Jones, Jo,
black American musician, one of the most influential of all jazz drummers, noted for his swing, dynamic
subtlety, and finesse.

Jones grew up in Alabama, studied music for 12 years, and became a skilled trumpeter and pianist; he
toured with carnivals as a tap dancer as well as an instrumentalist. He played with Southwestern "territory
bands" (i.e., those in the South and Midwest), including Walter Page's Blue Devils, before joining Count
Basie's Kansas City band in 1934. With few breaks, most notably his U.S. Army service (1944-46), he
remained with Basie until 1948, after which he led a freelance career. He made the first of several Jazz at
the Philharmonic tours in 1947, occasionally led his own groups, and recorded with swing-era
contemporaries such as Billie Holiday, Teddy Wilson, Buck Clayton, and Lester Young.

At the height of his career, Jones was one-fourth of the "All-American" rhythm section that included
Basie on piano, Page on bass, and Freddie Green on guitar and provided the pulse for the Basie band in its
classic period of 1937-41. Jones was among the first jazz drummers to maintain the basic pulse on a
cymbal, rather than on the bass drum. The result was almost evenly accented rhythms, synchronized with
the graceful playing of Page and Green; moreover, this rhythm section's emphasis on metre led to the
virtual end of two-beat metres as a commonplace in jazz. Jones used his other cymbals and bass and snare
to provide musical punctuation. In an era when extroverted showmanship was admired among drummers,
Jones seldom chose to solo; he was adept at dynamic shadings, and his mastery of playing drums with
brushes was widely admired.