



# New Black Panther Snare Drums

Great Sound Made More Attainable

by Martin Patmos

## KEY NOTES

- streamlined cosmetics help lower the cost
- Black Brass model is versatile enough to be a primary or secondary snare
- Walnut model's harmonics are rich and earthy
- seam on outer ply of Maple drum is obvious

**M**apex's Black Panther snare drum line has been around long enough to establish a reputation as a quality series of instruments. The five most recently released models are essentially redesigned versions that, as the company states, "focus on playability rather than cosmetic frills." Furthermore, these drums are designed to bring Black Panther snares to the customer at a more affordable price than before. By combining this friendlier price with great sound, these Black Panther snares have a lot to offer.

Our review group consisted of three out of the five new models. They included a 6½x14 Maple model (5½x10 and 5½x13 sizes are also available), a 6½x14 Walnut model, and a 5½x13 Brass snare finished in black chrome.

### So What's Different?

The design differences for the new Black Panther models involve a few cosmetic changes, and little else. According to the Mapex Web site, the drums are "handcrafted to the same exacting specifications, and feature maximum sensitivity, remarkable clarity, and incredible resonance." When it comes to those sound characteristics, I'd



Walnut

have to agree. But we'll get to that.

Our review drums feature small, lightweight oval lugs that utilize one-point mounting. Chunky, easy-to-use throw-offs operate smoothly, silently drawing the snare wires into contact with the head. Snare-tension screws on both the throw and butt ends allow for fine adjustment of the 20-strand snares. Nylon washers, brass lug nuts, Remo heads, and 2.3-mm chrome hoops finish things off cleanly. And that's about the only noticeable difference. The hoops and hardware on other, more expensive Black Panther models may be black chrome, die-cast, or something else. Otherwise, these drums are cut from the same cloth, with their shell finishes complemented nicely by the traditional chrome hardware.

### Black Brass

Smooth 1 mm-thick brass finished in black chrome makes up the shell of this snare, which possesses a sound that is simply addicting. The shell's smooth, mirror-like black finish was flawless inside and out, interrupted only by the Black Panther and serial number badges. With eight lugs per side, the drum tuned up easily and was responsive over a nice range of tensions, with the potential to be tightened up to a high crack, or tuned down to provide a deeper tone.

At 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x13, the black Brass drum's size and tuning range gives it the potential to be played as either a primary or secondary snare drum. Its dark metallic harmonics rang fully near the edge of the batter, while the center region produced a dry crispness that was wonderful for snare chatter, ghost notes, and complex sticking. The response was immediate throughout a good dynamic range. Honestly, I had a lot of fun with this snare, and found it equally effec-

tive for chatter against a jazz ride or syncopated figures over a double bass pattern. Addicting indeed.

### Maple

The new 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x14 Maple Black Panther proved to be an exceptional contender among maple snares. A natural wax finish enhances the yellow wood tones of the 5.1-mm, 6-ply shell. The shell itself is strong, resonant, and finely crafted. Just tapping around the shell with my finger revealed some nice, resonant sound characteristics.

The exterior of the shell was super-smooth, while the sanded, unfinished interior had the faintest variations when running my finger across the grain. The bearing edges were immaculately smooth and perfect all the way around. My only criticism is that the seam of the outer ply, which runs through the serial number badge at an angle, is quite noticeable due to the wood's light color.

The ten-lug drum tuned up easily and was responsive at dif-



Black Brass



Maple

ferent tensions, offering a range of tonal possibilities. All the classic sound characteristics of a maple drum shone through, including plenty of presence, full harmonics, a woody tone, and great response at different dynamic levels. When tuned up, the drum was crisp, articulate, and warm.

Tuning it lower presented a solid fatness. In short, the Maple Black Panther sounds like an outstanding all-around snare.

### Walnut

The Black Panther Walnut snare is a beautiful instrument to play and to look at. Having never played a walnut drum before, I was eager to check this one out. Boy, did I get a thrill.

If you've never heard a walnut drum before, imagine a



The Black Panther throw off operates smoothly and quietly.

maple drum without the higher harmonic overtones and comparative brightness, and instead with a deeper overall tone, rich lower and middle harmonics, and a darker, earthier presence. With these sound characteristics, the Black Panther Walnut's dark harmonics rang true throughout a range of tensions from low to high. The drum's earthy character was exceptionally dynamic and sensitive, offering both

enhance the sound in the drum's interior.

As with the other drums, the Walnut tuned up easily with ten lugs per side. However, I'd recommend experimenting with it at first to get a feel for the drum's harmonics. As to the overall sound of the Walnut, I loved the earthy tone and power it provided. With these characteristics, it blended well with darker-sounding cymbals and didn't harmonize as nicely with really bright ones. Owing to its unique sound, its volume, and its versatility, I loved this drum.

### Conclusion

I found each of the new Black Panther snare drums to be well-made, expressive, and versatile instruments that would work well in a great variety of situations. By cutting costs as the result of a few simple hardware alterations, Mapex has helped to bring the price of these drums within the reach of more drummers. Plus, whether against black metal, dark brown wood tones, or light yellow ones, that shiny chrome hardware goes with everything. Whether you're looking to upgrade your snare or just looking for a new voice, these new

Black Panther snares are worth investigating.

rich brushwork and the most astounding, thunderous rimshot crack I've ever heard. Seriously, the first time I laid one down I was in such awe that I missed a beat in disbelief.

The 5.1-mm, 6-ply shell was well crafted, solid, and resonant. The natural wax finish applied to the smooth exterior emphasized the rich dark brown color and the finer lines in the wood grain. Even though walnut is a rougher wood than maple, the bearing edge was still quite smooth, while the finely sanded interior maintained a slight roughness that ought to subtly

### THE NUMBERS

5 1/2"x13 Brass (BPBR3551C) .....	\$509
6 1/2"x14 Maple (BPML4650CWN) .....	\$539
6 1/2"x14 Walnut (BPWT4650CWN) .....	\$559
<a href="tel:6157932050">(615) 793-2050</a> , <a href="http://www.mapexdrums.com">www.mapexdrums.com</a> .	

## Quick Looks

### Vater Color Wrap Sticks

I've never understood drummers who like using black or dark brown drumsticks. *Boring.* I want the audience to be able to appreciate the impressive way my sticks move. (Ha!) But to be able to do that, the sticks have to be *seen*. If you feel the same way, then chances are you're going to dig Vater's Color Wrap series.

And what colors they are! The high-density wrap material used for this new series looks amazing under lights. We're talking a deep, penetrating finish that is visible for miles. (Okay, I exaggerate a little here.) The Sparkle wraps are tremendous, and the Optics are more dazzling than a Pink Floyd

laser show at your local planetarium. (Okay, I exaggerate a little more here.) I wish I had a drumkit wrapped in this stuff.

The wrap material is also surprisingly durable. I've been using the sticks on my gigs for a few weeks, and they aren't very nicked up, even after I've bruised up my kit with 'em. Playing heavy rimshots, riding on the rims, and even smacking the edge of a big ride cymbal didn't tear them up like you might expect.

Okay, so the wrap looks good and is durable. But how does it *feel*? Well, while I've always been impressed by the quality of Vater sticks, frankly, I've found them to be

very smooth and a little slippery for my grip. But with the Color Wraps, there's a good grip surface and an added feeling of security. I could hold the sticks loosely without feeling like I was going to drop them.

So Vater's Color Wrap sticks feel great in my hands, seem very durable, and look amazing. But all is not perfect. My only gripe is, as of now, they're only available in 5A, 5B, and Power 5B models. I'd sure like to try the Color Wraps in some cool Vater sizes, like their Manhattan 7A or Fusion models, or from the other end of the spectrum, their Power House model.

Last but not least, just what colors are available? Color Wraps are offered in blue, gold, and red sparkle versions, as well as black, silver, and purple Optic finishes. (Check out Vater's Web site to give them a closer look.) All models are available with wood tips only and list for \$13.95 per pair. Your playing will look *mahvelous*.

[\(781\) 767-1877](tel:7817671877), [www.vater.com](http://www.vater.com).

**Frederick Bay**

