

# BOOKS //

## Tony Allen – An Autobiography of the Master Drummer of Afrobeat

Tony Allen  
with Michael E. Veal

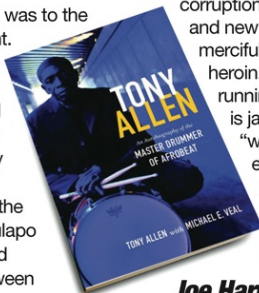
Duke University Press £15

Anyone who knows their Afrobeat will tell you how pivotal the kit drummer Tony Allen was to the genre's development. Indeed, as the saxophonist, writer and scholar Michael E. Veal points out in this important, deftly crafted book, the pairing of Allen and the late great Fela Anikulapo Kuti could be likened to partnerships between such jazz superstars as Coltrane and Elvin Jones; Miles and Philly Joe Jones; Ornette and Billy Higgins. But despite his contributions to everything from 20th century West African percussion – kit drums were rare in a motherland that sways, stereotypically, to hand drumming – to Afrobeat, African jazz and UK-based projects such as the Good, the Bad and the Queen, Allen has never made much of a claim for credit. Which, since Fela wasn't big on promoting his sidemen, meant that Allen's place in the Afrobeat Hall of Fame was overdue some polishing.

A professor of Music and African-American Studies at Yale, and the author of *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Icon*, Veal is a guy who knows his shit. His refined, informed introduction testifies to a deep understanding of postcolonial Africa and postcolonial African music, of Allen's oeuvre and the evolution of his playing over his 15 years as an official member of Fela's band and beyond. The early big-band jazz drumming in Fela's highlife crew Koola Lobitos; the jazz-inspired fusion of highlife and R&B, then the highly syncopated funky patterns, then the smoother and more jazzy style that characterised the later years of Afrobeat and to an extent, remains his signature now. Having reinforced the now 73-year-old Allen's legacy by placing him in contexts political and social as well as geographical and musical, Veal sets us up for Allen's story, told in Allen's voice, in Allen's words. Here, then, is the tale of a humble man of Ghanaian/Nigerian parentage; a God-fearing man who worked as an electrician while fine-tuning a centered, all-four-limbs drumming style that took its cues

from rhythmic storytellers like Max Roach, Elvin and Philly Joe.

A musician who both watched and lived the life during the heady years with a difficult, jealous Fela; who got double-crossed but hung about out of loyalty and love. Anecdotes come thick and fast: arguments over money, dope and women. Gigs in Lagos, London and Paris; military raids; Nigerian corruption; his French citizenship and new French family. A mercifully brief flirtation with heroin. And through it all, running like a silver thread, is jazz. "Jazz," says Allen, "was the thing that enlightened me so much." Still musically curious, still loving life, he's still got his jazz hat on now. **Jane Cornwell**



## Joe Harriott – Sketches From Life

Stella Muirhead

DLL Publishing £10

At 37 pages this is more of a booklet than a book per se so its scope is inevitably limited. And yet within these confines, Muirhead offers a neatly constructed and astutely condensed account of the life of one of the greatest musicians that Jamaica has ever produced, and whose contribution to the British jazz scene has been of great significance. She covers Harriott's all important musical education at the Alpha Boys School in Kingston, his arrival in Britain in the 1950s, his brilliant recorded output and his last, sombre days in Southampton where he died in 1973, aged just 44. Muirhead also broaches the essential questions of race, identity and Harriott's notoriously prickly personality, and perhaps these complex strands could have been developed in more depth. It's also a shame that the design and layout are a bit too busy. Having said that, the concise, economic text serves as a useful introduction to an artist whose legacy remains undimmed.

Kevin Le Genre

## Don Drummond: The Genius and Tragedy of The World's Greatest Trombonist

Heather Augustyn

McFarland £25

It's the foreword to Heather Augustyn's book on Don Drummond that locates the legendary Jamaican trombonist in a jazz context. Delfeayo Marsalis recalls a New York cabbie spotting his slide trombone and asking if he'd heard of Don Drummond. He hadn't. While taking the

driver's assertion that trombonist Drummond was "the greatest in history" with a pinch of salt he was surprised to hear that his own idol, JJ Johnson, had visited Jamaica in the early 1960s to check Drummond out. That conversation led Delfeayo to the music of the Skatalites. He was instantly impressed with an "earthiness and songlike quality" that makes Drummond immediately identifiable. Don Drummond's musical education began at the famed Alpha Boys School in Kingston. Alpha was a hotbed of musical talent and Drummond's alumni include Joe Harriott, Wilton Gaynair, Tommy McCook, Rico Rodriguez and Eddie 'Tan Tan' Thornton. It was a source of recruits for the big bands that played nightly at Kingston's uptown hot spots and the teenage Drummond went straight from Alpha into Eric Dean's Orchestra whose repertoire included Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman and Harry James. The rise of an indigenous recording industry created the demand for session players. Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd employed the Skatalites as his house band at Studio One and secured Drummond's services by buying him a trombone. This book gives a valuable insight into the working life of these Jamaican musicians, and while Ernest Ranglin once told me that the Rastafari had hijacked reggae from Jamaica's jazz fraternity it's clear from this book that the gatherings held by Count Ossie and his drummers at Warieka Hill provided a genuine sense of spiritual freedom and inspiration to a host of musicians including Don Drummond. Augustyn paints a vivid picture of the times. She never shrinks from dealing with the destructive cycle of abuse and mental illness that plagued both Drummond and the other main character in the book – Anita Mahfood aka Margarita – a famed rumba dancer. Despite the deep bond that existed between Anita and Don, the latter's psychosis-fuelled jealousy tragically led to Anita's murder on January 1st 1965. Drummond was subsequently confined to Bellvue Mental Hospital where he died at the age of 36 leaving us dozens of minor masterpieces that reflect the melancholy genius of Margarita's 'Ungu Malungu Man'.

Paul Bradshaw

## Jazz Covers

Joaquim Paulo

Taschen 25 Edition £34.99

There are jazz album cover art books, such as Graham Marsh and Glyn Callingham's superb *The Cover Art of Blue Note Records*

and Concord's *Prestige Records: The Album Cover Collection*. And then there's Taschen's new deluxe version of *Jazz Covers*: a tome so huge and heavy even Arnold Schwarzenegger would think twice before attempting to pick it up. *Jazz Covers* was first published in late 2008 (reviewed *Jazzwise* Feb 2009 issue) as a medium-size, soft cover edition containing over 650 jazz vinyl LP sleeves from the 1940s to the early 1990s, including many hard to find titles, sourced from the author, Joaquim Paulo's own collection. Compiled alphabetically by artist name, it included albums from the majority of jazz record labels in the USA, from majors to independents, together with a smattering of UK and European titles, each accompanied by label, year, designer and photographer credits and a short piece about each sleeve design. The reproduction and printing, as one would expect from art book specialist Taschen, was absolutely top drawer. For this new deluxe 25 Series edition the publisher has indulged in a spot of highly attractive cosmetic enlargement: pumping up the page dimensions to that of a 12-inch vinyl sleeve, expanding the pagination by 66 pages to 560 pages and dressing the package up in two hardback covered volumes that come in a three-inch thick glossy cardboard slipcase, weighing in at a colossal six kilos. The visual impact is immediate. The artwork leaps from the page with many sleeves now benefiting from full size reproduction, particularly eye-scrambling psychedelic gems such as Maurice McIntyre *Humility In The Light of Creator* (Delmark); Luis Gasca *Collage* (Fantasy); Archie Shepp *The Way Ahead* (Impulse), as well as hip-before-their-time early 1960s designs for Sarah Vaughan *The Explosive Side of Sarah Vaughan* (EMI/Columbia) and Horace Silver *Horace-Scope* (Blue Note). As I mentioned in my 2009 review, every turn of the page is another window onto a lost visual world from a golden age when album artwork was almost as important as the music, and in some cases was an event in itself. This is a rare example of a great book that just got better. And with the first soft cover edition from 2008 now out of print and selling for double the original price, this great value deluxe edition is an absolute must.

Jon Newey

