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8 (HOLI)DAYS A WEEK How and What to Buy for the Beatles Obsessed

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- FAST ROMANTICS
- A Drummer's Guide to Cymbal Cleaning
- HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR LESSON Asking Your Teacher Better Questions

where the music begins.

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Long & McQuade The Ultimate Toy Shop for Any Musician!

At Long & McQuade we know that Christmas – and any gift-giving holiday – is a busy time for everyone! We also know that there is nothing better than giving and receiving the gift of music. That's why our staff prepares months in advance to make sure that we have what you want, when and where you need it.

Every Instrument Under the Sun Tree

In this issue, we've got guitar packs and drumkits, both of which come with everything the beginner player requires. Toddlers and primary school youngsters are covered too, with our featured small button accordions, junior drum kits, mini bongos and djembes, recorders, tin whistle gift packs and more.

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Long & McQuade is hosting its **10th annual Music Therapy Fundraising Drive** in November and December. Donate a couple of bucks at the till and receive a \$5 rental coupon that you can spend in 2017 – or that you can stuff in a stocking on December 24th!

Visit **long-mcquade.com/community** for a list of hospitals and programs that we support via our music therapy fundraising drive.









HOW AND WHAT TO BUY FOR THE BEATLES OBSESSED

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Ab, the Beatles. What more can be said that hasn't been already? If you don't have a Beatles fan on your Christmas list, then I suggest joining a new family. However, if you do have a Beatles fan and you are their secret Santa, read on; we'll talk about what gear the Fab Four used and how you can find something (on any budget) for a Beatles fanatic this holiday season, whether they are naughty or nice.

AAX

Perhaps the brand most associated with the Beatles is Rickenbacker. To this day, Rics are still hand built in California, and as such, there are extended wait times for out of stock models. Given that Christmas is just around the corner, this article will be focusing on gear that the Beatles used that is readily available for the holiday season. Unless, of course, you want to pull a Kenner Star Wars Empty Box Campaign (look it up, kiddies).

By lan James

John

John Winston Lennon started his musical career playing, most humbly, on the back of a flatbed truck (as a makeshift stage) on the front lawn of a church in Liverpool. Throughout the years, John Lennon was known for playing many iconic instruments, but besides the aforementioned Rickenbacker (a 325 model), he is perhaps best known for playing an Epiphone Casino. He acquired it in 1965 and it remained his main instrument for the rest of his years in the Beatles (and later in his solo career), making prominent appearances in the promo video for "Revolution" as well as the much lauded "rooftop" concert in 1969. An **Epiphone Casino**, very similar to John's, can be under the tree for a very reasonable ^{\$759} in either a Sunburst (as John originally purchased it) or Natural (as it looked in the late '60s after John sanded the finish off).

Mr. Lennon also played his share of acoustic guitars, his pick of the litter being a Gibson J-160e. Considering John's original Gibson recently sold at auction for 2.4 million dollars, it's safe to say that the **Epiphone EJ-160e** will do just fine at an affordable ***549**. And if it's stocking stuffers you are after, and the owner of said stocking is a fan of the song "Revolution", then a Fuzz pedal for guitar is the way to go. The **Electro-Harmonix Little Big Muff** is a classic at ***99**; in any case, you'll say you want a revolution in no time.

Paul

James Paul McCartney (Sir Paul, or Macca, if you like) started his long and winding road playing, of all things, the trumpet. However, he soon discovered that you can't sing and play trumpet at the same time, so he traded it in to the local music shop for a guitar before transitioning to bass. There is perhaps no other instrument more closely associated with the Beatles than the Hofner 500/1 Violin Bass, as evidenced by the fact that it is colloquially known as the "Beatle Bass." Hofner, as a brand, is a little hard to come by these days, but Epiphone comes to the rescue again with its **Viola Bass**. Oozing vintage flare and tone, this thumpy little number will only set Santa back ***559**. For that truly vintage tone (and something that will fit in a stocking), a good set of flatwound bass strings will get you feeling fine, and a set of **Rotosound 77 Monel** flatwounds cost about ***60**.

McCartney was also no slouch when it came to guitar playing, contributing solos on many Beatles records, but he will always be remembered for his classic acoustic compositions "Vesterday," "Mother Nature's Son" and of course, "Blackbird." On record as well as live (like on the "Blackpool Night Out" TV program from 1965), Paul often employed another Epiphone guitar, the **Texan**, that is available today as a reissue for only %619. Very similar guitars, the **Epiphone DR100** or the **AJ220S**, go for %169 and %319, respectively.

George

George Harrison bore the artistic burden of being in the same band as the writing juggernaut that was Lennon/McCartney. That being said, what he did contribute to the cannon are some of the most amazing songs in the Beatles catalogue. In his career, George was perhaps the most eclectic when it came to gear, never settling too long on one brand or guitar style. He has been known for playing Gretsch, Epiphone, Fender, and Gibson. After an early stint with Gretsch guitars, he moved on to a Cherry Red Gibson SG in the mid-'60s, as seen in the "Rain" and "Paperback Writer" promo films. A wonderful USA-made version (the SG Faded Worn Cherry) would make an excellent gift at only ^{\$899}, with its Epiphone counterpart (the G-400 Cherry, which is actually slightly closer in look to George's original) going for an unprecedented ^{\$}439.

Long & McQuade was also able to get its hands on an amazing Fender Telecaster that very closely resembles (right down to the colour) and would sound similar to the all rosewood Tele that Mr. Harrison acquired in 1969 for the Let it Be recording sessions. The **Fender Limited Edition Rosewood Neck Telecaster** is available in (as the name would imply) limited quantities, so act fast to ensure you get yours for this holiday season!

Lastly, one of George's most enduring songs, "Here Comes the Sun", couldn't be played without the aid of a **capo**, and they are readily available from \$15 to \$30.

Ringo

Finally, we get to Ringo Starr (born, less interestingly, Richard Starkey), perhaps the most misunderstood and underrated member of the Fab Four. If someone in your family shoots off at the mouth over holiday turkey dinner that Ringo is a bad drummer, I highly encourage you to throw a drumstick at them (horrible pun absolutely intended.) Ringo was definitely the most consistent when it comes to gear, being a stalwart player of Ludwig drums for nearly 55 years, even down to a specific finish, that being Black Oyster Pearl. Unfortunately it seems that Ludwig has never issued a Ringo Starr Signature kit, but they do still produce a kit that is very similar called the Classic Maple Downbeat series, which consequently is the same series the man himself played in 1962. They even make it in Black Oyster Pearl! To complete your Christmas shopping for the drummer in your family, this kit is \$2599. As a more affordable option, our friends at Mapex make a very similar kit (the Saturn V MH 3-Piece) in a similar colour (Marine Spiral) for \$1550.

Ringo was known for using a slightly smaller-than-average kick drum, and if you want to keep that vibe, stay in the Ludwig family but STILL have the biggest present under the tree, for ^{\$}520 you can grab the Ludwig Breakbeats by Questlove kit; it's great for a young beginner due to its easy-to-manage 16" kick drum, but also perfect for intermediate players, players who need something easy to transport or those who play in small rooms.

Lastly, to top off the tree instead of a star, you can use the Ringo Starr (the puns never stop...) **Signature drum sticks** from Zildjian. Guaranteed to be made at the North Pole by Santa's elves, a **\$20 L&M Gift Card** will cover it; they are only **\$14**⁹⁹.

Beatles fan or not, any musician can appreciate the instruments that the Beatles used to craft some of the most enduring music of the last 100 years. When gift giving this year, don't forget **Beatles pick tins/packs** and **Beatles guitar straps** (from Planet Waves and Perri's), Beatles song books (like the Hal Leonard **Essential Songs book**), Beatles mirror balls and Beatles Signature trumpet. Ok, I may have made those last two up, but in any event, Long & McQuade will be your one stop shop for any Beatles fan this holiday season!

lan James is a lifelong lover of writing, recording and performing music, and has been working for Long & McQuade Langley and then Richmond for a total of 5 years.











Make a List, Check it Twice...

Use the Wish List tool in the Long & McQuade e-store to choose the gifts you'd like to see under your tree this year, and not-so-subtly email it to family and friends!







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6 Things to Consider BEFORE You Sit Down to Practice



You can get in your car and go for a drive, but the journey is always smoother when you know the destination before you leave your driveway.

If you are a working drummer, finding inspiration for your next practice session should be easy. Do you have new songs to learn? Are there feels (reggae, salsa, ska) that you haven't mastered? Did you flub a fill last show? Are you going to audition for a country band, but can't train-beat to save your life? Well... you know where to start.

But what if you aren't in a band, or don't have a specific repertoire of items to work on?

It is humbling, but you need to make an honest assessment of your skills. How are your rudiments? How are your shuffles? What about your odd-time grooves and bass drum control?

EVERYONE has a weak spot. Find yours so you can make it stronger.

If you struggle with self-assessment, or aren't sure where to start, consult with a qualified instructor.

2. How Much Time Are You Going to Practice?

You can accomplish amazing things by simply dedicating just a few minutes a day to organized, regimented and thoughtful work on a practise pad.

Don't believe it? Try this:

Set your alarm ten minutes earlier every day for the next two weeks. Spend that extra ten minutes before you leave the house doing paradiddles on a practice pad. Just paradiddles. Use a metronome, and work on accenting different notes in the pattern every day. At the end of two weeks, you will see huge improvements in your coordination.

Challenge yourself to set a time to practise and stick to it. If you have a full time job and kids, try to schedule a few 20-30 minute blocks in the week. Don't set unrealistic goals! You don't need a lot of time; just make the most of what you have.

Consider setting a maximum time for practise sessions. Once you get tired or bored you won't make any more headway. Hammering out doubles on a pad for six hours won't help if you are distracted or tired. Practise needs to be mindful.

Try to schedule some "play time" in your practise. Making music is fun, so don't make it all work. Once you've done your daily practise, give yourself some time to enjoy the instrument!

3. What Tools Are You Going to Use?

Whether you use an acoustic kit, electronic kit, a practise pad, or your hands on your knees, incorporate a timekeeping tool of some sort.

Get a metronome app for your smartphone. Or just grab your iPod...any music recorded to a click works just as well as a metronome. (Practising rudiments to your favourite rock ballad will pass the time a lot faster than working your ratamacues to a 105 bpm click.) Use your smartphone for more than just a metronome. Use the camera to record your practise session. Have you looked at your wrist technique lately? Is it relaxed and fluid? Ten seconds of video can answer that question. Record some audio to check how clean your kick drum technique is....in fact, record yourself whenever you can!

4. How Will You Measure Success?

If your goals were specific, such as: "being able to play double paradiddles forward and backward at 170 bpm" or "learn the guitar solo section of 'Bravado' by Rush", then there is no question whether or not you've achieved it.

But what if you want to have "more fluid technique," or "more bass drum independence"? Those things are more difficult to quantify. The key is to constantly measure, which is why recording yourself is such a great idea. If you record your practise today, and compare it to your practise session a month or two from now, you should see an appreciable improvement. If you don't, find a teacher to help you achieve your goals!

Finally, if you think you've got a grip on an aspect of drum set playing, simply ask yourself if you could teach it to a beginner. If you couldn't, you still need to work on it for yourself.

5. Is There Any Reason You Shouldn't Practise Today?

Some days suck. Are you injured, sick, too tired to move, or just uninspired? Skip practise. It's okay. The drums will still be there tomorrow, next week, or next month.

Just remember two things:

- There are few things that will lift your spirits like sitting behind the kit and bashing out a solid "2 and 4".
- It's cliché, but if you aren't moving forward, you are moving backward. Every day you don't work at your craft, you lose a day of the hard work you've already put in.

If you need some inspiration, read or watch interviews with professional drummers. They will likely mention something they are working on. If Steve Gadd, Neil Peart and Dave Weckl are still finding reasons to hone their skills, you can too.

6. How Much Is Enough?

No matter what role the drums play in your life, don't let your practise regimen interfere with your job, relationships or school work. Don't commit more time or energy than you can comfortably give to your instrument. Obsessive practising may lead to some short-term gains – but slow, steady and lasting improvement is a healthier goal.

Finally:

Not everyone who plays golf wants to join the PGA. Similarly, many people play drums solely for fun and relaxation. Take what you want from this article to improve your playing, but don't feel obligated to follow every piece of advice!

Taking the time to consider these six points before you sit down to practise drums – or any musical instrument, for that matter – should help you make the most of your time and effort!

Tony Bouma ("Tony B.") is a drummer, martial artist and painter living in Southwestern Ontario. In his 25-plus years behind the kit, he has backed numerous rock, blues and country acts on local and regional levels. Tony works at Long & McQuade in Cambridge.









Fast Romantics

Founded in Calgary in 2008 by lead singer/songwriter, Matthew Angus and bassist, Jeffrey Lewis, Fast Romantics have released 3 records: their self-titled 2009 debut, the *Kidcutter* EP (2010) and 2013's *Afterlife Blues*. Along the way, through radio play and touring, they've garnered a substantial following, toured Canada repeatedly and have been featured prominently at events including Virgin Fest, SXSW and CMJ.

In 2009, Spin Magazine tapped them as one of three worldwide finalists for Spin's "Free the Noise" competition. In 2011, they were in the Pop/Rock category at the 10th annual Independent Music Awards for the song, "Cool Kids", had several songs appear in high profile television shows such as Vampire Diaries and, in 2014, won the Sirius XM Indie Award for Pop Group of the Year.

Many bands would come to the conclusion that, given those awards and accolades, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it", but Angus felt there was a disparity between what the band played and what he listened to and wanted to achieve sonically.

Consequently, Fast Romantics rebooted, shook up their lineup and added singer/songwriter, Kirty, on keys, guitar and vocals, Kevin Black (guitar/vocals) and drummer Nick McKinlay.

Angus said he was captivated by what Kirty was doing and that, while he still does the lion's share of songwriting, she is a counterweight, creatively; she is someone who's willing to call B.S. if she believes a song isn't coming from a genuine place.

Out of the gate the new lineup came up with "Julia", a track produced with Gus Van Go (Michael Rault, Hollerado, Whitehorse) that won the 2016 SOCAN Songwriting Prize, recognizing the best in Canadian emerging music.

As for how the band is going to use the ^{\$}10,000 in cash from the SOCAN prize?

"It's a boring answer," Angus says, "but it's funny how much debt you can incur making a record...so it's just going back into the record."

"We also had a bunch of gear break..." Kirty adds.

"So we're reinvesting," Angus says.

"Julia' was the first song we did in the process of re-inventing our band," Angus continues, "and the first song Kirty was on."

It's also the first track on their upcoming, as yet untitled, record.

22



We've always been hard to pin down and that's part of the reason we've been growing over the years. We don't generally fit into anyone's box."

"It was this kind of exploration of what we wanted the band to be more than anything, and that's what came out of it. It was like the starting gun for the (new) record."

"Julia" has prompted comparisons to the likes of Elvis Costello, Pulp, Bruce Springsteen and Velvet Underground and says a great deal about the commitment Fast Romantics have to working hard to make their vision come to life.

Making the new record itself, Angus explains, found the band "bouncing back between NYC and Toronto for two years." Making the accompanying video for 'Julia' involved similar commitment.

Frankly, "Julia" is a must watch video, and Angus was instrumental in making it. He says that he's embarrassed by how long it took to make and it has made him question whether he "wants to be involved in film or video ever again". The result, however, was clearly worth the effort. Featuring Fast Romantics performing against the backdrop of Fred Astaire's 'ceiling dance' from the 1951 film, Royal Wedding, the clip is an exceptional piece of work.

"We are a live band," Angus says, "and we're keen to recreate that on video... and do it in ways that maybe haven't been seen that much before.

"And, despite me joking about it, we all want to be heavily involved in any video we do from now on. We want that to be a part of the music we make. Videos are often the first way people consume a song," he adds, "and if you don't represent yourselves well then people aren't going to get what you're driving at."

What Fast Romantics are driving at will certainly be communicated with their upcoming record, which steps out from their previous efforts.

"Over the past two years, bringing on new band members, everyone

has different influences," Kirty says, "and when we get in the room together and workshop songs that everyone feels a part of, everyone gets more comfortable sharing their ideas. It's a rebirth. Everyone has different influences and styles and I think that connected on this album in a really beautiful way."

The band's live shows have also had an impact on the record.

"We recently went back and re-recorded a song," Angus says, "because we were playing it live and came up with all these amazing ways to treat it. So (the new record) feels like a live record because the band elevated the songs as time went on.

"It will have to be judged when the whole record comes out, but I really think it's more than an evolution. I've certainly grown as a songwriter big time, and, as Kirty said, the influence of everybody on the sound of the band, the sound is just different and our producer, Gus Van Go really influenced that."

The approach the band takes, Angus, says, "is songs first," adding that a variety of styles ranging from Motown to Americana and Springsteen/Tommy Petty-esque rock shows up in their songs.

"We want these songs to feel timeless like a lot of our influences," Kirty adds. "The bands and artists who've inspired us – the reason they have – is they've created timeless music you could play for 5 year olds or 55 year olds."

Nailing down the band's sound isn't easy, but it's clear that Fast Romantics' primary concern is sounding like themselves.

"We didn't set out to be super current; we never have," Angus says. "We've always been in the corner in that department, and don't try to follow trends. We've always been hard to pin down and that's part of the reason we've been growing over the years. We don't generally fit into anyone's box."





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By Crystal Greffard

THE VIBRANT EXPERIENCE OFAmateur PianoAmateur PianistsO&A with Glenn Kramer of Amateur Pianists

In the world of classical piano, it can often feel like all the opportunities to perform or compete are exclusively for young prodigies and the pros – especially here in Canada, where we don't appear to have any established Amateur Competitions. But if you think you've missed the chance to showcase your talent on stage as an adult, you need to talk to Glenn Kramer!

Head of the largest piano performance meetup group in the world and Founder of the San Diego International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs, Glenn has good news for adult pianists! The world of amateur piano performance is alive and well.

Glenn let us in on the wealth of amateur events just south of the border – where adult non-professional pianists are the sole focus, in true concert performance settings. Entrants have the opportunity not only to meet a personal goal, but to join a vibrant community of people whose love of music drives them, above any prize.

Can you tell us about the *AmateurPianists* organization?

I started this meetup group in 2011, with the idea to offer performance opportunities to anyone who wanted to perform in public, on stage. There are a lot of amateur pianists out there, who would love to perform, but just don't have opportunities. Mainly what we do is put on recitals for people to sign up and play publicly. We play for our friends and family 98% of the time, so having a place like a concert hall helps motivate us.

Which are the main amateur competitions in North America?

Those on the east coast tend to gravitate to the Boston Competition, there's one in Chicago, one in New York, and if they want to travel further west, they would travel to the Van Cliburn in Fort Worth Texas. That's the most prestigious.

I have a lot of friends who play piano in Los Angeles, and there's a lot of talent in San Francisco, so I thought if I could create a competition here in San Diego...it's a beautiful city and people don't have to travel all the way to the east coast to enjoy the experience. We have it every 2 years now.

What was your own experience like, competing in the Paris International Amateur Piano Competition?

I saw an ad for the Paris competition in Piano Magazine and thought I would pursue it out of curiosity, and I love Paris. I did not make it past the 1st round, but loved the experience and enjoyed meeting people from all over the world. I competed 2 more times after that and did quite well the second time, not as well the third time, but still enjoyed the experience. (Paris) was the first amateur piano competition that was ever started. That's a big one that attracts people from all over the world.

Was there anything you found surprising as a competitor?

What I did not expect was to make lifelong friends from the experience. It was just really nice to share that kind of comradery. I've participated in the Colorado Springs (Rocky Mountain Piano Competition) and the one in Paris 3 times, then as an audience member in New York – and they all have a very high level of pianists. The calibre of playing was higher than I expected.

Would you suggest memorizing pieces, even if it's not required?

I do suggest it because I think performers can do a better job if they're not relying on the music, but a lot of pianists like to have the sheet music there, even if they're not looking at it, just so they feel there's a safety net. We allow that, so they are welcome to do that for our competition.

If there's no promise of having a performing career or recording contract, why do adults choose to compete?

They love to perform for people and it's a personal goal for them. There's a lot of validation and goal setting in learning a piece for competition, even though it can be very nerve wracking. There's a competitive element to it, even if they're just competing with themselves to do a good job. We do have financial prizes, so for some people that's an incentive. There's also a chance to perform with an orchestra, which is very exciting for an amateur pianist to have that accessibility, so there are all sorts of reasons people have applied to our competition. But ultimately I get the sense that it's about their enjoyment and sharing their love of music with others.

Is there more appreciation of the music itself in amateur competitions compared to professional events?

I think that there is, because I've heard that professional pianists, although they love it, have to learn pieces they may not want to and it's their job to have a huge repertoire. For amateurs, they choose the pieces that appeal to them and there's a supportive element to it. I think when we attend as amateur competitors, we all feel like we're in this together, rather than competing against each other for a recording contract or some sort of recognition. There's a higher sense of family to the amateur competitions.

Do you have any suggestions for adults contemplating entering a competition?

It is so worth the experience! The thing I took away from it was not whether I won or lost, but the experience itself. It's really one of those things where the journey makes a big difference and it's not about reaching a goal of being a finalist, but making friends with other pianists. Sharing the adventure really means a lot. It did for me.

You can find a list of international competitions at *AmateurPianists.org*, as well as info on the Meetup group and events hosted by Glenn Kramer. TBA: Amateur events in Canada at The Honens Piano Competition *(Honens.com)*.

Crystal Greffard began playing piano at age 6 and holds a Royal Conservatory of Music ARCT Performer's Diploma in Piano. She is a solo & collaborative pianist, creator of MasterclassBC.com, a performance education resource site, and Lessons Coordinator at Long & McQuade's Lesson Centre in Kamloops BC.





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How to Get
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Do you ever go to class unprepared? You just want to sit down and listen to the teacher. Well, being a good student is more than just listening to someone talk about something you may or may not want to learn. It usually helps to have a good mindset heading into class, but it really pays off to be prepared with questions.

How do you know which questions to ask? That one is always tough, but it can help you with the first question you should ask your teacher. What kind of questions should I be asking? This is a good base to establish what your teacher will be looking for during your next week of practicing. You can learn more from them by going over their answers with them.

When you are practicing at home, try to keep a notebook by you. Perhaps you will use the same book your teacher writes in. Always have it close at hand while you practice. You can write down questions you have or references to the points in the pieces you are working on. That way when you get to your next lesson you don't struggle to remember what you were having troubles with. You will begin to notice that you retain a lot more information when you do these sorts of exercises.

For the following week of practicing, it would be good to see how your teacher would break down the pieces or exercises to avoid overplaying something. Ask how much time you should spend on difficult sections and how to overcome the part of it you find most challenging. Maybe you want to see how best to chart your progress in these cases. Your teacher will have plenty of ways to help you learn how to break up these sections on your own and be able to feel like you are moving forward even when you are frustrated.

Asking your teacher if there is a better way to do something you are having troubles with can also help. Most of the time the music has laid out the most effective and efficient way of doing a certain technique, and other times you need to adjust your playing based on your physicality. Young guitarists or pianists may have to learn a different way to play chords with their smaller fingers. Your teacher will be able to help you figure out a tentative method to practice. Once you grow more, you can continue to adjust your playing until you can finally reach the goal properly.

How do you pick music? Do you let your teacher bring all the selections to you or only play out of a method book? It is a great skill to learn how to pick music and where to go to find it. You can learn a lot about a composer or artist when you seek out music yourself. Ask your teacher how they pick music and start trying it yourself. You can also create challenges with one another using themes and see what each of you comes back with. Make a point of discussing the selections you brought to the lesson. You can even take time to dissect the piece(s) as a theory portion of the lesson or find the parts of the music you like best and look for another piece with similarities for the following week.

Have you ever wanted to perform outside of recitals and exams? Ask your teacher questions on how to prepare for the performing world. Do you want to be in a band? Do you want to play as a soloist in Carnegie Hall? What ever your dreams are, keep them really big! When should I start performing in public? Ask your teacher what you should think of charging for your services and where to advertise or ask to play. They may need to introduce you to someone who does more of those kinds of things week to week, but you will have a better idea of where to go and your teacher can still help prepare you for performances.

Now that you have had time in your lesson to go even deeper into questions with your teacher, you should apply what you are learning at home. Before you leave the lesson, ask if there is a way for your parents to help with your practicing. Do they know of any music games you can play on the Internet or flash cards you should try at home? It can help your parents learn how involved they should be. Make sure you discuss this with your teacher and your parents so everyone knows what is going on.

Keep asking great questions and you will go great places!



Desirae Becker attended MacEwan University's Bachelor of Jazz composition program. She is currently studying grade 10 piano RCM and grade 9 vocal RCM. Desirae is the Lesson Centre Coordinator at the Edmonton South location.







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Let it Shine A drummer's guide to cymbal cleaning

By Tony Bouma

Clean cymbals under bright lights can be the most eye-catching instruments on the stage. They also often represent the largest portion of a drummer's gear budget. It is, therefore, no surprise that many drummers go to great lengths to keep their cymbals as shiny and new-looking as they can.

Other drummers never clean their cymbals, preferring to allow their instruments to age and patina naturally. In fact, some jazz musicians will pay huge sums for "Old Ks" because they appreciate the mellowing of sound that results from years of accumulated copper oxide, stick residue and dirt!

For the rest of us, cleaning our cymbals is a way to keep them looking and sounding the way they did when we first fell in love with them.

Hand Washing with Soap and Water

If your cymbals have no signs of excessive dirt or corrosion, a bath in lukewarm water with a small amount of detergent should make them look new again. Be sure to wipe them in the direction of the "tonal ridges" (lathing), and rinse and dry them thoroughly. If you are diligent about wiping the dust and fingerprints off your cymbals every time you use them, this may be the only maintenance you ever need to do.

Hand-washing with soap and water is safe for all cymbal types as long as you remove all the moisture and soap residue before putting them away.

Acid-Based Cymbal Cleaners

Some finger-prints and stick-marks may resist cleaning with simple soap and water. In these cases, consider using an acidbased cymbal cleaner.

Acid cleaners work because cymbals are made of bronze – an alloy of copper, tin and various trace metals. When exposed to air and moisture, bronze will form a thin coating of copper oxide on its surface. Copper oxide dulls the look of the cymbal and traps dust, dirt and oils on its surface.

If you search "cymbal cleaning" on the internet, you will undoubtedly encounter many articles and videos from wellmeaning drummers who will encourage you to employ various household ingredients (lemons, ketchup, cola – even toilet bowl cleaner!) for this purpose. These home remedies will work to varying degrees, but never as well as a commercially manufactured cleaner. (Acidic foods also require much more rinsing to remove the unwanted protein and sugar residues they leave behind.)

Acids (including the acetic acid in ketchup or the citric acid in lemons) break down the copper oxide, allowing you to remove it and the dirt trapped inside it.

There are four things to keep in mind should you decide to employ an acid-based cleaner:

 Most cymbal manufacturers spray a thin coat of lacquer over their instruments to prevent oxidization. Using strong acids can damage that protective coating. If you are dealing with a new cymbal, it is best to avoid harsh cleaners until soap and water are no longer effective.

Although commercial cymbal cleaners are much more effective than the "home remedies" mentioned above, they are caustic, and should be used only in accordance with the instructions on their labels.

3. Acid-based cleaners are most effective on "brilliant" cymbals such as Sabian's AAX and Zildjian's A Custom cymbals. It may be less useful on "natural lathed" and unlathed cymbals. It can also radically change the colour of older cymbals that have never been cleaned with acid before. (This is especially true of B8 alloys!) You should test your chosen product on a small area under the bell of the cymbal before applying it to the entire surface.

4. If you are a drummer who takes pride in the logos on your cymbals, be cautious when using a commercial cleaner. It is easy to fade – or completely erase – the logos from your cymbal if you clean it aggressively with strong acids.

 Some acid-based cleaners available at Long & McQuade:

 MEINL MCP
 (377998)
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 (415717)
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 ZILDJIAN P1300
 (218327)
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 PAISTE AC29001
 (86832)
 \$1350

Hand Polishing

If you are trying to remove heavy oxidization, years of groundin dirt, dried tape residue, or other stubborn marks from your cymbal, then acid-based cleaners may not be enough. This is especially true if you are dealing with a cymbal that has deep tonal grooves, such as Meinl Byzance, Sabian AAs or Zildjian As and Ks.

Polishing is the use of abrasives to physically remove a thin layer of the bronze and its accompanying dirt and oxidization.

As with strong acids, polishing will remove the layer of protective lacquer on the cymbal, and there is a very strong possibility that it will remove the company logos as well.

The safest way to polish a cymbal is to manually apply a product specifically designed for the task. Use a clean towel, wiping in line with the tonal grooves. You may need to use some serious elbow grease to get your desired results, but if you work carefully and rinse the polishing compound thoroughly afterwards, you are unlikely to do any serious damage to your cymbals.

Outsourcing/Mechanical Polishing

If your cymbals need serious polishing, there are a number of professional cymbal polishing services available.

Many of them employ machines specifically built to clean cymbals. The machine spins the cymbal, allowing the operator to apply more aggressive polishing compounds and/or sanding blocks to remove material from the cymbal's surface.

Although these methods are extremely effective, they will remove ALL the printing from the cymbal. (Some of the more established services may offer to re-apply your logos for a nominal fee.)

Given the amount of material being removed, there is a good chance that you will hear a noticeable change in the cymbal's pitch once it is cleaned. There may also be a slight change in the cymbal's overall "complexity" or "shimmer" due to flattening of the tonal ridges.

These services are relatively inexpensive, but require you to entrust your cymbals to another person. Be sure to research the company, read all of the online reviews and always take proper precautions when sending your valuable instruments through the mail!

Finally: There are also plenty of internet videos depicting the use of automotive polishes and hand-held polishing and sanding tools. Be extremely cautious if you consider using power tools of any kind on a naturally-lathed cymbal. That type of abrasion is very likely to flatten the tonal ridges of the cymbal, reducing the complexity of the cymbal's sound, or even changing its fundamental tone. You should only use those types of techniques as a last resort! (If the look of the cymbal is more important to you than its sound, you should consider trading in your traditional cymbals for some brilliants BEFORE you pick up that sander!)

It is up to you!

Whether or not you clean and polish your cymbals is as personal a choice as the heads you select, the sticks you use, and

the music you make. If you do decide to clean your cymbals, start slowly and learn as you go. You may be surprised how easy it is to restore them to their original lustre and shine!



Tony Bouma ("Tony B.") is a drummer, martial artist and painter living in Southwestern Ontario. In his 25-plus years behind the kit, he has backed numerous rock, blues and country acts on local and regional levels. Tony works at Long & McQuade in Cambridge.





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