

Core Arts. Drum kit lesson #7. Funk!

Hi people. I hope you are all well, staying safe and alert. This week's lesson is about FUNK! You all know about that, right? If you don't know, get to know! Hehe.

Funk music is one of the most satisfying styles of music to play as a drummer. Funk music originated in the USA. It is black music. Of that there is no question. That doesn't mean you can't be funky if you're white, yellow, brown or purple! (Not sure about orange though hehe).

There is no point in asking when was the first funk record or who made it. So I'm not going to go there, instead I'm going to give you a few prime examples of funk music and drummers, and you can do your own research from there.

Clyde Stubblefield.

Surely the King of Funk, James Brown. "Get Up! Get on Up!" "Make it Funky!" "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag". With a career spanning decades, James Brown always had the best funk drummers, he even has a song called "Funky Drummer". The man at the kit on that occasion was **Clyde Stubblefield** (who I had the pleasure of seeing perform at a tiny basement club in Camberwell in the 1990s). Stubblefield played with James Brown from 1965 to 1970 and was apparently self-taught, so you don't need me! (I'm half-joking. If you have a good drum teacher they will help you, but only **you** can actually make yourself get better.)

Joseph 'Zigaboo' Modeliste

The man with the best name and the highly influential drummer with the Meters, funk band from New Orleans. Modeliste had a style that was 'simple'. Well, not really simple but not flashy. Funk is all about timing and precision. Even if you are playing 'loose and funky' your timing has to be good. Check out songs such as 'Cissy Strut', 'Clapping Song' or 'Just Kissed My Baby' or any other Meters song to hear the extremely funky drumming of Joseph 'Zigaboo' Modeliste.

New Orleans. A quick word about New Orleans. This city is acknowledged as the birthplace of Jazz music. Under slavery, black people were forbidden from playing the drums, as it threatened the slave masters. Except in New Orleans where, in **Congo Square** drummers would play and people would dance every Sunday. A whole essay could be written about New Orleans.

George Clinton. Parliament/Funkadelic.

You can't talk about funk without mentioning George Clinton and Funkadelic. P-Funk. 'One Nation Under A Groove'. The funkier, psychedelic and very political band of the 1970s and still going, just! I had the honour of supporting them at a gig in Paris and it is one of the highlights of my career. I confess, that they have had so many drummers that I don't know them all by name – you can Google it - but **Dennis Chambers** deserves a mention.

Ohio Players.

Incredibly funky band from Ohio, surprisingly. Check out 'Love Rollercoaster', 'Fire' and many other fantastic cuts. **James 'Diamond' Williams** was the drummer throughout the 1970s and 80s. Incredibly good technique and very inventive creator of grooves.

Sly and the Family Stone.

I am sure you have heard their songs.

Greg Ericco was their drummer from 1966 to 1971 and one of the funkier white guys on the planet! (And I share my birthday with him...) He also went on to play with **Betty Davis**, a very out there and ahead of her time singer and songwriter in the funk genre, who was at one time married to Miles Davis and is credited with introducing him to the electric 'funk rock' sounds of Jimi Hendrix and Sly and the Family Stone.

Obviously there are too many to mention everyone. You can spend many happy hours researching it more deeply. I'll just mention **Herbie Hancock** and his 'Jazz Funk fusion' band **The Headhunters**. This is where Funk went fused with Jazz. Check out "God Make Me Funky" which has the great drumming of **Mike Clark** (another funky white guy) and **Harvey Mason**.

You have to include **Prince** who took the funk into pop and rock with amazing songwriting and arrangements from the late 70s through the 80s, 90s all the way up to his untimely death just a couple of years ago. A genius for sure.

Enjoy your journey into the fabulous world of funk music and funk drumming.

