



Max Roach. Photograph by Francis Wolff © Mosaic Images LLC

a better education for their children. The young Roach found himself in a strange, new urban environment.

Roach accompanied gospel bands in church at the age of ten and played with the Duke Ellington Orchestra at eighteen. He played the drums performing music, not as the traditional “timekeeper,” the drummer’s role in most forms of music. Roach’s ability was inspired and his musical knowledge immense. He was able to perform drum solos that were complete songs with a beginning, middle, and end. Roach’s performances are available for viewing on YouTube; his performance of “High-Hat” illustrates the unique way that he changed jazz. His knowledge of the drums, the historical perspective, and the improvisation he introduced by mixing-up the tempos as he perfected the bebop sound have influenced every musician who has played jazz post-Roach.



Alando Mitchell

*Sarah Merritt, Executive Director,
Arts Council of Wayne County*

TO SAY MUSIC is Alando Mitchell’s life is an understatement. Music is the very essence of the man. A native of Wayne County, NC, the bass player and drummer was born in 1972. From the very start he was surrounded by music. His father is an accomplished guitarist and his mother plays the piano. All five of his siblings are also very musically inclined. “The stringed instrument runs in my family, the history of that is pretty thick...my great-grandfather, we found out a few years ago, played the ukulele. He played that and then my grandfather, he and all of his brothers, all of them, played guitar. And it was like ten of them, eight or ten. Every last one of them played the guitar or some type of instrument.”*

Mitchell’s passion for music is infectious. Whether he’s talking about his first drum set or his work with the drum line group he founded, his eyes sparkle, his legs beat a rhythm as if a

song is just going to burst out of him. He talks animatedly about his family reunions and how music was a central part of any gathering. “And the most awesome thing that I loved about our family reunion,” he will tell you, “was this great big, long porch that we had, was filled with guitars, drums, people singing. The whole porch was just filled with music. And they would play for hours. I’m talking about eight and nine hours. They would just play, and everybody would just eat, and just dance, and take turns coming up singing songs...They would just be pouring off sweat, and just playing those guitars, all of them playing at the same time.”

Mitchell started playing the drums at the tender age of three and at thirteen took up the bass guitar. Gospel is his music of choice, and as Mitchell puts it, “In our background, in our history of music and our style of music, jazz, blues, and gospel are really about the same as far as progressions and everything.” He laughs when he talks about how he and his brothers would spend their summers practicing. “I know it like to ran my mother up the wall, but she saw us developing, she heard us getting better every day, I think she pretty much enjoyed it. Sometimes she would come back and she would sing while we played.” His love of drums was further developed in school along with a close friendship with jazz drummer Alvin Atkinson.

Mitchell has never stopped playing and can be found on any Sunday playing at his church, Deeper Life Ministries in Goldsboro. Following in the footsteps of his ancestors, he and his wife have nurtured the musical talent in their children. Equally as inspirational, Mitchell has devoted his life to igniting a love of music in children of his community. Three years ago he started A Drummer’s World, a drum line program that has



Alando Mitchell. Photo by Becca Scott Reynolds.

very quickly grown to include a performance group that is now playing all over the state.

**Note: Quotations in this essay are taken from interview transcripts with Sarah Bryan of the North Carolina Folklife Institute for the African American Music Heritage Project.*



Bascom Lamar Lunsford

Leslie Burrell Smith, Program Coordinator, Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies, Mars Hill College

BASCOM LAMAR LUNSFORD, folklorist and musician, was born on March 21, 1882, in Mars Hill, NC, in the high mountains of rural

Madison County. His parents were descendents of the area’s first pioneer settlers. His father, James Bassett Lunsford, was a teacher at Mars Hill College when Bascom was born. Madison County, a mere twenty miles from Asheville, was a hot-bed of folk traditions in the late 1800s. Around 1900, Madison County is where the famous collector, Cecil Sharp, made numerous ballad and folk song discoveries. Lunsford was raised in this culturally rich environment.

Long before Lunsford reached adulthood, he began his quest to preserve the folk heritage of his native region. He began playing the banjo and fiddle as well as performing for audiences at an early age. When he reached working age, he chose occupations that allowed him to continue his music interest and scour the southern Appalachian mountains in search of folk songs. Purportedly, it was said that Lunsford would cross hell on a rotten rail to get to a folk song.

In 1928 the Chamber of Commerce for the City of Asheville decided to hold the first Rhododendron Festival. As part of the grand festival, the chamber decided to ask Lunsford to present the wide variety of music and folk dances. The *Asheville Citizen* dubbed Lunsford’s portion of the festival “The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.” Lunsford invited only the finest musicians and dancers to perform, many of whom he had met during his travels in Appalachia. He informed his performers that the show would begin around sundown, and he instructed them to wear their best. Hence the nation’s first folk festival was born.

In 1930 the festival separated from the Rhododendron Festival and officially became its own event, The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. This festival was in its sixth year

before America even had its own folk festival. Sarah Gertrude Knott began the first National Folk Festival in 1934, which was modeled after Asheville’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.

Lunsford did not stop there at the success of The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. Later, along with fellow friend and co-founder Ed Howard, Lunsford began the only festival he allowed to carry his name, “The Bascom Lamar Lunsford Minstrel of the Appalachians Festival.” This



Bascom Lamar Lunsford. The Lunsford Scrapbook Collection, Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill College