

MODERN DRUMMER

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JOYFUL NOISE

ELITE SERIES SNARE DRUMS by Michael Dawson

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DIGITALLY ENHANCED

Last year we checked out two of Joyful Noise's snares—the TKO Modern Classic seamless brass and the Legacy flamed birch—and we were knocked out not only by their incredibly musical tones but also by their exquisite and classy design. As we said in that review, which was in the April 2010 issue, Joyful Noise drums are “destined to become classic pieces.” Upping the collector factor even further, the company offers the Elite series, which features Modern Classic seamless bronze or brass shells, with the addition of detailed hand-engraved artwork on the shells and hoops.

The Elite series consists of four models (shown from right to left in the photo above): the black-nickel-plated Winged Elite (\$2,555), which has a feather motif panel engraving; the Scrolled Elite (\$2,705), which has a black-nickel-plated shell with a scrolled feather motif engraving; the Majestic Elite (\$7,000), which has a scrolled feather motif engraving on a 24-karat-gold-plated shell; and the Esprit Elite (\$4,050), which has a scrolled feather motif engraving on a shell plated in pure silver. We received for review a 6½x14 drum in each model. To test the differences, we tuned all four drums to identical tensions at three different batter head settings, using a

DrumDial tuning gauge. We used 85 for a medium tuning, 87 for medium tight, and 89 for tight. Each drum proved to have a very distinct voice at each tuning.

WINGED WORKHORSE

If I had to choose one of the four Elite snares to be the go-to drum for a range of musical styles, the bronze-shell Winged Elite would be it. Not only does it have universal visual appeal—the beautiful feather motif panel engraving is less ornamental than the feather scroll on the other drums, and the bright nickel hardware on the black-nickel finish would work well with any drumkit—but it also produced a wide range of usable tones. At a medium tension, this drum threw out a ton of punchy midrange and low-end frequencies, plus vibrant bell-like overtones. With the drum left unmuffled, these overtones could be a bit too much for some players. (One drummer who tested the snare at a gig said the overtones were so prominent that they actually started to cause feedback in the lead singer's microphone!) But all it took was a couple of

MASTERFUL TOUCH

Inspired by the look and feel of classic American drums, Joyful Noise Elite series snares are beautiful, artfully designed modern instruments featuring seamless spun brass or bronze shells, 2.5 mm solid brass hoops, solid brass Corder tube lugs, 24-karat-gold-plated feather motif badges, vintage-style crimped snare beds, precision bell-flange bearing edges, cast bronze One Touch Classic throw-offs, and one-of-a-kind hand-engraved artwork done by master engraver John Aldridge. These drums are available in 4x14, 5x14, and 6½x14 sizes, with a variety of options including gold- or nickel-plated hardware and engraved single- or triple-flange hoops.

2" strips of gaffer's tape to tamp down the ring a bit, bringing the attack and over-ring into a perfect balance of punch and “kang.”

At a medium-tight tuning, the Winged Elite had a crisper, more crackling sound, and the overtones became a bit more focused and even. This was my preferred tuning for this drum, and it reminded me of the great singing snare tone Patrick Keeler gets on the Raconteurs song “Consoler Of The Lonely.” A tighter tuning brought out more pop, but the overtones remained strong and sonorous.

SCROLLED AND SUBDUED

Like the Winged Elite, the Scrolled Elite has

a black-nickel-plated shell, but this drum is made from seamless brass and has gold-plated hardware and single-flange hoops. If the Winged Elite is the drum to choose for all-purpose playing, the Scrolled Elite is the one to grab when you want a puffier and more vintage-sounding vibe. Despite its single-flange hoops, which usually translate into a more prominent over-ring, the Scrolled Elite was more subdued. The lower mids stood out, and the high end was noticeable but more in the background of the overall tone. A medium tension produced a classic, almost boxy vintage sound, while medium-tight and tight tunings had strong pop and vibrant high-end overtones, reminiscent of the sound I most associate with studio legend Steve Ferrone.

MAJESTIC POWER

The Majestic Elite snare is all bling, with a 24-karat-gold-plated bronze shell and gold-plated hardware. Of the four drums we tested, this one had the liveliest sound, making it ideal for big, bombastic rock drumming styles. As with the Winged Elite, the overtones on the Majestic were very strong. But instead of making me feel the need to tamp down the ring with tape to get a more “studio ready” tone, this drum wanted to be left wide open so its increased presence could stand strong in a heavy-rock mix. At all three tunings, the Majestic Elite opened up quickly with a wide and vibrant voice. Medium and medium-tight tensions were where this drum shined the brightest.

THE ESPRIT ASSASSIN

While the Majestic Elite was a dominant, attention-getting snare, the silver-plated brass Esprit Elite with 24-karat-gold-plated hoops and hardware had a transparent and quick tone that I found very appealing, especially when playing tighter, more deliberate grooves. This drum was much more controlled than the others; its overtones added just a touch of high-end sparkle, while the bulk of the sound sat in the pistol-popping middle and upper-middle frequencies.

The Esprit had a naturally higher-pitched sound, and it favored tighter tunings. With the batter head at 89 on the DrumDial, this drum let out a super-quick, dry, and white-noise-like pop that disappeared almost instantly. I loved using it when playing along to classic funk recordings, like Sly & the Family Stone’s “Sing A Simple Song.” Greg Errico’s snare tone on that track is downright deadly, and this snare was a perfect match for those hard-hitting rimshots.

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