

JIM CHAPIN OBITUARY

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Jim Chapin, legendary jazz drummer and educator, died on July 4, 2009 in Florida. He was a few weeks shy of 90 years old.

Mr. Chapin was born in New York City in 1919. His father was James Ormsbee Chapin, an artist of the American Scene school of painting and his mother was Abigail Forbes Chapin, a teacher and writer.

Mr. Chapin did not begin playing the drums until he was 18 years old, after being inspired by legendary drummer Gene Krupa. He studied with the renowned rudimentalist, Sanford Moeller, and within two years he was playing opposite Krupa at the 1939 World's Fair in New York!

In the early 1940s, Mr. Chapin began working on a drum instruction book that was eventually published in 1948 as "Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer, Volume I, Coordinated Independence as Applied to Jazz and Be-Bop." His exercises and concepts caused such a stir among drummers that he had to have a pair of drumsticks in his back pocket at all times in case he was called upon to demonstrate a particularly difficult passage and to prove that he truly could play every pattern in the book! Still in print today, it became known among drummers simply as "The Chapin Book" and is arguably the most important drum set text ever written.

All of the great drummers in the past 60 years have paid their dues with The Chapin Book, which is the much-imitated, standard work on the subject. In 1971, Mr. Chapin published "Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer, Volume II, Independence–The Open End", a monumental undertaking that utilizes overlays to

illustrate its complex points. In the preface of this work, Mr. Chapin admitted that even he could not play every pattern that is presented, thus getting him off the hook of having to pull out his sticks on demand to prove that everything printed can actually be executed! Volume II was ahead of its time nearly 40 years ago and it is modern today!

From the 1940s through the 1960s, Mr. Chapin performed and toured with a variety of bands, including Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra and groups led by the likes of Mike Riley, Woody Herman, Tommy Dorsey and Tony Pastor. He also performed on occasion with his sons, Tom, Steve and the late Harry Chapin who was one of the top singer-songwriters of the 1970s and a founding member of the World Hunger Year. And he led his own bands well into his 80s.

Some of Mr. Chapin's techniques were captured on an instructional video first released in 1992 called "Speed, Power, Control, Endurance", which is now available on DVD. Though most would expect the video to feature him playing complex patterns from his books on a drum set, Mr. Chapin spent the entire time on a practice pad, demonstrating the methods of his instructor, Sanford Moeller, of which he was evangelistic about and to which he attributed his longevity as a drummer. It was Mr. Chapin's mission to get as many drummers as possible to utilize The Moeller Method to get the maximum results from the minimum effort, thus avoiding fatigue and injuries.

During the past 25 years, Mr. Chapin found a second career, as he was discovered by a new generation of musicians that hungered for his depth of knowledge on drummers

and drumming. He spent his time traveling around the world teaching and presenting seminars and he was a fixture at music trade shows and percussion conventions. He was a Pied Piper of drumming and all Mr. Chapin had to do was sit down at his battered and always handy practice pad anywhere in the world and a crowd of drummers would gather to soak in as much of what long-time student, friend and confidant Dom Famularo aptly dubbed as “The Chapin Magic”.

In 1994, Mr. Chapin received two honors for his contributions to music and education: the American Eagle Award, presented by the National Music Council in Washington and a lifetime achievement award from the Berklee College of Music in Boston. And in 1995, he was inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame.

Through times of “here today-gone tomorrow” artists, Mr. Chapin was always there. During the past 70 years, he observed, studied and analyzed every great (and not so great) drummer. He was there almost from the beginning of modern drum set playing and that will never happen again. Mr. Chapin was a master student in addition to being a master teacher and he epitomized the most important quality necessary for longevity in the music business: he would not grow old!

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