

As in the relationship between Krishna and Arjuna, my path through the aspect of devotion would be propelled by guiding principles like Jack DeJohnette, and would eventually lead to finding a clear Magnum Opus purpose in music. During the pandemic, I took the time to interview him by phone. Musicians of my generation often find parallels in philosophies of related sciences. Whether it's the wisdom of the ancients or purely Sun Ra and Thomas "Fats" Waller, our jazz magicians are often encircled by discussions that dissect the meaning of life and the events we conduct. Few musicians of Jack DeJohnette's ilk would be as super-positional as he. When asked about his early Chicago engagements and influences, he mentioned Eddie Harris, Johnny Griffin, John Gilmore, Sun Ra, Ahmad Jamal, in addition to his early participation in Muhai Richard Abrams' orchestra with Roscoe Mitchell just before they chartered the AACM, when he left for New York. For someone so cosmological, he used the terms commercial and experimental to describe some of his many exploits, which demonstrated his understanding of present-day music business acumen, yet his subsequent *oeuvre* would demonstrate an inexplicable adaptability and organic musical absorption that would blur any lines attempting to define a project.

When asked about sitting in with John Coltrane after Elvin did not return to play the second set, he said: "When John played, it was like someone going through the jungle clearing it with a machete." When asked about the healing quality of music, including the ergonomic techniques he shared with me 40 years ago, he referred to the spiritual intent that could fuel change, and the work he was doing concerning his own challenges. When asked how he became such a great bandleader, he credited Duke Ellington and, of course, Miles Davis, with whom he spent formative and shapeshifting years. Jack sat at the dias of a critically defining era in musical ensembles of American players of the 20th century. The CTI Records, the pre- and post-*Bitches Brew* era, the ECM and Jarrett flights, his own multi-reeded groups, and the many "experimental" ensembles, which I feel were at a zenith with Michael Cain, Lonnie Plaxico and Gary Thomas—all gift us a broad palette of polymathy. Plaxico and Cain describe him as endearing as a father, who paid them extremely well and had more energy than his band members, 20 years younger than himself.

As we gradually discern how the drum set turns the Samsara wheel of our tradition, we will find that Jack DeJohnette has symbolic statues carved of sandalwood in many rooms of meditation for drummers preparing for their next concert.

—PHEEROAN AKLAFF (drums, percussion)

One day, when my late wife Lucille and I were living in Germantown, PA, I took a ride up the highway in my car. Passing through these towns, I came upon a music store I'd never seen before. I stopped there, looked around and saw these huge drumsticks. They must have been at least two feet long, and about as thick as my forearm. They were meant to be played on giant drums the likes of which I've seen at festivals. I bought two sets. Back down the highway to Germantown, got home, and I put the sticks away. Lydia and Jack used to come over to my house to visit. One day they were there, Jack and I in the house, Lydia outside in the studio with Lucille. I told Jack, "Hey man, I was playing some place and some guy gave me a set of drumsticks, would you like 'em?" Jack said yeah. "Wait till I go find them." I had two pairs. I went upstairs, got one set and came back down. Jack, Lydia, and Lucille were all downstairs at the time. When I pulled out these huge drumsticks, we all fell out laughing. We laughed hysterically for a long time. (I later gave the other set to Al Foster, who also had a big laugh. Al did play them, and I had pictures of him playing.)

—SONNY ROLLINS (tenor)

I met "Action Jackson" at Shelly's Manne Hole in 1968. He was working with Miles, having just joined the band. I was already hip to Jack because of his work with Charles Lloyd. A mutual friend in LA, Norman Johnson, said to me, "Look man, you *need* to meet Jack DeJohnette. You need to listen to him. He's playing the new shit!" So, I'm checking out Jack, and the first thing I noticed about his playing, was that it was like he was playing a different instrument. I didn't know then he was also a pianist. As a drummer, he played to the chord changes and the phrasing of the musicians, like a piano player would. The reason his time was so immaculate was because he knew where to play the chord. Jack had a cymbal pattern, but it was of a drummer that was melodic-minded. That's why he had perfect timing: he played to the changes. I came out of a rudimental style of drumming, as I understood the cadence. Jack was the exact opposite. He understood the melody to fit the cadence. Jack would play more cymbals than the average drummer who hadn't studied the piano: he was hearing chord changes and playing the changes. When I first heard Jack, I heard colors; I had never heard colors until I heard him. He had in essence invented a scale for the drums, like a piano. The drums were the white keys; the cymbals were the black keys. Anytime he wanted to make a note sharp, he would go to a cymbal beat. But he didn't play in a melodic sense, he played in a tonal sense: what color to put where when.

Jack's mind was completely free. He told me something that I didn't figure out until 10-15 years later after he first told me: "You have a great sense of humor. You need to play the way you talk!" I didn't hear it. But when it hit me, I thought "That's what he's talking about, to play my personality." I later became Jack's spiritual mentor. He said to me, "You're the only guy I had ever met in the music business that thoroughly understood his destiny". He really wanted me to be a household name, but he never realized I never cared about that. Two years ago, he told me, "Man, Michael, I finally figured you out..." I said, "What's your verdict?" "You just know what you want to do!" Jack understood it.

The ranks are getting thin now. The world knows of his great musical talents and all the things he had given to the global jazz community. But he was a really kind, caring and very beautiful human being, and very funny too. He may not have thought he was funny, but he was! I loved him so much. 55 years of friendship and I'll miss him. I will always cherish the time we had together. He loved me so much and I would always thank him.

—MICHAEL CARVIN (drums)

I am still reeling about the news of Jack's passing. He opened up the world for me and was one of my very best friends. I came from Detroit, he came from Chicago. When we moved to New York, to the Lower East Side, we just connected. It seemed like we always knew one another and ours became a life-long friendship. Jack and I brought out the best in each other, we really did. We just got the opportunities to do some things that were phenomenal and it was so uplifting every time I had an opportunity to play with him. When we performed together, it was golden. He was magic, so incredibly gifted. I am happy that I was able to have him as one of my friends and as a guide for me really. He gave me hope for my future, as he was ahead of me in a lot of regards. Just a genius. And some of the things we did, I tell you, if they had been recorded, it would have caused a revolution! So many great times spent with Jack. He was like a brother to me, not only musically but as men enduring the eras and having a career and the challenges that come with that. I had the great honor of being the best man at his wedding. When he got married to Lydia, she was a jewel, and his career is a testament to that. He just flowered.

—BENNIE MAUPIN (tenor, bass clarinet, flute)

I'm heartbroken to hear of the passing of Jack DeJohnette, one of the greatest musicians to ever do it and a dear friend. I first met Jack in the mid '60s when he would come to Free Spirits gigs (the band I was in with Larry Coryell and Jim Pepper) and dance like crazy wearing a cape and Zorro hat. Later we went to see Nina Simone's group together and were blown away by the free-form funk of her drum team, Don Alias on drums and Jumma Santos on congas and percussion. That inspired us to form the group Compost in the early '70s with the great Harold Vick (saxophone, flute), Jack Gregg (bass) and badass conga man Jumma. Jack wrote much of the music, sang and played keyboards and I was the drummer. We would always switch off for a couple of tunes where Jack would play drums, and I would play keys (clavinet with a wah wah pedal). To this day it was the most fun I've ever had playing music. We would always close each gig with an extended double-drum duet and this is what kicked my drumming to a higher level. Years later when visiting Jack he played me some tapes of Compost live and when it got to the drum duet, I couldn't believe my ears. It sounded like five drummers. I said to Jack, "That's just you and me?" He said, "No that's just me. You haven't come in yet!" He was always on a higher level than me. Jack was and is such an inspiration to me and I learned so much from him. One of the most important things was to play on, even through equipment breakdowns. I used to get so frustrated for example if my bass drum pedal broke while I was playing. I remember watching Jack play so hard he would destroy his whole set, yet play on as if nothing was wrong. I thought, that's the way to be. This is a lesson for music and life. To remain undaunted and positive no matter what challenges or obstacles come our way. Gratitude and love eternal to you Maestro DeJohnette for your friendship and inspiration.

—RA KALAM BOB MOSES (drums, percussion)

DeJohnette's Polyphonic Poly-Rhythmic Music: Jack DeJohnette was a master drummer and composer in the 20th century. The artistry he demonstrated through his drumming allowed other artists to unveil their own extraordinary flow of musical inspiration and creativity. His performances inspired them to develop fresh musical ideas in the present moment. His knowledge was uniquely expressed through performance, requiring no explanation.

I first encountered his music in Chicago in the late '60s. He was there to perform with Miles Davis in the George Wein Jazz Festival at Chicago's Soldier Field. Muhai Richard Abrams gave me a call telling me that Jack was meeting him at the AACM and that I should join them. Only the three of us were present, making it an intimate moment where we were performing with and for each other. Jack was the first drummer with whom I discovered how to play in the context of a horizontal and a proportional rhythmical construction. This discovery allowed me to create across the "bar line." When DeJohnette played, he articulated his accents and cross-rhythms around, inside and in between the flow of the emotional and creative expanse of the music. His rhythmical structures shaped and pushed a continuous forward motion. We were able to create solo lines that were clear and enriched by the emotional arc of the music, satisfying the artistic realm of expression. This was something rare! I have always valued his musical expression and knowledge of the creative music artform.

I am honored to have been able to make music with him over the last 25 years. Our last session in 2023 was a tribute recording celebrating Miles Davis' compositions, as well as two I created as a dedication to Miles. Jack DeJohnette's orbit was a most wonderful journey. His music speaks straight to the heart. He was my friend and a great human being.

—WADADA LEO SMITH (trumpet)

I have had great relationships with great drummers in my career: Max Roach, Billy Hart, Ed Blackwell, Billy Higgins, Elvin Jones, Steve McCall, Dannie Richmond, Jimmy Cobb—and Jack. I have learned a lot from my experience, particularly with Jack, in how to speak with drummers in their language. And I usually have had great success with those types of drummers, in how to speak "drum talk" and how to understand what they do: I understand drummers and am able to help them understand me. Jack has always been one of my favorite drummers. One of my first meetings with him was my recording, *The Outside Within* (India Navigation, 1978). Soon thereafter, I would join his Special Edition, replacing David Murray, a group with which I played for around five years. In addition to his own bands and cooperative groups, he of course played in a lot of different projects throughout his career, whether with Dave Holland, the trio with Keith Jarrett and Gary Peacock and of course the Charles Lloyd Quartet. For my generation, there were two schools of drumming: Elvin and Tony Williams. And by that, I mean, a lot of drummers coming up then would sound like one or the other. Jack, however, was the essence of both. I learned a lot from Elvin (who played on my *Beyond The Rain*), so by the time I was with Jack, I could see what Jack had learned from him. I remember leading a band, with Kenny Barron, Cecil McBee and Jack, plus my father, Von Freeman. For the concert's first set, Jack was a little more aggressive than I was accustomed to. Turned out it was because Max was in the audience. He was trying to impress Max because he had so much respect for him. So, Max Roach came backstage afterwards, told him that he played too much and gave him some tips and critique. Jack then took the critique to heart and, after that, made an immediate adjustment. I actually felt it represented a turning point for him. Yes, he clearly had an ego, but he did not have an ego problem. Watching him, as my elder and seeing how he reacted to his elders, was not only a learning experience for him, but certainly was for me as well. I respected him even more when I saw that.

As a bandleader and musical collaborator, Jack had things he wanted, but importantly he would ask me to always challenge myself. He was open-minded and tried to do more things with as great an amount of freedom as possible. And he consistently encouraged me to let my eclecticism come out, not to be confined.

—CHICO FREEMAN (woodwinds)

Out of the blue, sometime in 1965, Jack called me..."I want to play with you, man." I had not heard him play yet and was told he was "from the street" and would be too loud. Eventually, we met up and early in 1966 the quartet with Keith, Jack and Cecil coalesced with a concert at the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore—a spectacular galaxy opened up. Our first recording *Dream Weaver* came out shortly after in 1966. We traveled the globe together—broke down barriers in the USSR, sat under the redwoods together and played our hearts out for the majesty of the trees and the Universe. Jack was a natural, intuitive musician and a great, great drummer. I'll take the street he comes from any day of the year. He brought the street and his own inner, very personal, purposeful vision to every sound he made. Always for the greater good of the Universe. He was a Master. My condolences to Lydia and his family. Barche Lamsel dear friend. Om shanti shanti shanti.

—CHARLES LLOYD
(tenor, flute)

It goes without saying that Jack DeJohnette was a phenomenon. And what can you say about a phenomenon? He covered a lot of musical areas, one reason because he also played the piano, which made him extraordinarily musical. Consequently, he played the drums as an instrument, musically. He was the kind of guy who could anticipate and perceive what everyone was doing, which allowed him to improvise on an extraordinarily high level. He was a true improviser: because improvisation implies composition. And so he could and would co-compose with anybody he was playing with at any given time: he was part of everybody's composition that he played with. That's what he meant to me, besides being a phenomenon at rhythm. He could play rhythms from different cultures, not quite unlike some of the great drummers we've had. But when you add that he could improvise with musicians on a high harmonic level, he could uplift whomever he was playing with, even if another drummer. He was such a great musician. When I made my first record under my own name, he was so encouraging. He invited me and my family to his house just to stay there for a week, so that meant we went down to his basement and we played, him on piano while I was on drums. He was just a phenomenal musician, a great, rhythmic drummer, a wonderful person with a great sense of humor, a great friend and a huge inspiration in so many different ways to so many other musicians. I'm still trying to get over losing Jack. He was such a huge force, such a huge, musical force.

—BILLY HART (drums)

Jack DeJohnette was one of the greatest musicians to ever live. I was a fan from listening to him on so many recordings. I still can't believe I got to play with him. I was in his group for about seven years and playing music with Jack changed my entire philosophy of music. From our first moment playing together, it just felt magical. His approach to rhythm and interpreting a song, and most importantly, supporting the band and the soloist, was truly unique. His energy for music was limitless; it always felt like you could just keep playing and never stop. One time we played at Jazz Alley; one set was two hours straight, but I thought it had been about 10 minutes!

—GEORGE COLLIGAN
(piano, drums)

It has been heart-warming to read so many of the tributes to Jack that have appeared since his passing. There is very little more that I can add to the words of appreciation for his outstanding musical output over so many years and in so many different settings. That said, one thing I observed on the occasions that I was lucky enough to work with him was his unfailing support and interest in younger musicians. Normally after gigs Jack would be surrounded by young fans and drummers seeking advice and, no matter how tough the day had been on the road, Jack always found time to talk and offer wise words. A couple of weeks ago I was asked to choose a special track of Jack's for a broadcast. After a lot of thought I said, "Pick anything and drop the needle—whatever Jack played was worth listening to!"

—JOHN SURMAN (woodwinds)

Once in Rockport, MA, I saw Jack and his group playing at the Shalin Liu Performance Center. Jack was playing a lot of piano and very notable was his comping for his group. It was extremely interesting and one could never know what he would play next. It created an awesome flow, in and out of the band's music. He was so very innovative. I had first heard him, in the early '70s, on a Chick Corea album, on a song called "The Brain". The feeling of what he played was quite amazing, especially in the sounds, spaces and rhythms he played with Chick and Dave Holland. It was a loose feeling, open and very expressive. He always seemed ready to create and/or join musicians' ideas, regardless with whom he was playing. My first thoughts were to ask him to record with me. In the '80s we did four albums of mine (*Keyed In*, *Ancient Dynasty*, *Where The Legends Dwell* and *Special Identity*), together with Eddie Gomez on bass. What a treat that was! Jack has recorded such amazing music with his own groups and also with many other musicians of course. He will be greatly missed here on earth.

—JOANNE BRACKEEN (piano)

