



The View from the Back of the Band: The Life and Music of Mel Lewis (North Texas Lives of Musician Series)

By Chris Smith

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Mel Lewis (1929–1990) was born Melvin Sokoloff to Jewish Russian immigrants in Buffalo, New York. He first picked up his father's drumsticks at the age of two and at seventeen he was a full-time professional musician. *The View from the Back of the Band* is the first biography of this legendary jazz drummer. For over fifty years, Lewis provided the blueprint for how a drummer could subtly support any musical situation. While he made his name with Stan Kenton and Thad Jones, and with his band at the Village Vanguard, it was the hundreds of recordings that he made as a sideman and his ability to mentor young musicians that truly defined his career.

Away from the drums, Lewis's passionate and outspoken personality made him one of jazz music's greatest characters. It is often through Lewis's own anecdotes, as well as many from the musicians who knew him best, that this book traces the career of one of the world's greatest drummers. Previously unpublished interviews, personal memoirs, photos, musical transcriptions, and a selected discography add to this comprehensive biography.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is the best and most complete tracking of Lewis' career."--**John Riley**, author of *The Art of Bop Drumming* and holder of Lewis' chair at the Village Vanguard

"This wonderful research work illuminates not only the life and work of Mel Lewis, but in doing so uncovers for the reader a treasure trove of great music."--**John Mosca**, Trombonist and Director of the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra

"Mel's sound and concept were all about the feeling of the music. That was his personal approach, and it was amazing!"--**Joe Lovano**, Grammy award winning saxophonist and Blue Note recording artist

"Through exhaustive research and numerous interviews with personal associates of Mel Lewis, Smith has produced the first significant retrospective regarding the life of one the most influential jazz drummers of all time."--**Jim White**, Drummer and Professor of Jazz Studies University of Northern Colorado

"Mel played with perfect articulation and perfect dynamic support. It's no wonder he was Buddy Rich's favorite big band drummer."--**Ed Soph**, Drummer and Professor of Jazz Studies University of North Texas

"Smith did a fine job. The research is meticulous and his insights into the music of Mel Lewis are good ones."--**Bruce Klauber**, author of *World of Gene Krupa: That Legendary Drummin' Man*

"I don't think Mel ever thought of himself as a drummer, I think he probably thought of himself as just a band member. But as it ended up, he *was* the band!"--**Marvin Stamm**, World-renowned trumpeter and educator

"[A] superbly engaging portrait of a vibrant musicians's life, passions, and achievements."--*Midwest Book Review*

"Chris Smith's *The View From The Back Of The Band: The Life And Music Of Mel Lewis* is a lot like Lewis' celebrated big band drumming—smart, energetic, empathetic, and inclusive. . . . Smith's impressive skills as a writer, story teller, and jazz scholar make it easy for the casual listener, jazz aficionado, and musician—three of the potential readers to which the author painstakingly builds bridges—to appreciate his account of Lewis' life, music and career. . . . Interspersed amongst the wealth of biographical detail are explanations of Lewis' unique style—these are of importance to musicians, and not beyond the reach of most laypersons—with an emphasis on his philosophy of drumming and jazz in general. Of interest to all parties is a section of tributes from family and fellow musicians, which makes it clear that Lewis was loved and respected in his lifetime, and that his influence as a musician and a mentor continues to the present day."--*All About Jazz*

"Il libro è denso di informazioni, aneddoti e di belle foto, ma è anche provvisto di una fondamentale sezione di trascrizioni e guida all'ascolto, per entrare con chiarezza nel playing di Lewis."--*Drumset Mag*

"While history holds a seemingly endless list of great drummers, any person interested in the history of jazz drumming will appreciate the life story of Mel Lewis. Having performed on a whopping 630 recordings, it's almost impossible that you've never heard his playing. This fantastic book by Chris Smith is a heartfelt look at the life and career of the great Mel Lewis. In fact, the book itself is as wide in scope as Lewis's career; and it traverses depth comparable to Lewis's playing. It is an extremely extensive Mel Lewis biography which will leave no reader unsatisfied."--*ProDrumBlog.com*

"There was a time when certain jazz drummers were instantly identifiable. One was Mel Lewis, subject of this superb book. Chris Smith, a drummer and jazz educator, has beautifully interwoven the man and his music via extensive interviews--including with Lewis himself--and long-lost, previously published materials."--*Modern Drummer*

"Lewis well deserves a book and Mr. Smith has written a good one. . . . [He has] succeeded in adding a fascinating story to the jazz library, and one that was vital, it transpires, to have told."--*Jazz Journal*

About the Author

CHRIS SMITH was raised in Iowa and began playing the drums at age eight. He holds degrees from Northern Illinois University and Manhattan School of Music, and a doctorate from University of Northern Colorado. He is currently a professional drummer and educator in New York, frequently giving master classes throughout the U.S.

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