



*Frank DeVito with the Hal McIntyre Band
1951 / Hotel Statler, Washington, D.C.
photo courtesy of DeVito Archives*

the time traveler



by Paul Kreibich
Compiled and introduced by Stephen Gullette
cover photo taken at Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas 1980

When we examine Frank De Vito's career as a drummer, we can tell a great deal about him by listening to the recordings of his playing. But what about those times in his career when the tape reel was not rolling and there was no one around to hear his efforts?

When we look back over any career to consider the legacy of someone's achievements, we often look at how the person affected those around him or her; we look at how people remember the individual. Frank holds up well under this type of scrutiny.

Jim Chapin taught Frank at the Brooklyn School of Modern Music in 1948, the same year Jim published his book *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer*. Jim says he gave Frank a copy of the book and says, "Within nine months he had the whole book down. No one else had come close." According to Jim, Max Roach and Art Blakey, among others, had copies of the book and were working through it. If you consider that impressive, consider this: Jim goes on to say that in his opinion, "Frank is one of the greatest drummers that

ever lived. Because what he was doing at that time, he was doing better than anyone else."

During my discussion with Jim, I asked him to validate a story I had heard about Frank. As the story goes, Jim stopped by, at around three or four in the morning, to visit Frank at his apartment in The Radio Center Hotel. As he approached the door, he noticed it was slightly open. He pushed the door open to find Frank, full dressed, lying on his bed with a pair of sticks in his hands - a practice pad in his lap. Open on a chair next to his bed was Jim's book. Frank had fallen asleep practicing. Jim says every word of the story is true.

This story speaks volumes about the character and effort that has guided Frank DeVito throughout his career. What follows is an interview written by Paul Kreibich, a seasoned, professional drummer who has toured internationally with Ray Charles for four years, in addition to recording, teaching and playing with a host of other talented artists and bands throughout his drumming tenure.

Stephen Gullette

The Time Traveler: Frank DeVito

A while ago I was given an old set of Rogers drums by producer Dick Bank. They had been sitting in his friend's house for many years and were rusty, dirty, and had parts missing. At first I thought they were junk, but gradually took an interest in the drums. I cleaned up the chrome, polished the shells and replaced missing and broken parts... with originals whenever possible. It became quite an absorbing project. One particular thing intrigued me. On the front head of the bass drum (which is an unusual 20" x 12" size) was emblazoned in the flashy lettering of the 50's "FRANK DE VITO - Rogers." I had met Frank and had heard him play live, but didn't know him that well. I knew he had a great reputation as both a jazz and studio drummer. I decided to call Frank and quiz him on the history of these vintage drums I had acquired. What follows is the result of several interesting conversations. Frank has had a full and fascinating career that reads like a chronicle of jazz and pop music from the forties to the present day.

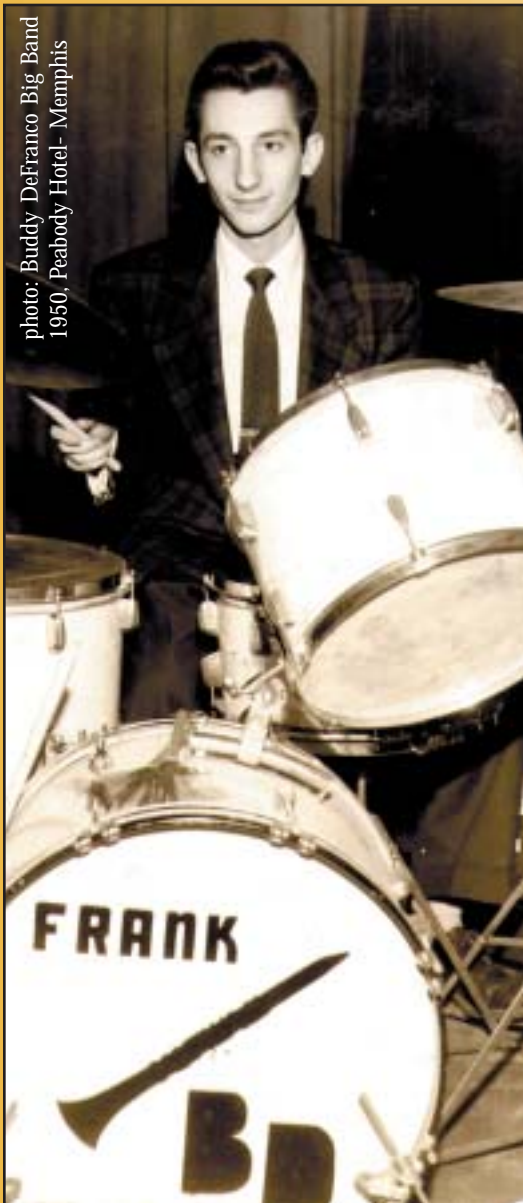


photo: Buddy DeFranco Big Band
1950, Peabody Hotel- Memphis

Having grown up in the era when Gene Krupa was the national drumming hero, Frank soon found himself in New York at the center of the Bebop revolution with drummers like Max Roach and Roy Haynes. After paying his dues on the road with Terry Gibbs and Buddy De Franco, among many others, he settled in the Los Angeles area. Once again he found himself at the epicenter of a great change in music: the transition from swing to rock 'n' roll. Along with drum innovators like Hal Blaine and Earl Palmer, Frank became part of the skilled studio crew that changed the face of popular music, recording with



photo by Billy Jeanssonne

such stars at The Beach Boys and Sonny and Cher. For years Frank has also owned and operated Danmar percussion, manufacturing innovative percussion products. He is still very active in music and enjoys playing the drums more than ever. Frank loves to share his experiences and friendships and is well-liked by all his peers in the business.

Early Years

Frank was born and raised in Utica, New York. His first drum teacher was George Claesgens, who taught at the local music store. De Vito came from a musical family, with cousins Torrie and Ronnie Zito also becoming professional musicians. Ronnie is a great drummer who is still very active in New York. Frank first started gigging when he was 14 years old. He played at the Silver Rail club with hometown pal J.R. Montrose, who became a renowned tenor saxophonist. Musicians were needed locally because so many of the pros were away in the military during the war. Frank answered an ad in Billboard for work in a territory band that traveled on a sleeper bus. He also worked with polka bands and other local groups to get experience. Frank had found his calling and decided to leave school and start his professional career. De Vito remembers live music being much bigger in those days. "There was no TV and the records of the time were not so good, so live bands were the thing," he recalls.

Gene Krupa was Frank's first influence. "When I first saw Gene he was bigger than life," he remembers. "Gene had Anita O'Day and Roy Eldridge then... and Charlie Ventura on Tenor Sax." Frank also caught Count Basie with Jo Jones and heard Stan Kenton's band with the young Shelly Manne on drums.

Frank soon made his way to the New York City area, where he studied at the Brooklyn School of Music with legendary drum teacher Jim Chapin. De Vito is credited with being the first student to master Chapin's entire *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer*. The book is now a classic in drumset instruction. To this day the book is extremely challenging. Frank still has his original copy of the book in which Jim Chapin wrote, "To my first star pupil." Frank speaks of what amazing hands Chapin had.

Payin' Dues

Frank moved into Manhattan proper in the late forties and hung out at the happening clubs of the time; the Famous Door, the Three Deuces, Birdland, and the Onyx. He stayed at the Radio Center Hotel, a popular roost of some of the up-and-coming musicians of the time. Fellow borders included Gerry Mulligan, Red Rodney, bassist Teddy Kotick and tenor saxophonist Brew Moore. "We played all the time," he recalls. "I'd throw my bass drum on top of Teddy Charles' vibes and we'd roll down the street to Nola Studios, where the Broadway shows rehearsed. We'd rent a rehearsal room for \$2.50 an hour. All our friends would come to listen and play. We'd take a collection to pay for the room. And we'd go down to the union twice a week to get gigs." Frank fondly remembers a circle of drummers that formed out of the Radio Center crowd. "We had Ed Shaughnessy (of later Tonight Show fame), Fred Gruber (who was this writer's teacher) and a nervous little guy named Jackie Moffatt, who had some of the speediest hands I've ever seen. We'd sit around with our practice pads, share ideas, trade fours and drink a little wine together. We played a lot, but didn't work much. But in those days you could eat for three days on \$2.00! We used to go to a little place where you could get a spaghetti dinner for 50 cents. I was 17 or 18 at the time."

De Vito then got a call to replace Shelly Manne on Bob Astor's band, one of the well-known dance bands of the time. Frank was happy to get the gig, but felt he was inexperienced, especially at reading. "The band was made up of older, more seasoned players. I traveled a few weeks with the band until Bob Astor told me he was bringing in another drummer from New York," Frank sighs. Astor kindly offered Frank the opportunity to stay on the road with the band for a week to listen and learn. "To my surprise, the guy he brought in was my buddy, Teddy Charles, who was a much better vibes player than a drummer. Teddy brought his vibes and we both played together with the band on some things." But after three days, Astor still wasn't satisfied and fired them both. "It was a learning experience," he remembers.

Footloose again, Frank moved back to his hometown of Utica. A few months later, in 1949, he got a call from his friend Buddy De Franco who was forming a new band in New York.

De Franco had financial backers who wanted a Benny Goodman style combo. The side men were Perry Lopez on guitar, Teddy Charles on vibes, Harvey Leonard on piano, bassist Teddy Kotick (who played with Bird and Miles), and, of course, Frank De Vito on drums. The band played around New York at top clubs like the

Three Deuces. "I used to carry my drums on the subway," he recalls. "I'd have a light trap case with my snare-drum, cymbals and stands and a bass drum. Instead of a stool, I'd just sit on the case."

"It was a good band. I remember the first rehearsal. We were all really getting into bebop then. Buddy played great. He practiced all the time and wrote a lot of tunes for the band. I remember playing

BUDDY DEFRANCO: "Frank was always a delight to have in my band or group. He is a fine, professional drummer--well mannered--(who was) interested in what we were doing and (had) a great sense of humor."

some real fast tempos. "Soon the band was on the road all over the east and the mid-west. "We were scuffling, though. Buddy was not that well known then and it was hard to stay working. "Eventually the band broke up and it was back to Utica again for Frank. He was paying his dues.

This time Frank hooked up with old buddy J.R. Montrose, who rarely left Utica. Montrose was playing strong and they were having a good time gigging around town when Buddy De Franco called again. This time he was putting together a big band. "Yes!" replied Frank, "I'll be on the next train!" They soon took off for a successful tour with De Franco, whose name was rapidly climbing in the jazz world.



photo: Terry Gibbs
Quartette, Birdland,
New York 1954

Winds of change

These years were, of course, a time of profound stylistic change in jazz music. The transition from big band swing to small group bebop was all around New York. Frank and his musical peers were swept up in the stimulating musical environment. Having grown up emulating drum greats like Krupa and Buddy Rich, who later became personal friends, Frank was now hearing the music of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, with the revolutionary drumming of Max Roach. "Until then the older drummers always played heavy 4/4 on the bass drum. This was partly because bass players played more primitively and had no amps. The drummer had to supply more on the bottom," he explains.

Hearing Max Roach with Charlie Parker and bop vocalist Babs Gonzales, Frank's ears were opening up to the new sounds. He hung out at the "musician's booth" at Birdland, where players could come and listen without paying the cover charge. "It was a drastic change that came all of a sudden," De Vito remembers "When I first heard Charlie Parker I just heard

a lot of notes. I had no idea what he was doing. We were into Coleman Hawkins. It took a little while. When I became more sophisticated, I said 'Oh my God!' and I loved everything about it." Back in Utica, Frank's buddies J.R. and Sal Amico had already been playing early bop records from the Black and White, Dial, and Savoy labels for him. He also got to hear the new music live in his hometown. "We had this weird club in Utica where they would have some dumb show one week and then the next week they'd have Howard McGee!" he laughs. McGee, the legendary trumpeter (who Miles claimed as an influence) was friendly to Frank and introduced him to his drummer, Specs Wright. Practicing together with Specs, Frank was getting an understanding of the differences between swing and bebop drumming.

Skin Deep

"Max Roach had great chops," says Frank, "and he got all the drummers to tighten up their drums. Buddy and Gene always had tight snares, but most drummers had calf heads and kept them kind of loose. Max even kept his bass drum tight. He used a 20" bass drum with a lamb's wool beater to soften the sound." I asked about Kenny Clarke. Frank continued: "I heard Kenny at the Royal Roost with Tad Dameron. That was a great club on Broadway and 44th Street where Dizzy and Woody Herman would always play. Kenny was great, but I felt he was still a bit in the older style. Max was the first real 'bebop' drummer to me."

"Max exaggerated the hi-hat on two and four. Before that everything was 4/4. He didn't play four beats on the bass drum. He concentrated on the hi-hat and cymbal beat, breaking up the time with the left hand on the snare and bass drum accents. We used to call it 'dropping bombs' back then."

Land of the Giants

Frank worked a lot at Birdland with Terry Gibbs in the early fifties. "We were almost like the house band," he recalls. "We worked opposite Basie and Duke. One week we were on the bill

with a band called The Birdland Allstars." It was formidable line-up of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Tommy Potter, and Roy Haynes. "I had been friendly with Roy. I've known him for years," says Frank. "The music was so good that Terry and I never left the room between sets. Dizzy and Bird were such beautiful, wonderful people. They never fluffed anybody off. They would always answer the dumbest questions from people. They weren't aloof like Miles. Dizz was a clown and played incredibly well. And Bird was very bright. He was so articulate and had an amazing vocabulary. This was a mystery to me because he had no education really, from my understanding."

TERRY GIBBS: "From 1953 to 1957 I had an award winning quartet. In the four years, I only had three drummers, and Frank was there for two of the four years. In the two years Frank was there, I think we had more fun on the bandstand and off the bandstand than any other time I ever had with the quartet."

"One night Roy Haynes says to me, 'Hey, tomorrow I've got a record date and I'm gonna miss the first set. You wanna cover for me; play with the band?' I said, 'Yeah!' So I got to play with Bird and Dizzy. The only thing that made me nervous was Bud Powell, 'cause he was pretty erratic. The drums were right next to him." Frank remembers an evening he heard Bud's trio when he made Max Roach play brushes all night. "The night we played, Bud was in a good mood and he actually said a few things to me that were complimentary. Roy also called me to rehearse with Bird when he was doing the Bird with Strings concert. Buddy Rich had played on the now famous recordings. I showed up and Roy's drums were there. We're all waiting for Bird... waiting and waiting. The studio was booked ahead. About the last ten minutes Bird comes in and takes out his horn. We got to play about a tune and a half and the manager comes in and says, 'You all have to leave, we got someone else coming in.' Bird just laughed and split."

After a tour with Hal McIntyre's dance band, De Vito was back in New York hanging out in front of the Bird in Hand club one night. Up pulls a cab and out comes none other than the great bassist Oscar Pettiford. After introductions were made, O.P indicated that he was looking for a drummer. "You can read a little, can't you?" he asked. "Yeah!" replied Frank, his skills now honed from experience. "Well then bring your drums down to Snooky's on 57th tomorrow night." De Vito ended

up playing seven weeks with Pettiford's group of rising stars that included Lee Konitz on alto, Kai Winding or J.J Johnson on trombone, and Kenny Dorham on trumpet. Jon Lewis and Horace Silver traded off on the piano chair. "Oscar Pettiford, man, anybody could play drums with him. He'd play those double stop tempos so fast. He was brilliant," says De Vito. Pettiford had gone through three drummers and was looking for someone that didn't play so much in the new style. Frank explains, "I was into bebop but had been playing a much straighter style with Hal's band, which was



more of a Les Brown style band. Oscar was still kind of old school. I wasn't dropping a lot of bombs and he dug that. That was his groove."

Road Work Ahead

When the gig with Pettiford ended, Frank made a living working around New York doing various gigs including burlesque shows at The 82 Club. Soon he got a call from Terry Gibbs and went on the road for two years with his combo. "We worked south and west. There were so many jazz clubs! We had Terry Pollard on piano and different bass players like Bill Crow, Herman Wright, and Ernie Farrow. This was in '53, and '54. In 1954 we worked fifty weeks solid travelling! We played the Hi-Hat club in Boston, Birdland in New York, and the Bluenote in Chicago. We traveled in two cars. We had the bass and drums in one car. Cars were big then. I was playing two bass drums then and got them both in the trunk! I think it was an Old's 98. We worked in Miami and at the

Little Brown Jug in Atlantic City. That was a swingin' town. The gig started at midnight and went till five in the morning. We had lots of fun."

...Here I Come!

By now it was 1955 and the tour ended in California. Frank felt burnt out from two solid years on the road. He loved the weather in L.A. and decided to hang out there for a while. Buddy De Franco had already moved west. Soon Frank was working with De Franco and the Pete Jolly trio. Then his good friend, guitarist Tommy Tedesco, recommended him for a tour with Frank Sinatra. "Alvin Stoller and Irv Cottler were the regular drummers with Sinatra, but they were getting too busy in the studios and didn't want to go on the road. De Vito ended up working with the famed singer for three years. "We got along great. I sat next to Sweets Edison. Sinatra always had the best players like alto sax player Willy Schwartz, lead trumpeter Conrad Gozzo, and Joe Comfort

on bass. De Vito's recording work with Sinatra includes the hits "Witchcraft" and "The Summer Wind" and a recently released live date recorded in Seattle, The '57 Sinatra Concert. "It's interesting to hear yourself way back then. It's kind of weird. You know the style to play for Frank. It's ch-koom, you know, tight and everything. And he wanted to hear a little bit of back-beat. I was listening to Alvin and Irv, but I was still basically locked into the loose jazz thing, you know, catching everything--catching things with the bass drum. They didn't do that too much. They caught things mostly on the snare drum and they just swung! If I had the record to do over again I probably would have played a little simpler, but I was young then. Irv was great. And he helped me get work, too."

After the Sinatra stint, De Vito worked a steady gig at The Peacock on Hollywood and Western with tenor player Georgie Auld. "Georgie played great and one night a week they had a jitterbug contest. That tells you how long ago that was!" he admits. "Across the street was Jazz City. Miles played there. Maynard Sloat, a former drummer who is now a producer of shows in Atlantic City and Las Vegas, owned it. Buddy Rich used to bring a small group there. I worked there with Alan Eager and Max Bennett on bass."

Makin' Wax

Frank began his recording days in Hollywood with some memorable jazz dates. He recalls a date with Terry Pollard, guitarist Howard Roberts, and trumpeter Don Fagerquist and a Buddy De Franco big band session called Broadway Showcase as stand-outs.

Then one night Frank was doing a concert

Form 1-1969

ESTABLISHED 1849

JOSEPH ROGERS, INC.

MANUFACTURERS OF DRUMS ☆ ☆ ☆ DRUMMERS' ACCESSORIES
ROGERS CALFSKIN DRUM AND BANJO HEADS
744 Bolivar Road - - - Cleveland 15, Ohio

AGREEMENT TO ENDORSE

IT IS HEREBY UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED:

THAT, in consideration for a special trade-in allowance of my old drum set toward the new Rogers' drum outfit with the Rogers' SWIV-O-MATIC drum equipment, I authorize you to use my likeness, name and/or any biographical data of me for publicity and/or promotional purposes or in any other manner you see fit for a period of not less than two years from date of this Agreement.

THAT, I do hereby endorse and will continue to endorse the Rogers' drums and the Rogers' SWIV-O-MATIC attachments exclusively for a minimum of two years from this date, and agree to use them exclusively for a minimum of two years in all my professional engagements for the life of this Agreement.

This Agreement shall remain in full force and effect unless terminated after the above two year period by either party giving thirty days written notice of their intention.

Signed and witnessed at Hollywood Calif
City and State

this 4 day of September, 1958.

WITNESSED BY:
W. Ryker
 name
1415 N. Cherokee # 6
 address
Hollywood, Calif
 City and State

Frank A. De Vito
 Signature
1173 9th
 Address
Redbank, Calif
 City and State

ACCEPTED BY:
 JOSEPH ROGERS, INC.
 744 Bolivar Road
 Cleveland 15, Ohio
Henry S. Grossman
 Henry S. Grossman, President

HIGHEST AWARD AT COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION 1893

endorsement contract with Rogers / 1958

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with Buddy De Franco opposite Jackie Cain and Roy Kral. Earl Palmer was in the audience with his wife. "I had only heard of Earl at the time," says Frank, "but I knew he was one of the busiest guys on the scene. Earl comes backstage and introduces himself. He says, 'You sound good! What are you doing?'" Frank replied, "I just got in town, I'm getting my union card. I've got an answering service: Call Nina-Hollywood 2-3311." Earl says, "Maybe I can throw some work your way." A week later a contractor from Liberty Records calls and gives me a record date. Earl helped me so much. I can't say enough about him. And I had just met him!"

Drummers Earl Palmer and Hal Blaine were on the crest of a whole new trend in studio drumming.

With the boom of rock'n'roll in the 60's, the emphasis now was on the straight eighth note style of drumming



versus swing. Hal Blaine was innovating sounds in recorded drums. "Hal worked on muffling the bass drum and snare just right. He went out of his way to work with the engineers. Most of us didn't do that. He used two heads on his bass drum with a patch of towel folded over and taped to the front head. He used Ludwig plastic heads on his drums, which were new at the time, except for a calf head on the batter side of his bass drum. This got more of a definite popping sound with a felt beater. We all copied that...Johnny Guerin, Jim Gordon, and so many others. A lot of jazz drummers could not or did not want to get into the straight eighth rock thing. They had no concept or desire to do it. A lot of guys like Stan Levy, who was a great jazz drummer, didn't want to know from rock."

"I'm not saying that I was a great rock'n'roll drummer, but I had a concept for straight eighth and Latin stuff. I enjoyed listening to Earl and Hal. It was a good education. The style was very simple: just eighth notes on the hi-hat, back beat on the snare and bass drum on one and three. Then they got into the bass drum playing the boom, ba-boom, thing. One day Earl came up with boom, dap, da-bepa-boom-bap. Everyone's goin' "Wow!" That was pretty hip for those days." Frank ended up doing a lot of rock'n'roll records and appeared on some big hits like, Sonny and Cher's, "I Got You Babe" and the Beachboys, "Surfin' USA" which he did at Western Recorders, playing the infamous black Rogers drums I wrote of earlier. "Like I say in my clinics. I play the boom-boom-boom-boom...Surfin' USA, you know, the quarter notes on the bass drum. The scale for a record date back then was \$57 for 3 hours. Up to this point that one tune has probably made 57 million!"

The sixties were a golden age for studio work in Hollywood. There was a lot of recording work at studios such as Capital, RCA Victor, United, Radio Recorders and the Annex. Frank says that in that era people like Tommy Tedesco, Hal Blaine, Earl Palmer and bassist Carole Kaye were so busy they would sleep in the studio.

Frank was busy too. He would get five or six dates a week just from Earl Palmer or Hal Blaine. "There was so much going on," he says, "It was great! I worked at NBC and CBS on TV specials, we put in a lot of rehearsal time. It paid \$18.00 to \$20.00 per hour, which was great money back then. I did pre-recording for the Judy Garland show at CBS in 1963. Shelly Manne did the gig, but was too busy recording during the day to rehearse. It was a big orchestra." One week the contractor came up to Frank and said, "You've been living here this week. You put in so many hours you've made as much money as the conductor!"

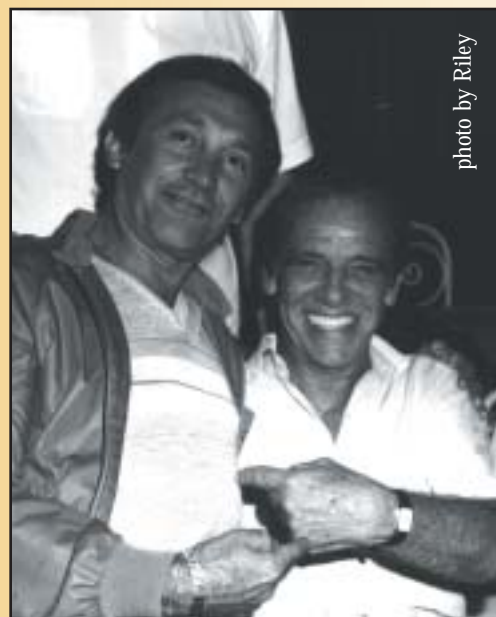
"I also worked with Elvis on a 1968 NBC TV special. He was coming out of retirement and I played with him for two weeks in a studio rehearsing. Hal Blaine and I played drums and percussion. We were working with Claude Williamson. Elvis was a nice guy. He didn't bug anybody and showed up every day on time. This was when he was in his prime. Every day he wore the same thing, a black shirt and black pants. And he always had 3 or 4 of his cousins with him who acted like bodyguards. On breaks they'd practice their karate. And he called everybody "sir." 'How are you today, sir?' And I was younger than him! We also went down to United and did an album, too. Hal Blaine played drums and I played congas and tambourine and stuff.

Hal, Earl, and Shelly were great guys. We were so busy in those days. Back in the 60's there weren't that many drummers, but there was a lot of work. Now it's the other way around."

I asked Frank what some of his all time favorite records were, in terms of his own playing. He cited the aforementioned Buddy DeFranco Broadway Showcase big-band album and a tentette record with Terry Gibbs that features Frank trading fours. Frank also recorded with Stan Kenton on the Adventures in Time album. De Vito worked with the great guitarist Joe Pass quite a lot and played on one of his last CD recordings, Love Walked In.

Buddy's Buddy

Frank remained friends to the end with his two early drumming heroes Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich. "Buddy and Gene were great;



especially when they had a conversation. They were funny to listen to. Buddy had this clipped way of speaking that was all his own." Frank sat in a lot with Buddy's small band when Rich had a steady gig in the lounge at the Sands in Vegas. "He had Sweets Edison on trumpet and Sonny Criss on alto. Buddy seemed a little bored and wanted to play some congas for fun. When I sat

in, he never said anything or offered any suggestions. I was nervous at first, but I said to myself, 'I'll do my own thing.' You didn't

want try to play like him. That was the kiss of death. Contrary to his tough image, Buddy was a very sensitive guy," Frank shares. "One day a bunch of drummers, Jim Keltner, Nick Ceroli, Fred Gruber, Don Lombardi, and myself took Buddy to lunch. Then we went to Nick's house and listened to records with Buddy playing that he hadn't heard in years. We sat on the floor, watching Buddy play on Nick's drums. What a day!"

Frank informed me that Buddy played on some Woody Herman recordings, like "Your Father's Moustache." Along this line I asked Frank about legendary Herman drummer Dave Tough. "I heard Davey on 52nd Street playing with traditional jazz bands. He covered it all. He played a lot of cymbals. If you listen to the Woody records that Davey's on, he hardly hits the drums. He catches the brass licks on the cymbal, except for "The Good Earth" where he ends with the ba-pa-pa-pa-pa on the bass drum." I then asked Frank about another one of his contemporaries, the great big-band drummer Mel Lewis. "Mel came to L.A. from Buffalo in '59 or '60. He stayed for several years and did mostly jazz gigs and records. The way he played was so great, so original, so stylized, that he didn't fit in to a lot of commercial studio work. He played his way. There was nobody like him. He played laid-back and loose and simple...and that's not easy to do." Frank also knew one of Mel's big influences, Tiny Kahn, who De Vito admired for his drumming and arranging talents.

Danmar Days

Frank had always been handy with tools and had his own workshop at home. One day at a record date a castanet machine broke and Frank took it home to fix it. When he came back he had improved the mechanism so much that a fellow percussionist suggested that he should market the new instrument. Soon Frank was selling some of his new percussion products through Bob Yeager at the Pro-Drum Shop in Hollywood. This new venture happened at a good time since studio work was beginning to dwindle. Drum machines were starting to be used and a younger generation of drummers like Jim Keltner and Jeff Porcaro were replacing some of the old standbys. Frank even remembers a jingle contractor who was told by executives not to hire anyone over the age of 30. Frank went into business with his products and now his company, Danmar, is one of the leading manufacturers of percussion accessories.

Just when Frank thought his days as a fulltime musician were coming to an end, he got a call to join Julius Wechter's Baja Marimba Band, which was a top act on Herb Alpert's A & M records. He recorded and toured with the band for five busy years. The travel was first class and songs like "Spanish Flea" were huge



photo by Darren Carr
Dec. 6, 2002

international hits. Frank even did some comedy bits in the live shows. The Baja Marimba Band appeared 12 times on the Johnny Carson Show and recorded 14 albums on A & M. They were successful, musical, and had plenty of fun. When not working with the Baja band, Frank toured and recorded with Stan Kenton. He also did stints with Benny Goodman on the Woody Herman band, subbing for Gus Johnson in Vegas for a week.

Up to date

After this lucrative period, Frank moved to Newport Beach, CA to run Danmar, freelance in music, and enjoy his family life with his lovely wife, Marit. Frank's son, Vito, is also a drummer. Frank still works often with the big bands of Les Brown, Bill Tole, and Tex Beneke. Every year he plays at the NAMM show with accordionist Tommy Gumina and is a regular at many jazz festivals such as the Sweet and Hot in L.A. He seems to be having an active and satisfying life these days.

So, an old set of drums led to the illumination of a great career in music and a new friendship. By the way, the Rogers set is back in commission now. I'm using it on all kinds of live gigs and recordings and it sounds just great! Frank tells me the drums date back to 1959, when he was working with singer Betty Hutton. He also played them on the Herb Alpert hit, "Whipped Cream." Frank was a Rogers and Zildjian artist at the time. Drum companies have sponsored De Vito since he was 24.

These days Frank likes to drop by my jazz gig at Kikuya in Huntington Beach, CA and sit in on his old set. He sounds as great as ever and loves to hang out and share stories of his special life and times. As a drummer it's fascinating to check out Frank's first hand knowledge and connect the past to the present. Frank De Vito has been there!

Paul Kreibich