

YAMAHA

Club Custom and GigMaker Drumkits

by J.R. Frondelli

Yamaha's singular goal is to "build it right," and the company seems to achieve this a majority of the time, whether we're talking motorcycles, auto engines, professional audio gear, pianos, electronic keyboards and synths, brass and woodwinds, guitars, or drums and percussion. A good number of Yamaha's professional audio and musical products have become industry standards. The Recording Custom series of drums, for example, which debuted in the late '70s, is the choice of many top professionals the world over. Though the dominance of that line has diminished slightly, many great live and recording artists still entrust their signature drum sound to Yamaha, including Steve Gadd, Dave Weckl, Anton Fig, Steve Jordan, Keith Carlock, Billy Cobham, David Garibaldi, Mickey Curry, Paul Leim, Questlove, and Clyde Stubblefield.

One of the reasons why the company can do things so well is its autonomous nature. Yamaha has its own factories that produce every fitting and shell for its drums, right down to the tension rods and screws. While Yamaha has traditionally been associated with the "EQ'd" sound of birch and the punchy sound of maple, it likes to throw curveballs here and there with drums made of oak, beech, bamboo, fiberglass, and even carbon fiber.

The kits being reviewed here fit right into Yamaha's standards of excellence. We begin with the new Club Custom series, developed in cooperation with drummer/producer Steve Jordan. This line is a double-edged throwback, to Yamaha's pre-professional drum days of taillight lugs and colorful patterned wrap finishes, and also as a sonic departure into warmer, vintage-type sounds.

Next up is the GigMaker, which is also a throwback to the days when Yamaha drums were produced as high-quality yet snazzy-looking entry-level kits. Both of these sets, though situated at far different price points, hark back to the company's roots, and therein lies the Yamaha secret: quality at all levels.

CLUB CUSTOM

When I first saw the Club Custom drums, I was immediately drawn to the finishes, which are swirls of orange, blue, or black. Though they appear to be a wrap from a distance, as you get up close you can see and feel that they are, in fact, lacquer. Yamaha craftsmen accomplish this by first shooting a base coat in the main color. Then the swirl color (yellow for swirl orange, white on the others) is added to the drum while the shell is being spun horizontally, and the craftsman pulls the swirl color across the shell with a rope. Though this process might smack of elementary spin art, it's performed with surgical precision, utilizing skilled eyes and hands. The result is gorgeous and achieves the wrap look with a lacquer finish, which is less restrictive on shell resonance.

Our review kit is a four-piece in swirl orange, with a 15x20, 10-lug bass drum with matching orange lacquer

hoops; an 8x12 tom with a YESS mount; a 14x14 floor tom; and a 5¹/₂x14 snare. The floor tom legs feature floating rubber tips, and all drums sport the company's low-mass Oak Custom lug with locking inserts.

Lightweight 1.6 mm steel hoops are standard on Club Custom toms and snares, and the tom mount is included with the kit. The thin 6-ply, 6 mm shells are made from a native Japanese wood called kapur, which is similar to mahogany in weight, appearance, and tone. Kapur produces a warm and woody sound with just the right balance of attack and resonance. This is supported by Yamaha's R3 bearing edges, which are 60-degree (more commonly known as 30-degree, depending on whether you measure from the vertical or horizontal axis) with enough of a roundover to assist seating the heads while still retaining sustain and high frequencies. The heads on the kit are Yamaha by Remo: Coated Ambassador snare and tom batters, Clear Ambassador bottoms, Clear Powerstroke 3 kick batter, and Smooth White Powerstroke 3 on the resonant side. All of the features built into Club Custom drums are designed to maximize resonance and capitalize on the sonic thumbprint of the kapur shells.

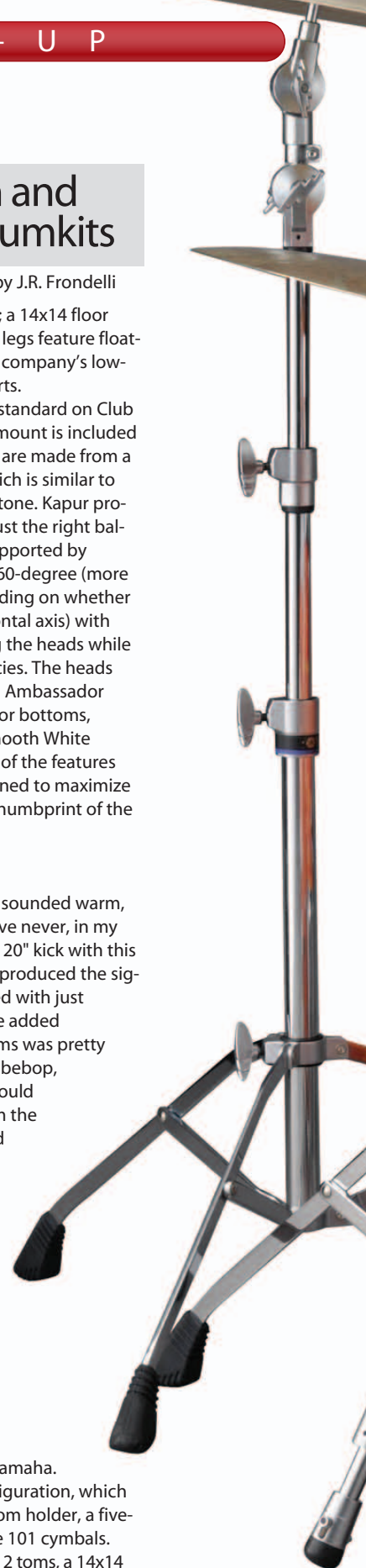
HOW DO THEY SOUND?

I had a blast playing this kit. Everything sounded warm, open, and resonant, yet controlled. I have never, in my forty-plus years as a drummer, played a 20" kick with this much punch and resonance. The snare produced the signature Yamaha sound: thick and focused with just enough resonance, but including a little added warmth. The tuning range of these drums was pretty wide, so you could get sounds for rock, bebop, and everything in between. All in all, I could hear distinct vintage tones coming from the kit, but with a slightly modern edge and the drum-to-drum consistency that's a Yamaha hallmark. Club Custom shell packs list for \$4,450.

GIGMAKER

If the Club Custom is the retro upscale roadster, the GigMaker is the feature-laden economy car. Though it's an entry-level model, the GigMaker doesn't leave you wanting for much, providing budding drummers with a complete, solid kit to get started on and offering the semipro a low-cost, quality alternative that's decidedly all Yamaha.

The review kit is the "complete" configuration, which includes a five-piece shell pack with a tom holder, a five-piece hardware pack, and a set of Paiste 101 cymbals. There's a 16x20 bass drum, 8x10 and 9x12 toms, a 14x14 floor tom, and a 5¹/₂x14 snare. Our review kit features the shimmering yet subdued silver glitter wrap. Other





available finishes are black glitter, blue ice glitter, burgundy glitter, and white grape glitter (which is actually green).

THE GIGMAKER SOUND

This kit delivered some serious goods, even with the supplied factory heads (a prime area of cost cutting on all entry-level kits), and the signature Yamaha drum-to-drum consistency was quite evident. All of the drum hardware features nice chrome plating. Of special note are the springless lugs and the tom holder, which has Yamaha's trademark hex-arm/ball-joint system and includes memory locks. This holder allows you to position the toms exactly where you want them, and it holds them rock solid.

600 SERIES HARDWARE PACK

The GigMaker complete setup includes a 600 series hardware pack consisting of a hi-hat stand, a straight cymbal stand, a convertible straight/boom stand, a snare stand, and a bass drum pedal. Hardware has always been a forte of Yamaha's, and

the 600 series is no exception. These are strong, well-built yet lightweight double-braced stands. Of particular note is the use of a non-ratcheted tilter on the snare stand. This is a very nice touch, since ratcheted tilters never quite seem to place the snare at the most comfortable angle. The bass drum pedal is very basic, but it was quick and responsive.

PAISTE 101 BRASS CYMBAL SET

Most drummers have been taught that brass makes poor cymbals. Leave it up to Paiste, experts at B20-alternative alloys, to figure out how to make brass sound good. No, 101 brass models don't sound like quality bronze cymbals, but they are musical with a subdued volume, plus a low-pitched dryness that I actually found useful and fun. They also have none of the trashy qualities you'd expect from budget brass pies.

Sensing that the reduced volume and dryness of these cymbals would record well, I miked the GigMaker kit with a stereo pair of overhead mics and recorded

some beats onto my trusty Tascam 2488 recorder. The cymbals recorded nicely, balanced well with the drums, and never sounded shrill. What I heard upon playback was reminiscent of old Motown recordings. While these cymbals are decidedly entry level and suit that purpose well, it's not beyond the realm of possibility that pros could find them useful in certain lo-fi situations.

THE VERDICT?

The GigMaker is one of the finest entry-level kits on the market. As the owner of an entry-level Yamaha kit from the early '70s, which also sports quality and features far above its price range, I am happy to see that Yamaha hasn't forgotten its roots. The company has the engineering know-how and skills to build player's drumkits at any price point. Quality instruments foster the inspiration to make music, and the GigMaker fits the role to a T. The GigMaker complete setup lists for \$1,300.

yamaha.com

GOING GREEN

GigMaker shells are lightweight 8-ply basswood/poplar, and they sport flawless 45-degree counter-cut bearing edges.

The interior of the drums is unfinished, with no gnarly-looking inner plies that you'd typically find on entry-level kits. In an effort to join the green revolution, Yamaha's engineers have formulated the shell adhesives to have the lowest possible formaldehyde content.



Reprinted by permission of Modern Drummer Publications, Inc. © 2011

www.moderndrummer.com