to travel as much. He gave his resignation after they finished their Japanese tour. Gene Harris told me later that he walked up to Ray Brown at that session and said to Ray, “It looks like we’ve got our next drummer!” That’s how I got the gig with Ray’s trio then. Ray offered me the gig with his trio in Glendale where I lived at the time. He was getting his bass fixed down the street and asked to meet at the Good Earth Restaurant. I knew something was up because he doesn’t invite me to a restaurant unless he’s got something in mind and he wants to talk me into something. He said “I know you don’t want to be on the road that much, but Mickey left the trio. Are you interested in it?” I said “I don’t want to be on the road that much, but I’ve always wanted to play with you, and I’m not gonna say no, but I am married, and I don’t want to be on the road all year.” He said, “Let’s try it and see if it feels right.”

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278 Hamilton, interview by author.
279 Ibid.
Hamilton had been going to watch the trio every night and wasn’t sure if he would be compatible with Harris. Hamilton recalls,

> It sounded good, but Gene just had this heaviness to his groove. It didn’t sound like Oscar and Monty to me. To a lot of other people it did, but when you’re on the bandstand with Monty and have studied Oscar that much, it didn’t sound like that to me.”

At first it was difficult for Hamilton to adjust to playing with Harris and he wasn’t quite sure how to make it work musically. Hamilton remembers,

> After the first night playing with Gene, Ray asked, “What’s the matter?” I said, “Gene feels different to play with. It’s different to play with him than to listen to him.” He said, “Like what?” I just said, “It feels heavy, and I feel like you and I have to adjust to what he’s doing. He’s not coming to us so we have to adjust to what he does.” Ray says “So?” I said “Yeah, but usually I don’t have to do that.” Ray said forcefully, “I wanna play with him! I got him out of Boise, Idaho, and I wanna play with him!” I said “Okay.” Ray told me, “Just think about playing with him tomorrow night; if he goes a little bit then go a little bit, but don’t worry about it.” I kept that in mind during the second night and thought, “Okay, I don’t have to keep it here. I can kind of bend,” and the more I did that, the less Gene did. The more he felt me being flexible, whether he was aware of it or not, the less he would move, and I learned how to play with him. Gene and I hit it off after those first gigs. I saw him in the parking lot the next morning, and I said “It sure is an honor to play with the piano player from the Three Sounds.” He laughed, and he said, “You know about that, huh?” I said, “I’m from Richmond, Indiana, like Andy Simpkins.” He offered, “You sure sounded good last night.” After we connected personally it helped a lot musically, too. Those first gigs may have just been him getting out of his semi-retirement phase because we seemed to gel from then on.⁹²¹

Hamilton got close with Harris and his wife Janie Harris. In fact, Jeff and Janie would do a Louis Prima and Keely Smith act that would have everyone laughing.⁹²² The close friendship they shared led to a strong mutual respect in the group. Hamilton recalls,

> I knew what Gene and Ray did, Gene knew what Ray and I did, and Ray respected both of us. We all knew what the music needed and who needed to do what at the time. I think that’s why that trio was so good, because nobody talked

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⁹²⁰ Hamilton, interview by author.
⁹²¹ Ibid.
⁹²² Ibid.
about it; we just kind of knew each other, and nobody ever needed to look at each other to give a cue if somebody needed to get it hot or cool it. It just kind of happened.  

**Becoming a Jazz Legend**

During this time, Hamilton became so busy that he could no longer play with Bill Holman’s band every week. Regardless, Hamilton was still Holman’s drummer of choice and would do a limited number of gigs. He recorded the album *World Class* for JVC Records in 1987, which earned a Grammy Award Nomination.  

Hamilton had rehearsed a lot of the material on the record and had gone over to Cologne with Holman while they both worked with the WDR Big Band. This was a unique opportunity, because Holman would go over there at least once a year and would often bring Mel Lewis with him. If Lewis was too busy, Hamilton would go over instead. Hamilton recalls, “We’d have Johnny Griffin, James Moody, and Ferdinand Povel as guests with the band playing Holman’s arrangements.”

Reflecting on this period in Hamilton’s career, it is most impressive. Hamilton’s recording credits in 1988 alone read as a jazz greats text, recording with musicians George Shearing, Ernestine Anderson, Neil Swainson, Jackie Cain, Ray Kral, Conte Candoli, Bill Watrous, Bob Cooper, Bill Perkins, Monty Budwig, Rosemary Clooney, Scott Hamilton, John Clayton, Harry “Sweets” Edison, Red Holloway, Mel Torme, Marty Paich, and many others.

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283 Hamilton, interview by author.
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid.
Getting called for these sessions was not coincidence, and the volume and quality of work Hamilton was doing was a direct result of the work he had already done and continued to do. He was no longer an up-and-coming jazz musician; he had become a living jazz legend.

Hamilton recorded his first three albums with the Ray Brown Trio in 1988: *Summer Wind*, which was live at Ray Brown’s Loa Club in July; *Bam Bam Bam*, which was recorded in Japan in December; and *Mr. Blue*, which was recorded in Japan in December but featured vibraphonist Takashi Ohi.

The following year, Hamilton recorded *Super Bass*, which was a project John Clayton put together with his brother Jeff, Ray Brown, and Freddie Green. They played John’s arrangements that prominently featured the basses. Hamilton enjoyed the opportunity to work with Freddie Green again, and this was another recorded document of his close relationship with his best friend John Clayton.287

Hamilton did a record with Gene Harris, billed as the Gene Harris quartet with Ray Brown on bass and Ron Eschete on guitar. It was Carl Jefferson’s idea to make Harris into a band leader instead of just a member of Ray’s trio. Although Harris, Brown, and Hamilton remained together for a few years after that recording, Hamilton had learned from his experience with the LA 4 to have different projects going on. Hamilton states,

> After the LA 4 folded, I learned not to put all my eggs in one basket. That was a tough transition because I had to shuffle to get enough work together. Now it was nice because I was with the Clayton Brothers, freelancing a lot, playing with Ray’s trio. Jake Hanna was sending me on stuff, such as Peter Nero concerts and recording for Concord. The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra was a great addition.288

287 Hamilton, interview by author.
288 Ibid.
Indeed, the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, which at this point had been together for four years, was starting to build a positive following and gain momentum.

**The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra**

The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra recorded their first record, *Groove Shop*, in 1989. Hamilton recalls the session,

> We played at Evergreen Studios in Burbank, and Johnny Mandel was in the booth as a producer helping Clayton listen for stuff. He had a direct line to Clayton because he’s not always tactful and would say stuff in a way that we didn’t want the whole band to hear. I played a set of drums that had belonged to Larance Marable that I traded a cymbal for. I put calfskin heads on them, and they sounded so good that I wanted to play them on the record.²⁸⁹

The record received a lot of positive attention, including a Grammy nomination, and the band started to receive offers to play various music festivals such as the Monterey Jazz Festival, Concord Jazz Festival, and the Playboy Jazz Festival, which was exciting for the group.²⁹⁰

The band was unique because it was a tri-led effort between Jeff Clayton, John Clayton, and Jeff Hamilton. After four years, it was apparent that this group was special. John Clayton had found and developed his unique voice as a composer and arranger and successfully found ways to engage and feature each member of the band. Clayton’s music successfully marries the power of the blues and swing, with modern harmony and orchestration and engaging dynamic contrast. The overarching result equally engages the band members and the audience alike, which creates a truly unique performance experience. Bill Holman states,

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²⁸⁹ Hamilton, interview by author.
²⁹⁰ Ibid.
John does almost all of the writing for the band, and he found a great group for his writing with the joint-led band. He’s got the old time feel with very adventurous charts, and it’s refreshing to hear his music. He’s got a great imagination, but he puts it out in a context of a traditional big band sound, which makes it really interesting. It’s always a trip to hear the band.\textsuperscript{291}

The music and arrangements of the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra showcased Hamilton’s true mastery of the Big Band genre. Hamilton recalls,

I feel strongly that every composer and arranger has a drummer in mind when they write. Bill Holman had Mel Lewis in his mind; Bob Florence had Nick Ceroli; Ellington had Sonny Greer, then Louie Bellson and Sam Woodyard. John and I grew up playing together, and I am the drummer he hears in his head when he’s writing. There are many different times when he will pull up a brand new piece of music, and I don’t even care about the road map because I trust him so much. It doesn’t even have to feature me, but I don’t have to be worried about a seventeen-bar phrase grabbing me, or a bar of 5/4 stuck in the middle. It would be the way I would write a drum part because he asked me how to do that. He was smart enough to ask me for ideas during a shout chorus, and we’d listen to a lot of stuff together and talk about it. I hardly even have to look at him because I know what he’s gonna do next. It’s not that it’s predictable, I just know him well enough, and I know he’s gonna do this now, or he’s gonna cool out the trombones here. It’s just knowing somebody that long and developing that musical trust. It helps having the same goals and the same perception of what it can be, and then achieving that together is very rewarding.\textsuperscript{292}

The other important component in the band’s success, in addition to the quality of the music, is the friendship among the musicians. Trumpeter Clay Jenkins recalls,

We get along so well, we’re like a family. One time I was getting busy and flying back and forth, and I thought, “Maybe it’s time for me to leave,” and my wife said to me, “Are you nuts? You play the way you play because of that band,” and it’s true. I do play the way I play because of the swing and blues in the band. I wanted to be a better blues player in that band, and to play in that section with Snooky Young. It is just so swinging, and it spoils me. I think that’s been the joy. Plus, in that band, there’s no real cliques. I’ve been in a lot of bands, and there’s lots of cliques, but in that band we’re all just very good friends. We’ve known each other, and it’s very nice. It’s just been a huge influence playing with Hammer, Snooky, and John.\textsuperscript{293}

\textsuperscript{291} Holman, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{292} Hamilton, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{293} Clay Jenkins, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, February 20, 2016.
The band was quick to record their second album a few months later for the Concord label. It was titled *Boogie Down* and featured vocalist Ernestine Anderson. Indeed, the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra was off and running.

**Ray Brown Trio in Japan**

Less than a month after the *Groove Shop* session, Hamilton went back to Japan with the Ray Brown Trio. One of the gigs they had was at the Good Day Club in Tokyo, where *Georgia On My Mind* and *Black Orpheus* were recorded. However, these records were never supposed to be released. Hamilton recalls,

> We played a private club, and the owners, two tall Japanese guys, told us they would like to make a limited edition CD for their members. We signed a contract for about two hundred fifty CDs to hand out as gifts. Unfortunately, they ran into financial difficulty, and one guy disappeared, and one guy jumped out of a window. When the liquidators came in, they saw the recording on the shelf and sold it to a label, and that came out the same time as Ray’s first Telarc record. He almost lost his Telarc deal because they thought he wasn’t on the up-and-up with them and had done another record that he didn’t tell them about. He said, “Look, it’s a bootleg. I didn’t know they were gonna pull it out; here’s the contract—it was supposed to be for two hundred and fifty people at the club, and somebody got a hold of it when the club was liquidated.”

The trio continued to work a great deal, performing all over the world, which was in large part due to Brown’s hard work and business expertise. Pianist Benny Green recalls his work ethic,

> Ray was his own booking agent and manager. I’ve never seen anyone with such a balance of left and right brain as Ray Brown. He would get up first thing in the morning and just be on the phone. There was no email, and he was fast, he would say “Look, we’ve got May 18 to the 22 open; do you want it?” Then there would be a short pause, and he would repeat himself more sternly, “Do you want it? Okay, here’s what we’re gonna need.” He was a gangster man; he would just book a gig and be on the phone doing that, then maybe play some golf, then he’d be on the bandstand kicking our behinds. Afterwards, he’d have a good dessert,

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294 Hamilton, interview by author.
maybe some pie and ice cream, then go to sleep and do the same thing the next day. He’d always be up early in the morning on that phone doing business. That was his life; he was an incredible man.295

**Gene Harris and The Philip Morris Superband**

In 1989, Hamilton was presented with a remarkably exciting opportunity. Andrew Whist, who was the president of the Phillip Morris Cigarette Company, loved Gene Harris and followed his work. He had heard the Gene Harris All Star Big Band *Tribute to Count Basie* record and it.296 At the time, Phillip Morris had been sponsoring European tours to advertise their cigarettes all over the world, and Whist came up with the idea to put this band on tour and call it the Phillip Morris Superband.297

Whist, Harris, and Brown worked together to find the personnel for the band because not everyone from the original record was available to travel around the world. The trumpet section was Joe Mosello, Michael Mossman, Harry “Sweets” Edison, and Johnny Coles. The trombones were Urbie Green, James Morrison, Eddie Bert, and Paul Faulise. The saxophones were Jerry Dodgion and Frank Wess on alto, James Moody and Ralph Moore on tenor, and Gary Smulyan on baritone. Harris wanted the rhythm section to be the same as before with Herb Ellis on guitar, Gene Harris on piano, Ray Brown on bass, and Jeff Hamilton on drums. Vocalists Ernestine Anderson and Ernie Andrews were on the recording, but only Andrews joined the group for the tour.

It was an audacious tour, and they visited over twenty-five cities all over the world, including many cities that had never heard jazz before. Hamilton recalls,

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295 Benny Green, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, April 19, 2016.
296 Hamilton, interview by author.
297 Ibid.
It was quite exciting as far as “changing the world.” The group went to such places as Kuala Lumpur, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Morocco, Cairo, and many European countries. In fact, we were in Moscow, and an adoring fan rushed the stage while we were playing, and the security guards took him down.  

Hamilton enjoyed playing with Brown in the big band setting. There was a strong mutual respect, and Brown would often defer to Hamilton’s big band experience. Hamilton says, “Ray would ask what I thought on different sections like shout choruses and different figures, asking me if that felt right, and I always appreciated that.”

Hamilton loved playing with the various musicians on the band and remembers how well all of them got along. He enjoyed getting to know them during the tour. Hamilton remembers,

Harry “Sweets” Edison was great to have out there. I got to know him a little before, and I knew him when I went on the band, but when you’re with somebody every day you get to know them better. James Moody was great to have out there, too. We all liked to spend time together because we realized how special it was. Nobody could be the star of the band, because everybody was featured. Nobody was disgruntled, because we were getting paid well and traveling first class, which keeps a lot of guys quiet.

The tour went off without a hitch, which was impressive considering how many people were involved and how the world was changing at the time. In fact, the band was at the center of many of the changes that were happening. Hamilton recalls,

Everything went crazy on that tour. It was the fall of 1989 in November, and we were in Hungary, and we were on a guided tour of their federal buildings. While I was at the airport the next day, I looked in the Herald Tribune newspaper, and it said that Hungary had switched to democracy. It happened while we were in the federal buildings, and nobody said anything! Next, we went to Berlin and stayed in West Berlin and drove through Checkpoint Charlie to East Berlin. It was eerie, and they came on the bus and wanted to check everybody’s passports and instruments. I just had this uneasy feeling. Our concert was in an old concert hall, and the rhythm section entered from stage right, and the horns entered from

298 Hamilton, interview by author.
299 Ibid.
300 Ibid.
stage left. At the intermission, the tour manager from England walked up to Gene, who I was standing next to, and told him, “Don’t say anything into the microphone, but play a short second set, and let’s get the hell out of here. The Politbureau just announced on television that they’re stepping down tomorrow, and the wall is coming down.” The rhythm section was rushing everything, and we were trying to get out of there, and the horns are looking over like, “What the hell is wrong with you guys?” We’re nervous and looking over our shoulder while we’re playing, and then Ray, Gene, and I were on the bus immediately following the gig. We were thinking, “Let’s get these guys out of here!” Everyone gets on the bus, and we drive through Checkpoint Charlie. I’ll never forget this vision: there was a booth with a light bulb swinging in this booth, and it was turned out. As we drove through, there was nobody in the booth, and nobody stopped us; we just drove straight through Checkpoint Charlie into West Berlin. We got back to the hotel, and Jerry Dodgion and I were looking at the scene on German television, and we thought, “We don’t wanna go out there; this is their night.” The next thing happened when we were in the Philippines for three days. We did a clinic one day for the students, and they took us to a traditional dinner with a traditional ritual dance that was beautiful, and then we played a concert, had the next day off at the pool, and the next day we flew to Australia. The hotel was the Manila Peninsula hotel, and it had a huge palm tree going up through the glass ceiling in the atrium in the lobby, and it’s what it was known for. The next morning, we left the lobby at six in the morning and got on the bus, and we got to the airport, and we noticed there were machine guns lined up along the curb from the entrance to the airport all the way around to where they dropped us off, which was halfway around the airport. We all thought, “Oh no, something’s going on here.” They whisked us off the bus and right through security and took us right to the gate and held us at the gate. I think we were there for six hours and nobody told us what was going on, and they finally put us on a plane to Perth. The next morning we were going to go hang out at the ocean, and I picked up a newspaper, and on the front page there was a picture of the lobby of the hotel we were staying at with that palm tree because guerillas with their machine guns had taken over the hotel and were holding all of the American tourists hostage in the hotel to overthrow president Aquino. They came in a half an hour after we left—we missed it by half an hour! Join the Phillip Morris Band, and change the world.301

Oscar Peterson

Ray Brown had known for a long time that Hamilton wanted to work with Oscar Peterson. In fact, an opportunity had come up for Hamilton to work with Peterson in

301 Hamilton, interview by author.
1978, subbing for Louie Bellson when Peterson was in Detroit, but Hamilton had gotten food poisoning and was unable to play the gig. Then, in 1990, Brown brought up the Peterson gig to Hamilton when they were on a plane ride. Brown had known Peterson had some issues with previous drummers and wanted to be sure Hamilton was aware of that and knew what to expect. Soon after their discussion, Hamilton received a phone call. Hamilton recalls,

His management called and said, “Dr. Peterson would like for you to play with him in July and was wondering if you could do a date before that. It’s in New Hampshire, and you would have to fly into Boston on Friday. The concert is on Saturday, and then you fly out Sunday.” I told the office, “I can’t fly out that Friday because I am subbing for Ed Shaughnessy on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. I could take a red-eye and arrive Saturday morning.” The manager said, “I don’t think he will go for that, but thank you very much. We’ll be in touch.” Two minutes later, I got a call back, and she said, “Dr. Peterson said it would be okay for you to take a red-eye.”

Hamilton made the necessary arrangements and was soon on his way to the gig.

Hamilton remembers,

I flew in on the red-eye and slept a little during the day and then went over to the stage to set up the drums the way Oscar’s trio set up after studying it. I’m putting the wing nuts on the cymbals, and Oscar shows up, walks right by the drums and says, “Is there a stage manager somewhere?” The stage manager comes out and says, “Yes, Dr. Peterson, what can I do?” “Yes, you can move the Bösendorfer six inches closer to the drums,” and he turned around and looked at me, winked at me, and told me, “When you’re done, I’ll meet you in the dressing room. It’s nice to have you here.” “Thank you, it’s nice to be here!” I thought to myself, “I must be okay if he moved the piano to the drums instead of asking me to move the drums closer to the piano.” So I get set up and go back to the dressing room, and Dave Young is there playing bass for the gig. Oscar said, “Let’s start with ‘Falling in Love with Love,’ two-beat, brushes. When you see my hand drop to the left side of the piano bench, wood,” which meant switching to sticks. I say, “You’ve got it,” and he said “Alright, let’s play.” We got up on the bandstand, and I start with the brushes, two-beat. Then I saw the cue to switch to sticks, and it got hot, and he turns to me and says, “You got it!” I took a chorus, and I remembered Ed Thigpen

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302 Hamilton, interview by author.
303 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
saying that it took him six months to trade fours with Oscar, because he wanted to make sure Thigpen’s time was feeling good, and here I am getting a chorus on the first tune on the first night. I thought, “Okay, he wants me to hang myself, so I’m gonna cool it.” I just play and look up toward the end of the chorus, and he said, “Take another one.” He gave me four choruses, and I always had something in reserve. I’m not trying to blow the windows out, and I finish and am happy with what I played and bring them in. At the end of the tune, he stands and turns to the audience and says “Ladies and gentleman, thank you for coming to the concert tonight. That was ‘Falling in Love with Love,’ and I’d like for you to meet my new drummer; it’s his first night. Say hello to Jeff Hamilton.” I stood up and took a bow, and while I was bent over he said off microphone, “So you’re gonna be like that, huh?” I looked up at him during the bow, and he winked at me—I knew I was in. I had a nickname the first night, too, “Jeffro.” It was great.\textsuperscript{305}

The next gig Hamilton had with Peterson was in July at the Hollywood Bowl with the trio featuring Ray Brown on bass, Peterson on piano, and Hamilton on drums. It went off without a hitch, and it began the five-year association that Hamilton had with the group from 1990 until 1995. Even though this was a monumental moment for Hamilton, he knew his work had gotten him there. Hamilton states,

> I had the same feeling on this gig that I’ve had on every band I’ve worked, which is, “I’ve worked hard to get this, and I deserve to be here.” I had a feeling of “Man, this is fun. I’m getting to do what I wanted to do, and it’s a ball, and it’s even better than I thought, but I deserve to be there;” and I never lost sight of that. I always focused on what I needed to do to make the music work from my chair, and I was there for that reason. Playing the gig was sad in a way because it was like, “Now what? What was gonna happen after this?” Playing with Oscar meant that I had achieved the final goal I had set for myself back in college.\textsuperscript{306}

All of the gigs Hamilton played during that period were with the quartet, which featured Peterson on piano, Brown on bass, Herb Ellis on guitar, and Hamilton on drums. Oscar’s wife Kelly recalls meeting and hearing Hamilton for the first time,

> I was blown away with Jeff Hamilton as a drummer. He’s got incredible time, plays melodies on the drums, was able to get so many different nuances out of the drums, and is an incredible genius. He can do so much and is a creative drummer,

\textsuperscript{305} Hamilton, interview by author.  
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.
and I thought he complimented Oscar’s playing. He just kept adding to the quality of the music and the quality of the quartet.\textsuperscript{307}

The group traveled all over the world, to Japan and Europe multiple times, to Canada, and throughout the United States. Both logistically and musically, the tours were a great success. Hamilton recalls,

The tours went great because they had to. Oscar told me in London, “I want to stay at a hotel that’s equal to my house, or I don’t want to leave my house.” The people that set up the tour for him knew that and knew that it had to be that way or else, and the promoters needed to do that. There were some promoters that didn’t work with him because they couldn’t provide what he needed, and every place was top notch.\textsuperscript{308}

The quartet only performed live shows and never recorded together, but fortunately, some video clips from gigs at the Bermuda Onion in Toronto, Canada, and from their European tour are included in the Oscar Peterson documentary \textit{Life in the Key of Oscar}.

Hamilton and Peterson were exceedingly close during their time together.

Hamilton remembers,

We got along so well. He would call me up just to go out and eat because he knew that I was always eager to learn more about food and wine. Oscar had been to restaurants that Norman Granz had showed him over the years, and he couldn’t wait to turn me onto those things because he knew I enjoyed them. We talked about sports because he was a big boxing and sports fan. He loved and collected pipes and wine and discussed cars, wine, and gourmet food. That kept us pretty busy.\textsuperscript{309}

The feeling was mutual for Peterson. His wife Kelly recalls,

Oscar had great admiration for Jeff as an artist, as a musician, and as a person. He would tell me how outstanding a drummer Jeff is, and he would talk about Jeff’s talent and how great he was. I think that speaks highly of Jeff because Oscar’s talent was so vast. He would hear things nobody else heard. With Jeff, Oscar just felt like he could be inspired to go different directions with his playing because he had Jeff supporting him. Jeff always knew when to switch to brushes, where to

\textsuperscript{307} Kelly Peterson, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, February 25, 2016.
\textsuperscript{308} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{309} Ibid.
add a fill, where to do this or that. He knew how to compliment what Oscar was playing but knew how to sort of lead Oscar and inspire Oscar to go different directions, and Oscar would talk about that. Oscar truly loved Jeff and had a great closeness with him.\textsuperscript{310}

The members of the quartet formed close working relationships with each other, which was common for musicians at that time. Kelly Peterson recalls,

Being on the road with them was wonderful, because there was a real camaraderie among the older musicians and traveling together and the time you spend together, even just the quartet. By traveling on the road together, you spend a lot of time together on and off the stage. It needs to be fun; it needs to be good times, and it was always great to spend time with Jeff. Jeff could imitate the way people walked, and one of my favorite images is Jeff walking behind Ray in the airport imitating him or walking along pretending like he’s Sweets Edison. Moments like that are what break up the monotony of travel.\textsuperscript{311}

Unfortunately, Hamilton’s time with Oscar Peterson ended much earlier than he anticipated because while in New York, Peterson suffered a stroke. Hamilton recalls,

The stroke was very sad because you could see the writing on the wall. He wouldn’t give up because I think he just felt he was invincible. He was Oscar Peterson, and he waited until we finished the week at the Blue Note before he saw a doctor. The night of the stroke, he called us all over individually, and it felt like The Godfather, because we bent down to talk to him in his wheelchair. He said “I had a stroke last night, but you can’t tell anybody.” I would go on first and play, and then Ray and Herb and Oscar would come out. Oscar would walk along the backside of the stage with the piano lid up so nobody could see him scuffling, and he just laid his left hand on the keyboard. He still got a great review in the New York Times because the reviewer couldn’t see Peterson’s left hand from the way he was sitting. He wasn’t using his left hand at all, and everything was in the right hand. I even asked Ray, “Should we back off?,” but he said, “Oscar is gonna be on our case if we do.” I felt pretty bad playing that gig because I knew he wasn’t at his best.\textsuperscript{312}

\textsuperscript{310} Peterson, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{311} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{312} Hamilton, interview by author.
Hamilton’s last gig with Peterson was in Chicago in August of 1995. Although there were other times that Peterson wanted Hamilton back in the band, the timing never worked out.  

Ray Brown Trio and the early 1990’s

Hamilton continued to stay busy performing with multiple groups. However, in 1992, Hamilton decided it was a good time to transition out of the Ray Brown Trio. Furthermore, Hamilton realized there were other musical directions that he wanted to pursue, and he was growing tired of the busy and grueling travel schedule that the trio maintained. Hamilton recalls,

> When we were in Japan, I gave my notice to Ray because I knew what it took to play in that trio, but it seemed like there were only a handful of things I could do. We didn’t play up-tempos; there was no bebop; the Brazilian influence stuff could only be done one way. I just felt like there was more stuff that I wanted to do musically that I couldn’t fulfill from my role in that trio. I didn’t want to abuse the trio by bringing my stuff into it. I wanted to honor what that trio was, so I gave my notice.  

The timing wasn’t ideal for Brown because two months later, Gene Harris would no longer be playing in the trio. Hamilton recalls,

> Everything was great with the trio until Carl Jefferson wanted to make Gene the star and take it out of Ray’s hands. Gene changed a little bit, only because he didn’t know how to handle the situation with Ray. I felt Ray was a better businessman than Carl, and it seemed to bug Carl, and then Gene ended up double-booking himself apparently by accident. Ray said to Gene, “You’d better go do your own thing.”

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313 Peterson, interview by author.
314 Hamilton, interview by author.
315 Ibid.
Brown, who had sensed a transition with Harris coming, began seeking out other piano players to fill the chair vacated by Harris, but still wanted Hamilton to be part of the new project. Hamilton recalls,

> When we were in Japan, Ray asked me, “How much of a hurry are you in to leave?” Then he asked me about Benny Green. Benny and Christian McBride had been coming to hear us every time we played the Blue Note, and they’d catch our last few tunes. I met Christian when he was seventeen and knew Benny because I had seen him play with Art Blakey’s band. I told Ray, “He sounds great” but asked if he is a trio piano player? Ray said, “I think he’s done a couple things on his own, but I want to know what you think.” I thought it was incredible that Ray was even asking me what I thought, because he didn’t have to do that. He was Ray Brown, and I had already given him my notice, which let me know that he didn’t want me to go, either. I said, “Let’s try it and see. I’ll stay until you get covered because I’m not gonna leave you high and dry.” I liked Benny, and I thought he was more of a bebop piano player and an energetic young kid; that’s all I knew about him. He didn’t strike me as an Oscar Peterson-, Gene Harris-type piano player but a bebop player that worked in drummer Art Blakey’s band.

Brown brought Green into the studio to record an album titled *Two the Max* with James Morrison in 1992. Brown had planned the recording and then an Australian tour, and since Harris wouldn’t be joining the group on the tour, he felt it best to include Green in the recording in order to get a feel for how he would work in the group. Hamilton recalls,

> Benny came in to record *Two the Max*, and Benny played his butt off on that. The first track we did was “Freddie the Freeloader,” and after the tune I was just sitting at the drums thinking, “Man, that was swinging!” Ray came around the baffle, and he says “Well, Hamsky, what do you think?” I told him, “I would like to withdraw my resignation, please,” and he said, “I thought so!” I stayed for two more years so we could play together, and he hired Benny right there. I loved Benny—he was great!

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316 Hamilton, interview by author.
317 Ibid.
318 Ibid.
Green was excited to join the trio. He had looked up to both Brown and Hamilton and appreciated the mentorship he received from both men. Green recalls,

Jeff was a big mentor to me, and he treated me with a ton of respect from the beginning. There were many times from the first night with the trio that Jeff talked to me patiently and honestly with so much care about my musicianship and my playing and our responsibility as jazz musicians to serve the music. It’s nearly impossible for me to list all the different things that Jeff has cared enough to share with me, but one small example is how he talked about consistency. There were times where I didn’t do my best, and Jeff would come around and say, “Remember, we talked a long time ago about consistency? We have to be locked in from the first note.” He was very supportive, and his vote of confidence means the world to me because of the way I feel about Jeff as a musician and a person.\(^{319}\)

Hamilton recorded three records with this rendition of the trio: Two The Max with James Morrison in 1992, Bassface: The Ray Brown Trio in 1993, and Don’t Get Sassy in 1994. Green recalls the Bassface session,

The first record I made officially as a member of the trio, Bassface, was recorded on my birthday, which was April 4, 1993. It was my thirtieth birthday, and my parents were in the audience. A side note that sticks out was that they had the most amazing strawberries you’ve ever seen or tasted for us in the dressing room. They were just incredible, and they had those for this recording. We recorded, and it was a two-day engagement at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz. However, the first night there was some kind of technical glitch, and they couldn’t use any of the takes. We played our hearts out that first night because we planned for it to be on the record. I got there the second evening and was told in somber atonement, “Hey, we’re gonna have to make the record tonight. We’re gonna have to nail it tonight because whatever we get tonight is what we have to work with because they don’t have anything from last night.” What is on the record is from my thirtieth birthday on April 4.\(^{320}\)

This rendition of the trio was quickly off and running, traveling even more than with Harris, all over the world. Hamilton recalls, “With Benny, we got up to traveling nine months a year because all of the original conversation about not being on the road as

\(^{319}\) Green, interview by author.

\(^{320}\) Ibid.
much went by the wayside because Benny was saying that he wanted to travel and play.  

Green was having a great time and recalls life on the road,

Life was more simple for me because there wasn’t any Internet or email. I was just practicing and playing all the time, and you could see the results of that on the bandstand. We were always on the road with Ray, touring forty weeks out of the year, and we were workin’, man! He would take three weeks off around Christmas and New Years and then some time for writing, and we would pick it up hard in February. Ray used to say he wasn’t one to sit up at home and watch television. That’s not the life for him; he wanted to be on the road playing. It was all worth it because just being around Ray and just playing a note with him, you can’t help but think about Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Hank Jones, Oscar Peterson, Monty Alexander, Gene Harris, and all of these people he’s played with and all of these great pianists. He made you feel like you belonged up there, and he had touched the first generation of jazz masters. He played with Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, Lester Young, Billie Holiday—he actually played with these people. For Jeff and me, it’s like touching a second-generation jazz master, and that pulse, that beat and that rub, it stays with you.

Although Hamilton enjoyed playing with the new formation of the trio, he felt a greater need for balance in his life, which meant less time on the road. Hamilton’s vision for his own version of a trio became clearer, and he decided to leave Brown’s trio in 1994.

Hamilton recalls,

I was hearing more and more of what I could do with a trio. I wanted a greater interactive role and a more equal part of a trio. Rays’ group was still based in the piano carrying the load, with unbelievable bass solos and the occasional drum entrances and shout choruses like a big band. However, I felt there was a whole lot more that could be done with it, and that’s when I started thinking about my own group. I didn’t want a quintet because I realized with my Indiana record that the quintet wasn’t the right setting for me.

Hamilton’s career at the time was complicated because of two elbow surgeries, which happened in 1994 and 1996. Impressively, Hamilton recorded his final album with Brown’s trio, Don’t Get Sassy, and the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra album,

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321 Hamilton, interview by author.  
322 Green, interview by author.  
323 Hamilton, interview by author.  
324 Ibid.
Absolutely, when he was still recuperating from the first surgery. Most listeners wouldn’t even suspect Hamilton ever had surgery because he plays with fire and ferocity. Regardless, as Hamilton grew older he realized that he didn’t want to be out on the road as much as he was.

The Jeff Hamilton Trio

One of the motives for getting the trio started was Hamilton’s relationship with John Clayton’s manager at the time, Allyn Rosenberg. In 1994, Rosenberg had a discussion with Hamilton about his career. Hamilton states,

Rosenberg said, “Okay, you’ve got the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, and you’re Ray Brown’s drummer. What do you want to do? When you die, do you want to be known as Ray Brown’s drummer?” I said, “That’s not such a bad thing!” Then he said, “Well, do you want to do that the rest of your life? Ray’s in his seventies, so it won’t last forever. You’ve got the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, which is something. If I were to say you could have any kind of small group you wanted, what would that be?” I said, “A trio with piano, bass, and drums,” and he asked, “Why is that?” I said, “Because I know more about it, and I’m known as a trio drummer and a big band drummer, because that’s the most music I’ve listened to. I have the most recordings of those two formats.” He said, “Okay, get your own trio together, and I’ll put it out,” and I said, “Okay!” I had to think about, “What are the strong points? What are things I like to do, and what am I known for?” I thought about the styles of music that I like to play, the countries I’ve been influenced by, and I thought about tempos that I own and sound good playing. Then you start finding stuff within the trio that is gonna work, that maybe you didn’t even imagine. I started getting frustrated by playing with musicians who couldn’t hear my solos. They couldn’t hear that I was being clearer on my phrases than they were on their melodic instrument, and it just meant to me that they weren’t paying attention, or they were looking at the drums a certain way. I started thinking that in the future I only wanted to play with people who can hear what I’m doing. I wanted to define my statements and my musical ideas so that they were clear, and nobody had any reason to get lost in what I’m playing. I didn’t want to dumb down what I was doing and be

325 Hamilton, interview by author.
326 Ibid.
simple, but I wanted to make sure that I was taking the group and the listener on a journey with me. I wanted all of those things for the trio.\textsuperscript{327}

With the concept developed, Hamilton had to find the musicians that would fill out the bass and piano chairs. Although Hamilton had played with and had great relationships with many of the legends of the music, he wanted to have a group that would be open to his concepts and be able to take musical direction from him as a leader. Hamilton comments,

It was wild to get a band dropped in your lap and made me think about who I want. I had played with Ernestine Anderson when she brought pianist Larry Fuller in as her music director at the Loa, and we connected. I said to him, “You and I have to play together more in the future,” so he was my first choice. I called him, and he said, “Sure, I’d be up for it.” I had done a workshop with John’s students and my students when John was teaching at the University of Southern California. He had a stable of bass players, including Christoph Luty and Jesse Murphy. I could’ve chosen any one of those guys that night to be in the trio, and I thought about it and chose Jesse because he had a lot of energy when he played. It seemed that he would have enjoyed being on the road and going after it, but it turned out that he wanted to play more electric bass, and I felt that he wasn’t totally into the trio. Then he double booked himself with me, and I said “That’s it,” and I realized he wasn’t interested in it. I called Lynn Seaton because we had been together on Woody’s band, and I heard him with Von Ohlen. He came in and solidified the bass chair with the trio, and I thought, “Okay, we’ve got the foundation, and now we can do something with this!”\textsuperscript{328}

In 1994, Hamilton recorded the first record with his trio, called \textit{It’s Hamilton Time}, which featured Jesse Murphy on bass and Larry Fuller on piano. The next album, which featured bassist Lynn Seaton and Fuller on piano, was \textit{Live! The Jeff Hamilton Trio} and was recorded in Saarbrucken, Germany on May 8, 1996.

Both records realized Hamilton’s musical vision of making the drums a more equal part of the trio and featured a variety of tempos and styles. Instead of short drum solos over the form, the drums are incorporated into the statements of the melody. In fact, both

\textsuperscript{327} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid.
albums feature solo performances: “Caravan” on It’s Hamilton Time and “A Night in Tunisia” from Live! The Jeff Hamilton Trio. These easily stand on their own as musical arrangements, similar to a pianist’s would solo piano arrangements. Both songs have introductions, statements of the melody that are played on the drums with the recognizable pitches, solos over the form of the song, and then statements of the melody to end the song. This aspect alone was quite revolutionary and departed from the traditional role of the drums in most musical settings. It was much more than just keeping time, outlining the form, and adding dynamic contrast to the music. Furthermore, Hamilton brought a majority of the arrangements to the group himself. Hamilton recalls,

I asked Jesse and Larry to bring some stuff in, and Larry said, “I’m not an arranger; I’m not very good at that.” I said, “Why don’t you bring in what you want and explain what you want harmonically? Then we’ll sit down at the piano and play some things for you.” That’s how we did the “Isn’t It Romantic” arrangement. I wanted the dark parallel chords in there, and I played it badly for Larry, and he voiced it right, which became the arrangement. A lot of the arrangements still hold up. “Isn’t It Romantic” is one of my favorite things in the book, and we recently played “But Not For Me,” and that still holds up. Jesse brought in a couple of originals, but they weren’t trio material. I did all of the writing because none of them wanted to write, including Lynn. I’d take the stuff into them, and they would learn it.  

The trio with Seaton and Fuller lasted another four years, until 2000. At that point bassist Lynn Seaton had been offered a full-time teaching position at the University of North Texas, which began to limit the amount of time he could tour. Meanwhile, Ray Brown had heard pianist Larry Fuller with the trio, was impressed, and ended up offering Fuller a position in the Ray Brown Trio. Fuller had asked Hamilton for advice on the situation,

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329 Hamilton, interview by author.
and although it was frustrating as a band leader, Hamilton recognized how wonderful an opportunity this was for Fuller and encouraged him to take the position.\footnote{330}{Hamilton, interview by author.}

In the mean time, Hamilton had gone out to scout out a singer who had expressed interest in performing with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. Instead of watching the singer, Hamilton was struck by the pianist Tamir Hendelman. Hamilton recalls the night he met Hendelman,

I thought to myself, “This guy has got a lot together.” He got off the bandstand, and I said, “Hello, excuse me,” and he walked by me, and I said “Excuse me, I’m Jeff Hamilton, and I wanted to tell you I enjoyed your playing,” and he says “Thank you,” and he started to walk by me. I said, “Wait a minute, can I get your number?” He didn’t know who I was, and he’s never owned up to that, but he didn’t know who I was. He scribbled down his number on a napkin or something, and he took off again. He’s the first guy I thought of when Larry left, and I called Tamir to join the trio.\footnote{331}{Ibid.}

Hamilton had known Christoph Luty from earlier because he was one of John Clayton’s students and had been in the mix when Hamilton first formed the trio. Hamilton decided to contact him and scheduled a rehearsal with the group to see if it would be a good fit. Hamilton recalls, “

I asked both of those guys to get six arrangements together that we can play, and they both showed up two or three days later and had the whole book memorized. Both of them knew the entire book! I said, “This is going to be the new trio.”\footnote{332}{Ibid.}

In addition to being great musicians, both Hendelman and Luty were great arrangers and brought many new arrangements to the book, which according to Hamilton, “is why the arrangements got a lot more interesting after Tamir and Christoph joined the
An added benefit was that each musician lived in the Los Angeles area.

Hamilton states,

It is great having a trio that all lives in the same town because you can call each other up and say, “Hey, I just wrote something. Can you come over and play it?”

The trio has remained the same for the past sixteen years, and the music has continued to evolve and grow to the present day. This has allowed arrangements to develop with the group. Hamilton states,

You’ll be playing one night, and something will just jump out of the trio, and then after the set, we all say, “We’ve gotta leave that in, that four bars; we’ve gotta do that all the time. Why don’t we base the next arrangement off of that?” You watch it grow from being together sixteen years and playing one hundred and fifty dates a year.

The Jeff Hamilton Trio with Tamir Hendelman and Christoph Luty has recorded five albums together: The Best Things Happen... in 2004; From Studio 4, Cologne, Germany: The Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2005; Symbiosis: The Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2009; Red Sparkle: Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2011; Great American Songs Through the Years: Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2013. They have recorded three albums as the trio with special guests: Wilford Brimley with the Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2013 with Wilford Brimley on vocals; Live in Bern: Scott Hamilton & Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2014 with Scott Hamilton on tenor saxophone; This Happy Madness: Cory Weeds & The Jeff Hamilton Trio in 2015 with Cory Weeds on tenor saxophone.

The trio remains busy to date and has achieved acclaim for its musicality. Bill Holman states,

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333 Hamilton, interview by author.
334 Ibid.
335 Ibid.
336 Ibid.
I want to mention Jeff’s trio. It’s a very musical kind of thing; it’s not what you’d expect from a drummer that’s a band leader. When he put the thing together, he had an idea to make it as musical as he could and to make it interesting. [He wanted] to make the charts interesting and varied and not just play a head and blow and take it out, but to actually develop things. He relies a lot on melody and things a lot of drummers don’t even think about. I wanted to mention that because his trio is A-1.\(^{337}\)

Although the positive feedback has been encouraging for Hamilton and the trio, he knows that not everyone will understand what they are trying to accomplish musically. Hamilton states,

I realize some people don’t get it, and some aren’t gonna get it. I let them think what they are going to think. The comments that bother me, and they’re not from drummers, are when they pull Tamir and Christoph aside and say, “Well, as long as you keep writing arrangements that make him sound good, you have a gig.” That’s not what this band is about. I play less solos in this trio than in any other band I’ve been in, and people ask me why I’m not soloing more. I’m weaving in and out all the time, and there’s no room for a five-minute drum solo.\(^{338}\)

**Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl**

In 1998, the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra went in the studio to record *Explosive: Milt Jackson Meets the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra*. Hamilton and Jackson continued to cross paths since playing together with Monty Alexander and John Clayton. This included playing with the WDR Big Band in Cologne, Germany.\(^{339}\)

According to Hamilton, Jackson had gotten involved with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra project through Quincy Jones’ record label Qwest. John and Quincy had been working on a few projects together, and Quincy signed Jackson and suggested that they

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\(^{337}\) Holman, interview by author.

\(^{338}\) Hamilton, interview by author.

\(^{339}\) Ibid.
do a big band record. Furthermore, Clayton had been the bass player in a small group that featured Jackson, pianist Cedar Walton, and drummer Billy Higgins. Hamilton says, “Jackson loved Clayton, and that was probably another factor in the record coming to light.”

Hamilton loved working with Jackson, and he fondly recalls Jackson working with the band,

> When we played together live, Jackson would stand right next to the China cymbal and kind of turn toward Christoph and me and pretend that he was playing the drums on the shout chorus with his mallets. That’s the most joyful I think I ever saw him. Christoph and I still talk about that.

Hamilton enjoyed getting close with his hero Snooky Young while he was in the band, and Snooky loved Hamilton’s playing in the group. Clay Jenkins recalls,

> Snooky loved Hammer. Snooky would say, “I loved Papa Joe, Sonny Payne (because he and Sonny were very close, and they ran together), Shadow Wilson, Mel Lewis, and Hammer.” The first trumpet player has to be best friends with the drummer in a big band, and he and Hammer were tight. Snooky felt like Hammer made the band dance. He would look at me and say, “He’s a hell of a drummer.”

Young and Hamilton shared a lot of laughs while on the road with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. Jenkins recalls a story of Hamilton and Young while in Japan,

> Hammer and Snooky were having breakfast and were sitting by the window talking, and then Snooky looks out the window, and it’s like Hammer said he lost him. Snooky wasn’t listening anymore; then he turns back to Jeff, and he goes, “You know what, Jeff? I like Jim [Hershman] and everything,” who was our guitar player at the time, but he says, “I think we should have her as our guitar player.” Hamilton looks down and there’s this little Japanese woman with tight leather pants on leaning and putting a guitar in her trunk. “I think we should have her in our band.”

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340 Hamilton, interview by author.
341 Ibid.
342 Ibid.
343 Jenkins, interview by author.
344 Ibid.
From 1999-2001, The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra had the unique opportunity of performing regularly at the Hollywood Bowl. The opportunity came about after performing a concert in Los Angeles. John Clayton recalls,

We played a concert at the Cal State Los Angeles concert hall. The recording engineer Joel Moss brought the new director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic with him to the concert. He was a Dutch guy named Willem Wijnbergen. I actually didn’t know him when I lived in Holland, but he fell in love with the band. After the concert he asked if he could meet with me, and I agreed. He said, “I want to do these cool things with the LA Philharmonic, and I’d like for there to be a strong jazz program centered around your big band, the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. I’d love for you to be the face of the whole thing.” I said, “Wow, yeah, sure.” He was into it, and he could put his money where his mouth was.\(^{345}\)

Clayton became the director for that three-year period, and Wijnbergen bought new uniforms for the band, which were brand new suits, and they scheduled rehearsals around the series.\(^{346}\) In many ways this concert series helped establish the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra as a mainstay not only in the Los Angeles jazz scene, but also in the world jazz scene. In addition, it helped Clayton and the band accomplish one of Clayton’s major goals. He recalls,

One of the highlights of the band and my goals was to bring this music into the community. Wijnbergen loved the idea, and we would go into the community with the big band. We’d play in South Central Los Angeles, Compton, at churches, and at community centers. The way things were set up was that the audience at Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, which is now Disney Hall, was basically a Caucasian audience. I thought, “What a drag because I would love to see other people support this and combine it with other parts of the community.” We finally convinced them to let us have a concert in the Chandler Pavilion with the big band, so it wasn’t just a summer holiday Hollywood Bowl type thing. On that program we had Clark Terry, Scott Hamilton, and Barbara Morrison. It was cool because I looked into the audience, and there was a sea of multi-colored faces in the Pavilion.\(^{347}\)

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\(^{345}\) Clayton, interview by author.

\(^{346}\) Ibid.

\(^{347}\) Ibid.
Unfortunately, Wijnbergen was not well received by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and had pushed them farther than they wanted to be pushed.\textsuperscript{348} Therefore, lawyers got involved and called for Wijnbergen to resign.\textsuperscript{349} The administration that followed didn’t share the same vision with incorporating jazz and let Clayton’s contract expire after three years.\textsuperscript{350}

The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra has been successfully performing for the past thirty-one years and have recorded a total of eleven albums with the band: \textit{Groove Shop} in 1989; \textit{Boogie Down} with Ernestine Anderson in 1989; \textit{Heart and Soul} in 1991; \textit{Absolutely!} in 1994; \textit{Explosive: Milt Jackson meets the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra} in 1998; \textit{Shout Me Out!} in 2000; \textit{Live at MCG} in 2004; \textit{Christmas Songs} with Diana Krall in 2005; \textit{Dear Mr. Sinatra} in 2005; \textit{From This Moment On} with Diana Krall in 2006; \textit{The L.A. Treasures Project} in 2013.

\textbf{Diana Krall}

Diana Krall had grown up in the Canadian town of Nanaimo and had become a fan of Hamilton’s playing by listening to his records. Krall recalls,

\begin{quote}
I was listening to Monty Alexander’s \textit{Facets} and listening to Jeff playing with Rosemary Clooney, his own record \textit{Indiana}, and the stuff with Monty, Jeff, and John. \textit{Montreux Alexander} was probably the most important record, and the stuff with Ernestine Anderson. I wanted to sing like Ernestine and play piano like Monty.\textsuperscript{351}
\end{quote}

With the support of her high school band director, Krall was soon pursuing her goal of learning to play jazz music. Krall states,

\textsuperscript{348} Clayton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{351} Diana Krall, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, June 2, 2016.
When I was fifteen my band director showed me how to transcribe and how to make charts, I transcribed “Just in Time” from Monty’s Live in Tokyo record. I just made charts and chord changes and then got a teacher who showed me what ii-V-I patterns were, and that was it. I started playing in a jazz trio and went to the Port Townsend Jazz Festival, driving myself down there when I was nineteen.\footnote{352} 

Krall knew that Hamilton was on faculty at the Port Townsend Jazz Workshop, and she drove down with the intention of learning from him. Hamilton recalls meeting Krall for the first time when she was nineteen,

Diana came up to me the first night of camp, and I thought she was messing with me. She said “I want to talk to you this week about how that trio works.” I didn’t know what to think, because I wouldn’t have gone to a camp to study with a piano player, being a drummer. Then I heard her play, and it was totally by accident. I was monitoring the jam session rooms, and I thought George Cables was practicing in this dark room, playing “My Foolish Heart.” At that point nobody was fighting in the jam session rooms, and I sat down and listened. I thought, “Man, George sounds great!” When she finished playing, I spontaneously clapped, and I heard Diana let out a scream, and I switched on the light, and she was standing on the opposite side of the room, scared. I said, “That’s you?” I couldn’t believe it; I thought it was George Cables, and she said, “I’m glad it’s you,” and I told her, “I didn’t mean to scare you, but you sounded beautiful.” I told her, “You can do anything you want.”\footnote{353} 

Throughout the week, Hamilton had discussions with Krall about her musical future.

Hamilton encouraged her to move to Los Angeles and helped organize lessons with pianist Jimmy Rowles.\footnote{354} Krall’s parents were both tremendously supportive and appreciated Hamilton’s mentorship as much as Krall did. When the LA 4 was performing in Krall’s hometown, Hamilton brought Ray Brown down to her gig at a nearby restaurant. Krall recalls,

There was a gig with the LA 4, and I was playing solo piano at a restaurant a few blocks away from where they were playing. I’m playing, and I hear this guy say, “I don’t know who the hell she is, but she’s got a hell of a foot on her,” and it was

\footnote{352}{Krall, interview by author.}
\footnote{353}{Hamilton, interview by author.}
\footnote{354}{Ibid.}
Ray Brown! Jeff brought Ray Brown to my gig when I was nineteen. My parents had them all over to their house for dinner, and we made a plan. I was going to study with Jimmy Rowles, and I applied for a Canadian Arts Council Grant. I remember having to get the papers together, and this was before the Internet. I remember having to chase everybody down to get a letter of recommendation, and it had to be typewritten with a certain number of words on a page. Just imagine asking that of an artist like Jimmy Rowles. He wrote a letter for me that was hand written, and it only said, “She will be great, or my name isn’t Jimmy Rowles,” and he drew a doodle of a piano at the end of it—that’s what he did. Ray Brown gave me a recommendation written on a cocktail napkin, “Diana Krall should be given any help she needs, signed Ray Brown.” That’s what I could get because they were busy on the road. They didn’t have time to sit down and write a letter, because they were out playing. I sent those letters in, and I got the scholarship.355

It was difficult for Krall to gain momentum in the Los Angeles scene, because she didn’t have a United States work visa and could only play certain gigs. As a means of earning income, she would often babysit for John Clayton’s kids Gina and Gerald or house and dog sit for Hamilton. Hamilton recalls,

Los Angeles kind of ate her up. I got her to sub on some things, and she was in our big band in 1986 or 1987. [I] helped get some trio gigs for her, but she felt like she wasn’t getting where she wanted quick enough, especially because John and I were gone so often.356

Krall made the decision to go to college on the east coast, starting first at York University and then transferring to Berklee. She quickly fell into a restaurant gig in Boston and started honing her singing there.357 After about a year, Hamilton got a call from Krall. Hamilton remembers,

She called John and me and said, “I want to do a recording. Can I come back to Los Angeles and you get the studio for me?” I said, “Sure,” and we helped her get it set up, and during the session she asked for a boom mic stand. We were only about six feet apart, and I said, “Krall, I can hear you with instructions; I don’t need you to have a microphone.” She just kind of laughed because she thought I knew that she sang, but I had no idea she was a singer, too. I only knew her as a piano player. We started off with “Frim Fram Sauce,” and I almost

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355 Krall, interview by author.
356 Hamilton, interview by author.
357 Ibid.
stopped the take, thinking, “What are you doing?” I thought it was going to be a piano trio record, and I said “You’re gonna sing?” She said, “Well, yeah, you didn’t know I sang?” I said, “No!”

Krall had paid for that session herself, and it was just a demo recording. She took that recording and was able to get a small deal with a Canadian jazz label, Justin Time Records. Justin Time wanted to re-record the album with their own engineers, and they released the record as *Stepping Out* in 1993. Krall recalls,

I paid for the *Stepping Out Session* myself. I somehow rounded up the money and booked the studio and recorded. I used the tapes to get a gig with Justin Time records. That thing was basically just a self-produced demo tape, and I’m not sure anybody actually knows that. That helped me finally get some gigs, but it took a long time, and it was a long journey that Jeff and John stuck with me through.

A friend of Hamilton’s, Mary Ann Topper, was a manager looking to add female artists to her roster in order to book musicians at the Kansas City Women’s Festival and other gigs requesting women. Hamilton told her about the record he had done with Krall and told Krall to send Topper some materials. Hamilton didn’t think much about it, and immediately after that, Topper had a meeting with Tommy LiPuma with GRP and Bruce Lundvall with Blue Note about signing her to one of the labels. LiPuma and GRP won the bid and immediately took *Stepping Out* off the shelves. Hamilton states, “They wanted it to look like they discovered her and were launching her career into the jazz world.”

Hamilton continued to mentor Krall and even helped introduce her to guitarist Anthony Wilson. Hamilton recalls,

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358 Krall, interview by author.
359 Ibid.
360 Hamilton, interview by author.
When she played with The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl, she liked Anthony Wilson’s playing and wanted me to ask him to play with her. He wasn’t sure, so I said, “We are doing a week in Paris, and just come do that week with us.” That was when we recorded Live in Paris in 2002, which won a Grammy Award. He has been with her ever since, fourteen years and counting.\(^\text{361}\)

Hamilton has recorded nine albums with Krall: Stepping Out in 1993; When I Look in Your Eyes in 1998; Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas in 1998; The Look of Love in 2001; Live in Paris in 2002; The Girl in The Other Room in 2004; Christmas Songs in 2005; From This Moment On in 2006; and Quiet Nights in 2009.

Krall’s enormous success as a jazz musician would not have been the same if the two had not met in Port Townsend. Hamilton states,

> It was an example of the right place at the right time, and you seize the opportunity. Everything was in sync at the right time, because if she had been working on something that wasn’t happening, I would have turned around and walked out. That’s a rule I go by; you never know who will be in the room. It has to be one hundred percent every time you play.\(^\text{362}\)

**Recording Sessions**

Since he started freelance recording in 1978, Hamilton has recorded with a wide range of artists. Many of the recordings he has played on have garnered either Grammy nominations or Grammy wins, which exemplifies the quality of work Hamilton has made a living doing. In addition, many of these sessions were albums done with well-known musicians: Unforgettable, With Love by Natalie Cole in 1991, Grammy Award Winner; Back to Broadway by Barbara Streisand in 1993, Grammy Award Winner; A Single Woman by Nina Simone in 1993, her last studio album; Duets by Frank Sinatra with

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\(^{361}\) Hamilton, interview by author.

\(^{362}\) Ibid.
Barbara Streisand in 1993, Grammy Award Winner; Take a Look by Natalie Cole in 1993; Elegy in Blue by Benny Carter in 1994, Grammy Award Winner; Holly & Ivy a Celebration of Christmas by Natalie Cole in 1994; Remember The Time by Clark Terry in 1994; Afterglow by Dr. John in 1995; Manilow Sings Sinatra by Barry Manilow in 1998, Grammy Nominated; Ask a Woman Who Knows by Natalie Cole in 2002, Grammy Award Nominated; Duets by Barbara Streisand in 2002; From Me To You: A Tribute To Lionel Hampton by Terry Gibbs in 2002; Falling in Love Again by Joey DeFrancesco and Joe Pesci (listed as Joe Doggs) in 2003; 52nd & Broadway: Songs of the Bebop Era by Terry Gibbs in 2004; It’s Time by Michael Buble in 2005; Good Night and Good Luck Soundtrack featuring Diane Reeves in 2005, Grammy Award Winner; Before Me by Gladys Knight in 2006; Call Me Irresponsible by Michael Buble in 2007, Grammy Award Nominated; Travelin’ Light by Queen Latifah in 2007, Grammy Award Winner; Still Unforgettable by Natalie Cole in 2008, Grammy Award Winner; American Classic by Willie Nelson in 2009, Grammy Award Nominated; Love is the Answer by Barbara Streisand in 2009; and Kisses on the Bottom by Paul McCartney in 2012, Grammy Award Winner.

Malcom John “Mac” Rebennack, better known as Dr. John for his album Afterglow, was a contact through John Clayton. Tommy LiPuma had contacted each of them and wanted to do a record with the big band. Hamilton remembers,

Mac was pretty funny; he hadn’t sat in front of a big band, and we scared him. He actually said, “You scared the crap out of me!” But he loved it, and he came on in, and it was so much fun. He was easy to work with. Ray Brown was playing bass, and John was in front with his arrangements. The second day it was raining, so I walked into Studio A at Capitol records, and I had a hat on and a trench coat. I looked like something from Hang ‘Em High, and I’m wet, and I walk around him sitting at the Hammond B3, and he says, “Well, if it isn’t Dr. Sluggo, I presume,” and I just fell out. I turned around and laughed, and he had a big grin
on his face. I loved that record, and Larry Bunker was playing percussion on it. That might have been the last thing we did together. It was great hanging with Bunker and talking about Maynard’s band following Mel Lewis and going on Bill Evan’s gig and how close he was with Shelly Manne. I think he is an underrated musician because he played great vibes and was also a great drummer.363

Working and recording with Natalie Cole was another valuable experience for Hamilton.

He recorded four songs on her album Unforgettable with Love. Two were with a small group consisting of Ray Brown on bass, Dennis Budimir on guitar, and Nat’s brother, Ike Cole, on piano: “Route 66” and “Straighten Up and Fly Right.” The other two were with the Bill Holman Big Band: “Almost Like Being in Love” and “Avalon.” Hamilton recalls that the big band session was quite eventful,

I was in Seattle with Ray’s trio, and I got a call to fly down to Capitol and do two more takes on Natalie’s record with the Bill Holman band, and Ray said, “You mean to tell me there aren’t any other drummers in the world that can do that?” I said, “Well, apparently not,” and he said, “Why don’t you leave some work for somebody else?” I said, “I had a good example set for me,” and he said “Yeah, yeah, alright. Just be back on the bandstand on Friday for the downbeat at eight-thirty. I don’t want to hear any excuses. We have a gig that you committed to.” So I finished the gig on Thursday night, and I called the bass player from the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra because I didn’t have any cartage to transport my equipment at the time. I said, “Can you go over and get the Gretsch drums that have calf on them, with the twenty-inch bass drum, and set them up for me? Joni will let you in the garage, and I’ll pay you for your help. I’ve got to go right to Capitol from Los Angeles International Airport.” They had a car waiting for me, and I brought my own cymbals. I got to Capitol and realized that he brought the eighteen-inch bass drum, but it had calf on it, and I just cranked it down. Al Schmidt the engineer came in and said “Jeffy, you’ve got different drums today,” and I said, “Yeah, I brought the eighteen because it sounds like a controlled twenty when it’s tuned down all the way; let me know how it sounds in there.” We got both tunes done in an hour, and Al said, “Man, bring that bass drum in every time! That’s the greatest sounding bass drum!” Willis [Holman] said, “Okay, we’re done,” and I get my cymbals down, and I’m running out the studio. I got in the car that was waiting for me and drove back to the airport, and the flight was delayed. Then we were circling over Seattle after we did take-off, and the plane landed at seven thirty. I ran to my rental car, drove like hell through the end of rush hour, and got to the hotel at eight-fifteen. I jumped out of my clothes into a suit and walked across the street to the gig and got my cymbals put on the

363 Hamilton, interview by author.
stands five minutes before the down beat. Ray walks up and shakes his head. That was the two big band tracks that I did on her Unforgettable with Love record.  

Working with Clark Terry was also a memorable experience. Hamilton was in New York and had a good relationship with the MONS record label because they had released Hamilton’s trio albums. The label put a group together to do the record Remember the Time Clark Terry’s 75th Birthday in 1995. Hamilton had gotten to know Terry and worked with him previously. Hamilton recalls,

Clark and his lady, Joni I, and Norman Granz were sitting at the same table at Oscar Peterson’s and Kelly’s wedding reception. I had worked with Clark a little bit through the years at various jazz parties. One time, he overslept a little bit for his set and showed up fifteen minutes late. Richard Davis was on bass and Roger Kelloway was on piano, and they didn’t know what the jazz party was about. Richard went into his thing, with Roger playing with his elbows on the piano. Clark comes in and sees what’s going on and was a total pro. He said, “Okay, we’re gonna do this next number, just Jeff and me. We’ll come back and play something right after that.” He turns around and calls a calypso, so it’s just the two of us. I’m playing the rims and playing the calypso beat, and he’s doing the two-trumpet thing and then starts going into “Mumbles.” He starts trading with me on it, and I start playing with my hands, and it was so much fun. We just kept going, and he was getting tickled when I’d come up with something; then he came up with something, and the place just went crazy. He had the audience right back where he wanted them, and he said, “Ladies and gentleman, you just heard the premier performance of ‘Mumbles and Knuckles.”’ I laughed and thought, “That is a seasoned professional.” He sussed out the situation and came in and just righted the ship, and they loved him. The promoter wasn’t mad at him anymore for oversleeping.  

Hamilton has had many invaluable experiences making music with jazz music’s heroes, and although some situations were more difficult to work in than others, Hamilton remained professional and continued to serve the music above all else.

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364 Hamilton, interview by author.  
365 Ibid.  
366 Ibid.
Hamilton has not only been one of the most influential drummers in history but has also led innovations and developments that have helped shape the sound of jazz drumming for over the past three decades. These innovations began with the drumstick company Regal Tip. Regal Tip was a company that drummer Joe Calato founded in 1958. The way drumsticks and equipment in general was manufactured changed drastically to adapt to the heavier playing style of rock and roll music after the 1960s. Generally speaking, the focus shifted from developing sticks based on sound to developing sticks that would be more durable. This meant heavier and thicker sticks made out of denser hardwoods. Perhaps the most drastic change overall was the decreased tip size and shift from smaller barrel and acorn tips to the long, thin, triangular tips that most drummers from the 1940s until the 1960s played.

Hamilton found a great partnership with Regal Tip because they continued the tradition of making drumsticks that were durable but didn’t compromise sound. In fact, they had developed a signature drumstick for Hamilton that was modeled after the Don Lamond 8 D signature drum stick made by Gretsch. To this day, it remains one of the only drumsticks on the market with a long narrow tip, similar to those played by artists such as Don Lamond, Mel Lewis, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Gene Krupa, and many more.

Hamilton’s signature brush was developed a couple years later. Carol Calato had heard Hamilton with Ray Brown’s trio and realized the brushes he was playing were made poorly. In fact, Hamilton called them his exploding brushes; they would literally

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explode during performances because the material would simply break down. However, Hamilton played them only because he preferred the thicker gauge of wire.\(^{368}\) Although thicker wire brushes existed on the market, the brushes made in Taiwan were just right, not too thick and not too thin.\(^{369}\) Carol got in touch with her father about making a brush with thicker wire that would be the Jeff Hamilton signature brush.\(^{370}\) The gauge of wire they used was perfect. It was thin enough to get an exceptionally warm, stirring sound, but thick enough to project and give the brush the slightest bit of rebound, which made it significantly easier to play.

Hamilton worked with the Remo Drum Company to develop a series of drumheads. Hamilton had bounced back and forth throughout his career between synthetic drumheads and natural calf-skin drumheads. Specifically, he had played the Evans Blue X synthetic drumhead. He preferred the Blue X head because it had a lower, warmer fundamental pitch and a little “give” to it that absorbed the stick, which gave it a similar sound and feel to a calf-skin head. It was a plastic head, and he had the company spray a brush coat on it, which sounded warmer with the brushes. The sound and feel of calf was still superior, however calf was exceptionally temperamental to changes in weather, which makes it nearly impossible to keep the drumhead in tune or to get it to consistently hold a pitch. When Hamilton grew tired of the “thuddy” sound from his Blue X drumheads, he switched back to calf and dealt with its tuning inconveniences.\(^{371}\)

In the mid 1990s, Hamilton worked directly with research and development at Remo to get a head that had the same response, texture for use with brushes, and warm

\(^{368}\) Carol Calato, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, April 19, 2016.  
\(^{369}\) Ibid.  
\(^{370}\) Ibid.  
\(^{371}\) Hamilton, interview by author.
tone as a calf-skin head but with the consistency and durability of a synthetic head. The result was the Diplomat Fiberskyn drumhead. The FD3 drumhead had two different layers. The base layer is seven-and-a-half-millimeter plastic, and the second is three-millimeter polyspun fiber laminated on top of the plastic.\footnote{\textsuperscript{372} Remo, “Products,” Accessed September 20, 2016, http://remo.com/products/product/diplomat-fiberskyn/} The resulting sound is warm with open mid-range tones and outstanding definition, controlled sustain, and a warm smooth brush sound, all in a head that holds its pitch and intonation regardless of weather conditions.\footnote{\textsuperscript{373} Ibid.}

Hamilton has had a long road developing cymbals for nearly every major cymbal company. The journey began with the A. Zildjian Company when Hamilton expressed concern with Lennie DiMuzio because he wasn’t playing the cymbals that the company was actually making. Instead, he was playing cymbals from the 1950s and 1960s that were K. Zildjian, hand-hammered and hand-made in Istanbul Turkey rather than at the A. Zildjian factory in Massachusetts.

The conversation started after the Istanbul Cymbal Company offered Hamilton a paid position to fly to Turkey and check all of their cymbals. Hamilton turned down the offer because he was a busy working musician and didn’t want to dedicate time to flying to Turkey just to test products, especially when he endorsed a different company.\footnote{\textsuperscript{374} Hamilton, interview by author.} In 1993, DiMuzio offered to make Hamilton a signature cymbal. Although the process got past the prototype stages, the company refused to release the cymbals he helped develop, and the issue was hand-hammering. The prototype was a hand-hammered cymbal, but
the company insisted on machine-hammering their cymbals. Hamilton states, “They didn’t want to hammer cymbals because that wasn’t what they were known for, and because of that I felt it was best to leave the A. Zildjian Company.”

Not long after Hamilton left the company, he was contacted by the Bosphorus Cymbal Company at a NAMM show because they had seen and heard the cymbals that he had developed with A. Zildjian and wanted Hamilton to look at their cymbals. Hamilton recalls,

I looked at their cymbals and told them that all of their cymbals were too thin [and] too gongy, and they were too low in pitch. They were looking at me like, “Sheesh, how do you know all this stuff? Can we fly you over to help us?” I had just left Zildjian and flew to Istanbul Turkey where the company was based. There were three cymbal masters who were looking at me like, “Who’s the great white cymbal hope you dragged in here?” The owner lived in Atlanta and was from Turkey but owned an airplane parts factory in Atlanta. He brought me over there and asked me to tell them what I felt was wrong with their cymbals. They were not selling well. I said, “You need more bow to the cymbal to raise the pitch and a different contour to the bell, and it needs to be hammered more in order to darken the sound.” They were looking at me like “Oh boy,” and they made a couple, let them sit on the cement floor overnight, and came in the next day. They put a stick on it, and they couldn’t believe it. They said in Turkish, “This is your cymbal, not ours; we wouldn’t have come up with this,” and they loved it. From that point I was known as “Brother Jeffy.” I helped to realign all of their cymbals. I helped add stick definition in the Masters Series, so it wasn’t gongy. I beefed up the bell in the Traditional Series and suggested a thinner edge. That’s how I got my own signature cymbal.

These modifications revitalized the company and boosted sales. Although Bosphorus did a great job of hand-hammering the cymbals in the beginning, it became difficult to keep up with the growing demand. It appeared to Hamilton that they resorted to

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375 Hamilton, interview by author.
376 Ibid.
377 Ibid.
378 Ibid.
machine-hammering the cymbals and were not being forthcoming about it.\textsuperscript{379} Business partner Michael Vosbein recalls the issues they had with Bosphorus,

They were machining cymbals instead of hand-hammering, taking short cuts, and doing all sorts of things they shouldn’t have done. Before we revamped all of their cymbals, they were almost to the point of going belly-up and were looking to sell the company. I put together a proposal to buy the brand and become the brand manager through a company I called Cymbal Masters. I was the principal owner, and Jeff and another friend had a small part of it. It turned out to be a huge problem because the Turks were pissed off that they didn’t own their trademark. Eventually we broke away and started our own brand, Crescent.\textsuperscript{380}

Hamilton became a partial owner of Crescent along with Vosbein, but they quickly ran into similar issues. Hamilton recalls,

Crescent was the next move. An acquaintance we had met while at Bosphorus was managing the factory, which was previously called Impressions. They wanted to make our cymbals, so we had documents drawn up, but the people who signed them weren’t the owners, and it just seemed like every turn we made in Turkey was under the table like that, and we were just getting tired of not being able to deal with the people straight up. In fact, one of the owners ran into some trouble and had to leave Istanbul and took the factory keys with him. The workers couldn’t get in to make our cymbals, but they still demanded to get paid, and it turned into a huge problem quickly. It was clear that we had to stop doing business in Turkey.\textsuperscript{381}

Vosbein began discussions with Andy Zildjian, who was the president of the Sabian Cymbal Company, and they began talks of creating a cymbal at the Sabian factory that was a Crescent cymbal.\textsuperscript{382} Fortunately, Sabian acquired the company, and Hamilton started developing his signature cymbal with the Sabian Company.\textsuperscript{383} Hamilton recalls,

I flew up twice to work on my Hammertone series, and Mark Love the lead cymbal “guru” and the rest of the staff were all very willing to get on board. They all wanted that style of cymbal in their line. It’s a popular cymbal right now for everybody to claim that they know how to make a Turkish cymbal, and they

\textsuperscript{379} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{380} Michael Vosbein, interview by author, tape recording, telephone, April 7, 2016.
\textsuperscript{381} Hamilton, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
realized that we might be one of the few people in the world to tell them how to do it. A lot of cymbal makers are now thirty-five years old and under, and they never heard Mel Lewis or Elvin Jones, and nobody talked to them about how to make a cymbal. They were going strictly on what their cymbal makers had told them, and that’s not always the best advice I’ve found. So it feels great to finally be with a company with a great reputation and great production team, and we don’t have the day-to-day headaches anymore. We can just sit back and enjoy them making great cymbals, and we get our cut for designing them instead of owning the company and the pressure that goes with that.  

The Crescent line of cymbals was just recently released for public sale in June of 2016. It is an important development for the cymbal industry because Sabian was able to successfully produce a cymbal that has a vintage sound appeal but with greater consistency and durability. It will be exciting to see how they affect the greater influence of cymbal production after they have had more time on the market.

384 Hamilton, interview by author.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the story contained in this text that Hamilton has achieved significant success. He has worked diligently since his humble beginnings, and although challenges occurred along the way, his desire to pursue music professionally never waned. Although his biography warrants distinction, his musicality and technical ability also deserve the highest praise. Through his extensive listening and ear training, he is able to get deep inside the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic content of any arrangement with ease and a great deal of clarity. His vast lexicon and imagination allow him to contribute a variety of sounds, colors, and articulations that inspire the highest levels of musicianship and produce a unique, exciting, and dynamic accompaniment. Hamilton’s musical personality is an effective balance of taking command and flexibility. His body language while performing is very intentional: confident, open, but not aggressive. His posture, combined with his adept physical relationship with the instrument, exudes confidence, expertise, trust, and warmth rather than aggression, anger, doubt, or the like. This approach invites the other performers to feel comfortable and confident and bring their own personalities to the music.

His sound on the instrument is distinct and recognizable, and he makes the drums sing with a beautiful, round, full, and legato sound that stays consistent regardless of
speed or dynamic, rather than a harsh or brash sound that is typically associated with the drum set. Hamilton always sounds good and makes the other performers sound good regardless of their own experience or proficiency. He is a craftsman and approaches every situation differently while still maintaining his own unique sound and identity. His ability to blend to a wide variety of scenarios while still sounding distinctly like Jeff Hamilton exemplifies the great depth of his musical approach.

Hamilton’s technical prowess is also unmatched by his peers. He is a master timekeeper and a virtuoso of playing with brushes, sticks, feet, and even his hands. His technical developments and contributions include extending ride cymbal playing techniques by achieving a variety of different feelings and sounds, playing melodies on the drums and cymbals with sensitivity to specific pitches, playing clear and accurate articulations and matching the sounds of the other musicians on the band stand, playing and developing extended solos, timekeeping with the hands in addition to sticks or brushes, use of extended sound techniques such as playing with a wedding ring on the cymbal or scraping the cymbals or drum heads with his fingers, expanding the vocabulary for the brushes (including the lateral approach), extending the speed and agility of the single bass drum pedal and hi-hat pedal, and developing a sound concept that uses looseness rather than tightness to navigate difficult musical passages.

Hamilton’s achievements are inspiring because his story is not one of chance or coincidence, but rather of seized opportunity. When Hamilton was pushed or challenged, he didn’t show lament, but rather forged ahead, held on tightly to his dreams, and trusted himself, even when criticized for doing so. Based on the story contained in this dissertation, it should be no surprise that Hamilton has been so successful. His life is an
inspiration and can serve as a model to all who aspire to be successful: find what you love, love what you do, be a good person, surround yourself with good people, keep your nose clean, know who you are, be patient, learn all you can about your trade, reach out to mentors, keep an open mind, be honest with yourself, perform at your best all the time, do not be afraid to take risks, set and achieve your goals, dream big, and finally, take what you do seriously, but do not take yourself too seriously.

Hamilton’s recorded accomplishments, relationships with history’s greats, and musical and technological innovations have made him and continue to make him one of the best musicians of all time. His level of mastery on the instrument is astounding and only continues to get better with each performance.

The reader will find great joy in listening to the wonderful music Hamilton has made over the years and will continue to make for years to come. Hamilton is a living jazz legend, and it is crucial to see him in a live performance because his music is constantly growing, evolving, and developing well past the completion of this dissertation.


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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
DATE: January 19, 2016
TO: Brian Claxton
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE: [843510-3] The Life and Music of Drummer Jeff Hamilton
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: January 19, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: January 19, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 19, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.