

**SOUNDLAB****DETAILS****MODEL** Studio Line**SIZES** 14" x 4", 14" x 5", and 14" x 6.5"**FEATURES** Seamless metal or steam-bent wood shells; 2.5mm solid brass nickel-plated triple-flanged hoops; Joyful Noise's One Touch Classic snare strainer system; ten Corder solid-brass, bright, nickel-plated tube lugs; bell flanged bearing edges.**PRICE** \$1,240–\$1,280**CONTACT**Joyful Noise Drum Company, LLC, P.O. Box 31, Castle Rock, CO 80104,  
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# JOYFUL NOISE

## Studio Line Snares

**MAKE HAPPY SOUNDS**BY **DAVID E. LIBMAN**

**I**t seems as if almost everywhere you look, another "custom" snare drum manufacturer is popping up. I'm not complaining. In my view, the world can never have too many snare drums. But let's be honest; sometimes so-called "custom" snare drum manufacturers are doing nothing more than assembling drums made from shells and hardware that they bought from someone else. As a result, those manufacturers aren't actually offering anything "new" or "custom." On the other end of the

spectrum, some manufacturers actually are creating truly custom snare drums. One such example is the Joyful Noise Drum Company.

Hailing from Colorado, Joyful Noise is the brainchild of its president, Curt Waltrip, a drummer with an admitted affinity for vintage metal-shell snares. Waltrip's passion led him on a mission to explore many varieties of metal shells such as steel, aluminum, brass, bronze, and titanium. Waltrip realized he particularly loved the sound of vintage brass snares. As a result, Joy-

ful Noise now manufactures custom snare drums out of wood, bronze, and you guessed it, brass. As for the custom factor, Joyful Noise's metal shells are made to Waltrip's exacting specifications, which seek to capture the spectacular sound qualities of Waltrip's favorite vintage brass snares. In homage to those old vintage drums, Joyful Noise finishes its bronze and brass shells in some beautiful bright and black nickel-plated models, as well as engraved black nickel-plated drums. Waltrip explains that metal shells, like wood shells, each have their own unique sound. That's why he personally hand-selects every Joyful Noise snare shell for optimal resonance and overtones.

**THE NEWEST JOYFUL NOISES**

I had the welcome opportunity to review Joyful Noise's newest series, the Studio Line, which features seamless, beaded shells spun from brass or bronze. I received the Stu-

dio Line 14" x 4" brass shell, 14" x 5" brass shell, and 14" x 6.5" bronze shell models. Each Studio Line snare comes outfitted with 2.5mm solid brass nickel-plated triple-flanged hoops, Joyful Noise's One Touch Classic snare strainer system, and ten Corder solid-brass, bright, nickel-plated tube lugs. For those of you vintage buffs who may be wondering, Don Corder, whose family used to manufacture Corder drums, is the manufacturer of Corder lugs.

The review snares I received each sport a small air vent surrounded by an attractive gold-colored Joyful Noise logo badge. Joyful Noise also offers optional larger air vents, or no air vents at all. Each drum comes with a certificate of authenticity, a Joyful Noise drum sock (which is a handy piece of velvet that wraps around the drum to protect the shell during transport), and a Joyful Noise badge lapel pin engraved with the drum's serial number. Nobody from Joyful Noise confirmed this for me, but I'm rela-

PHOTOS BY TOM VOGEL

tively certain that if you actually wear that badge lapel pin, you're automatically entered into the annual "Most Nerdy Snare Drum Collector Of The Year" contest.

Joyful Noise finishes its Studio Line shells in a pure silver patina sealed with Carnauba wax. The silver patina finish looks like tarnished silver and includes the color variations associated with the chemical treatment and oxidation that accompanies the silver-plating process. Each shell has its own unique patina, and visually, there seems to be no overall color difference between the silver-plating on the brass versus the bronze. The patina gives these drums the vintage look of a refurbished drum outfitted with brand new nickel-plated brass hardware. My seven-year-old son Joel described these snares as "grey and shiny and beautiful," which I think is pretty accurate.

All Studio Line shells feature what Joyful Noise calls "bell flanged" bearing edges. These are fold-over metal bearing edges that are rounded just enough, but not nearly as much as those of many other manufacturers. Each snare has deep, crimped snare beds. You won't notice the crimp when the snare-side head is on, but take that head off and you'll see that a portion of the shell's sidewall above the snare bed is crimped inward to create the bed at the bottom of the shell.

### SNARE WIRE NETWORKING

Joyful Noise deserves extra kudos for its One Touch Classic strainer, which allows for the quickest snare wire changes I've ever experienced. Cast in bronze with bright nickel plating, this strainer looks like a mini boat anchor adorned with a feather at the top. The top of the strainer contains a knurled hand-screw snare tension adjustment. To release the snare wires you simply elevate a very small spring-loaded pull-tab at the top of the strainer and the top of the "anchor" falls away from the shell. To re-engage the snare wires, push the top of that anchor back toward the shell and it snaps back into position under the spring-loaded pull-tab.

Although the One Touch Classic strainer's engage/release system is clever, the real marvel is the strainer's snare wire attachment system at the bottom of the anchor. In particular, the curved bottom of the anchor has metal slits cut into each side that are just wide enough to accept and hold a knotted snare string in place. This means you do not need to tighten or adjust any screws to replace snare wires. The snare butt plate has the same anchor curve and metal slits. As a re-

sult, the process of initially installing snare wires goes like this: 1) tie a knot in the snare string on one end; 2) place that knotted end in the slit; 3) thread the non-knotted end of the string through the end plate of your snare wires; 4) tie a knot on the other end of the string; 5) place that knotted end through the slit on the other end of the anchor; and 6) tension accordingly. And voila! You're done. Once you have those knots adjusted you can forever more swap out the snare wires in a matter of moments by simply sliding the string out of the anchor's slits. If my description sounds complicated (it's really not), the snares come with detailed instructions and an instructional DVD.

### SAME GIGS, DIFFERENT SNARES

I gave each of these drums equal treatment by testing them over the course of three weeks at two steady gigs that I've been playing lately: a softer jazz trio gig that requires lots of brush playing, and a louder church gig with a gospel-style choir that requires more pop-oriented stick playing. I also took the 14" x 5" snare to a huge wedding gig at a large hotel (in California, we call these wedding gigs "casuals"), which allowed me to pound the dickens out of this particular snare with a 15-piece band. The contrast between these various gigs gave me a pretty good idea of how these drums perform under brushes or sticks at soft to very loud settings.

The 14" x 5" brass shell sings with lots of lively and bright high and mid frequencies with a good amount of the ringing qualities that often emanate from brass. This drum retains enough lows to maintain a full and rich sound. At the same time, it sparkles with a variety of pleasant-sounding yet controllable overtones on the high end. At my "casual" gig, I initially tuned the 14" x 5" model's heads to a medium tension and proceeded to pound the drum with all of my might because of the gig's high volume and the fact that my kit was not miked. After the end of the



first set, the lugs had loosened considerably, which was no big surprise, given the intensity with which I had been playing. For the later sets, which were just as loud, I tuned the drum tighter and the lugs seemed to retain their head tension much better.

Not surprisingly, the 14" x 4" brass shell speaks with more intense lively and bright frequencies than the 14" x 5" model. Predictably, its 4" depth is not quite as full or rich sounding as the 5" deep model. Given the 14" x 4" model's shallower depth, it produces a slightly more penetrating crack when played with rimshots. On the other hand, the 14" x 5" model has a fuller-sounding backbeat. The 14" x 4" is by no means a piccolo snare, however. It has enough rich and full-sounding qualities to work as an all-around snare, albeit of a higher pitched variety.

My personal favorite is the 14" x 6.5" bronze shell. Like the brass drums, this bronze baby speaks with plenty of lively and bright high and mid frequencies. At the same time, the bronze shell's voice includes some darker and warmer overtones than the brass models. Generally, the bronze produces a more biting, focused, and drier overtone series than the brass shells.

The Studio Line snares come with Puresound wires, which, in my humble opinion, are some of the best-sounding wires in the industry. Joyful Noise sent me Puresound's Custom series and Concert series

wires in 12-, 16-, and 20-strand sets. The Custom wires sound brighter than the darker and more complex sound of the Concert wires. The 12-strand wires buzz with drier and more articulate qualities than 16- and 20-strand sets. Normally, I might not even consider trying all of these different snare wires in such short order, but the One Touch Classic strainer system made this experiment a no-hassle proposition. Furthermore, in terms of snare sensitivity, Joyful Noise snare beds get an A+. These drums buzzed with sensitivity and articulation from edge to center, but none of them produced very much sympathetic snare buzz when I played my toms.

### UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE SOUND

On the whole, the Studio Line brass and bronze shells sing with voices that are slightly drier and less ringy, yet more articulate, complex, and aged-sounding than many other typical brass or bronze shell snares that I've heard. I attribute this to the shell design and the unique silver patina finishing process, which seems to warm the shell while still allowing it to resonate fully. At my jazz gig, each of these snares provided enough sensitivity and delicacy to produce beautiful brush sounds. At my louder church gig, backbeats on these drums resonated with complexity and fullness. And, as I mentioned, the 14" x 6.5" bronze shell was particularly satisfying. Even at the loudest volumes, these drums refuse to choke. But even though they whisper at quiet levels, these drums continue to speak with a full, rich sound. On each snare, the nickel-plated brass hoops supply beautiful side-stick sounds that are more creamy and rich than a typical steel-flanged hoop. These drums are definitely versatile enough to use for all styles, but because of their subtle, delicate, and articulate capabilities, I found them particularly well suited for jazz.

### VERDICT

True, these Joyful Noise Studio Line snares could make a not-so-joyful dent in your wallet. So the question is: Are they worth it? If you can afford it, and if you appreciate drums that play with a sound and feel that's extraordinary, then the answer to that question is an un-hesitating "yes." Beyond that, you can feel good about spending some extra dough on these snares because Joyful Noise donates a portion of the proceeds from each drum sold to charities that help children. On the other hand, you could try to negotiate a lower price by asking the company to forego that charitable donation and simply let the children suffer. It's your choice. I'd probably just pay the higher price to avoid rotting in hell for all eternity. Either way, you'll love the drum.