

## SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL ARTIST

# Doug Thomas

Drum teacher Doug Thomas teaches out of his studio in Ridgeland, near Freedom Ridge Park. He teaches drumming to students of all ages, but he has a special rapport with children. “I like to joke with my students and be fun and crazy, like a kid.”

Doug was introduced to drums at an early age. He was born into a musical family where everyone played an instrument. His brother Cliff placed a metal garbage can in front of Doug when he was only 3, and he was able to keep time to the music even then. He was given his first set of drums, a two-piece kit, at 6 years old.

Doug soon asked his dad if he could take drum lessons, but his dad wouldn't allow it, not wanting any more of his children to enter the music industry.

Older siblings Cliff, Ed and Barbara Thomas had become known in the late 50s and early 60s as the Cliff Thomas Trio. They wrote and recorded two top 10 hit songs, “I'm on my way home” and “Sorry I lied,” at Sun Records in Memphis where Elvis was first recorded. The trio was even invited to perform on a national television show, the Dick Clark Show.

As a child of 7 years old, Doug experienced a tragedy that has shaped him and his teaching - he lost his mother. He describes her as being very supportive. “Because of how significant she was to me, I try to reflect her traits as a teacher. I think of the kindness and patience of my mother and try to teach from that perspective, while also having fun.”

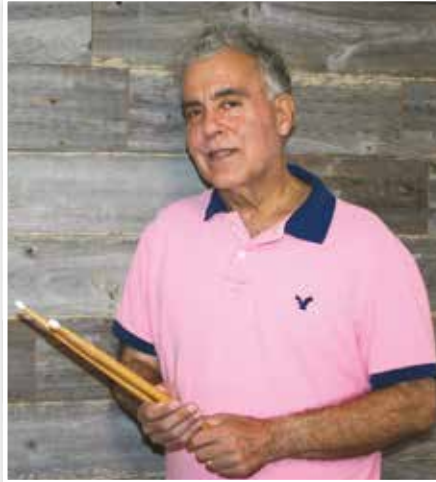
He adds, “Because of what I went through as a kid, I feel that I can talk to children on their level. I can put myself in their shoes.”

During those early years, Doug would come home from school and practice drums, playing by ear. When quality instruction for this born-to-play musician came much later, he realized that he needed to unlearn bad habits. It developed a deep understanding in him of the importance of learning how to play correctly from the beginning.

Finally in the early 90s, fate would have it that a former faculty member of the Berklee College of Music Quinous Johnson moved back home to Mississippi from Boston and Doug was able to study with him. “Berklee is one of the top 5 music schools in the country,” remarks Doug. “Steve Smith from Journey went there.” Berklee alumni have collectively won more than 250 Grammys and Latin Grammys (berklee.edu).

“The first thing Quinous did was work with me on my grip,” says Doug. “And he was tough, but it made me a good player.”

Doug was also able to study under Alvin Fielder, a well-



Local musician and drum teacher Doug Thomas pictured here in his Ridgeland studio.

known jazz drummer. “He is the Jazz King, probably the best jazz drummer in the South,” says Doug. “I owe a lot to him. He taught me jazz grip and how to play jazz.”

“To this day, I owe my teaching skills to my two teachers.”

Doug had played in bands for several years, but it wasn't until he was hired by Raphael Semmes, a prolific jazz bassist and vocalist – that he played more consistently. Doug also formed a group called the Organics who he played with for four years. Then he went on to play with Skeets McWilliams, a well-known jazz guitarist, for 10 years.

All of this musical success was fulfilling to Doug but he was lonely. “I asked God for help, and I soon met the woman who would

become my wife. When Buffie asked me what I was going to do with my life after we got married, I said, ‘teach!’”

“That's when I went with Morrison Brothers and worked as their only drum teacher for 17 years. Morrison Brothers moved and I moved with them. Then, when they finally closed the store, I built my own studio.”

Doug works with his students on their grip, tempo, reading music and rudiments which are like scales to a drummer. “I'm tough on technique and learning how to read music while practicing coordination.”

Drum student Drew Douglas has taken lessons for five years since he was about 9 years old. Drew says of his teacher, “He simplifies the lesson to your level so that anyone can learn.” While Doug challenges his students, he does not make drumming feel too difficult.

Drew's mother Julie shared how she noticed that once Drew got the basics down, he could pick up a song and play any type of genre. “He has been able to play drums at church and at school. And, it's something that he can enjoy throughout his life.”

Julie says of Doug, “He is a genuine person and he really has a heart for his students. I've never had to ask Drew to practice and I think that's because Doug challenges and inspires him. I'd highly recommend him to anybody.”

“I'm probably the craziest teacher but I don't care,” Doug said. “As long as the student is having fun, that's the bottom line.”

Doug Thomas teaches Monday through Friday, 2:30 - 7 p.m. and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

[www.dougthomasdruminstructor.com](http://www.dougthomasdruminstructor.com)

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