

MAX ROACH

(Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, others)

Max Roach is one of the most innovative and enlightened artists of the 20th century. Best known for breathing life into the intellectual and improvisational style of bop at a time when swing was growing tired and exhausted, Roach completely liberated the drummer from the confines of structured rhythm, and single-handedly transformed the drums into a melodic solo instrument.

Max Roach was born January 8, 1924, in New Land, North Carolina. He moved to Brooklyn, New York, when he was age four, he learned to play the drums by age 10, and he played a performance with Duke Ellington by age 16. Roach was largely influenced by Baby Dodds (Louis Armstrong and His Hot Seven, King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers) and the first drummer to play bop, Kenny Clarke (Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk).

Roach's style is less obsessed with the precise rudimental chops that dominated the swing era, particularly the style played by Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa, and instead focuses on the melodic capabilities of the instrument. Roach somehow transforms the drum kit into a full music combo, effortlessly switching back and forth between rhythms and melodies. This can be heard with vivid clarity on the tune "Blues Waltz" from the album *Jazz in 3/4 Time*. Notice how Max plays the drums as a rhythmic instrument, keeping time under the solos of his colleagues until his own solo at approximately five minutes into the track, at which point his hands transform the cymbals, toms, and snare into a cohesive melodic solo instrument while his feet continue to hold down the rhythmic responsibilities on the kick and hi-hat. Another unique aspect of Max's playing is his free-form style, which he contrasts beautifully with temperamental and explosive outbursts. One last signature of Roach's playing is his ability to unleash at any given moment into his blistering-fast ride playing.

Max is definitely a fearless leader who transcends time and space, guiding us into unexplored territory, sometimes dissonant and fearful, and sometimes upbeat and joyful. His sticks were like paintbrushes and his canvas was $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{7}{4}$ or completely free-form, whatever suited his mood. His mark has been made on timeless recordings with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Coleman Hawkins, Bud Powell, and Miles Davis, and he will always be remembered as an artist who walked through walls when it came to expanding the boundaries of self-expression.

"MUCH LATER IN MY CAREER I GOT TO KNOW AND TO PLAY ALONGSIDE MAX, A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE. MAX WAS A WONDERFUL MAN WHO GAVE ME FAITH IN MY OWN ABILITY. JUST A GREAT PLAYER AND A GENTLEMAN WHOM I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER WITH AFFECTION."

—Ginger Baker

"Ko-Ko"


from Charlie Parker's Re-Boppers'
The Complete Savoy and Dial Master Takes (1945)

Level: Advanced

After some beautiful brush work on the snare, Roach picks up some sticks and helps redefine jazz by putting the emphasis on a lightning-fast ride pattern backed up with some tasty snare and kick accents. This style of playing became the standard for bop drumming and is incredibly difficult to play, mainly because of the sheer speed. The following transcription is from 16 bars of the tune that faithfully represent the kinds of kick and snare patterns Roach interlaces throughout the tune.

Original Transcription (1:03–1:16):


Track 21



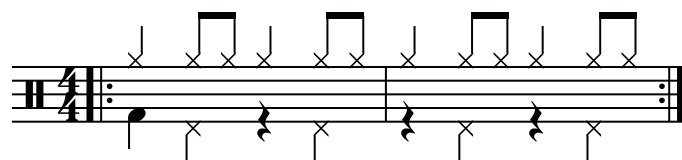
♩ = 284

Ride Cym. cont. -----

H.H. cont. -----



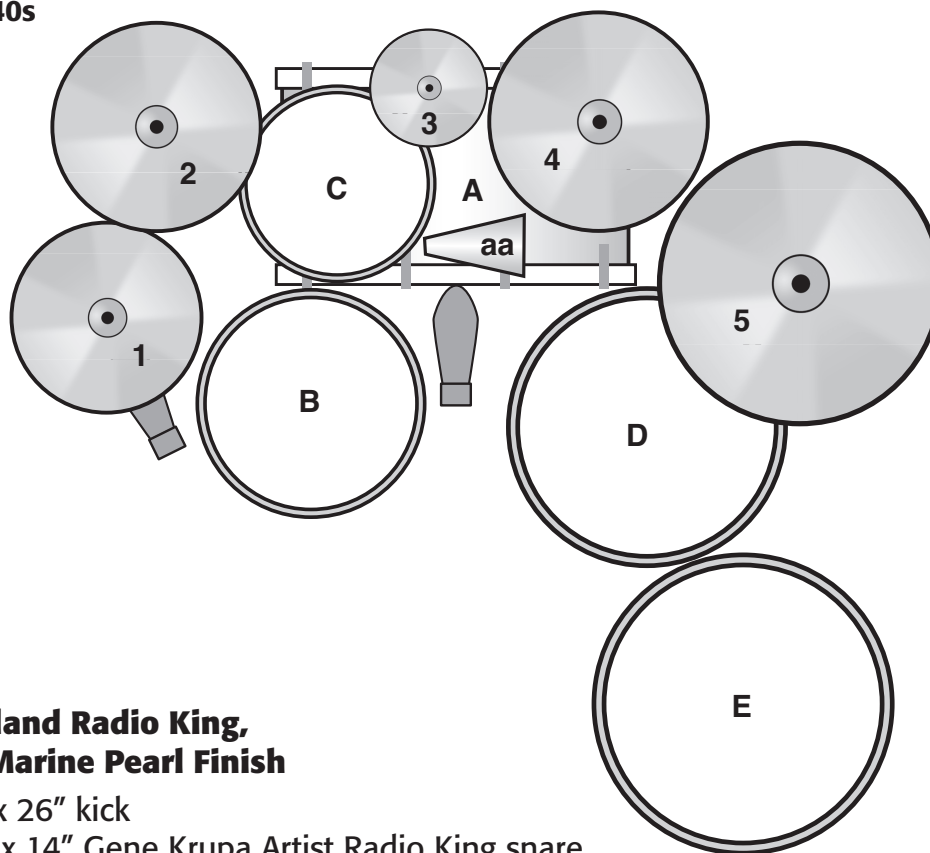
Start by playing a basic jazz swing beat on the ride, the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4 with the foot, and the kick on beat 1 of every other bar. Start slowly, and gradually increase the tempo until you can play it quickly and steadily. When you start to get to faster tempos, the swung ride beat should start to straighten out, with the eighth notes being bounced on the ride. If you feel yourself tensing up at quick tempos, slow down and relax your grip. You'll notice that the fastest jazz drummers play with a very relaxed temperament.



Drum Boogie

Gene Krupa is respectfully referred to as the “father of the modern drumset” for the fine contributions he has made to the instrument. Shortly after he earned an endorsement with Slingerland drums in 1935, Krupa convinced the company to make tunable tom toms in 1936, a move that would forever replace the old tacked-head Chinese tom that drummers used to clip onto the rim of their kick drums. He also helped develop the legendary Radio King snare drum. Gene Krupa was such an influential and important endorser to Slingerland that he was featured on every one of their drum catalogs from 1936 to 1967.

Circa 1940s



Slingerland Radio King, White Marine Pearl Finish

- A: 14" x 26" kick
- B: 6.5" x 14" Gene Krupa Artist Radio King snare
- C: 9" x 13" rack tom
- D: 16" x 16" floor tom
- E: 16" x 16" or 16" x 18" floor tom

Zildjian

- 1: 12" hi-hats
- 2: 13" medium thin crash
- 3: 8" splash
- 4: 14" ride
- 5: 16" medium thin crash

Percussion

- aa: cowbell