

MAPEX

Black Panther Series Snare Drums

by John Emrich

Cherry Bomb



Velvetone



Sledgehammer



Mapex has added fourteen new Black Panther snares to its lineup for 2010. We had the opportunity to play all of these drums, and each offered its own unique sound. For the purpose of this review, we chose the six that we felt were the most distinctive. Let's take a look.

CHERRY BOMB

The Cherry Bomb (\$439.99) has a 5 1/2 x 13 cherry shell. Its finish is beautiful and has an almost wet look, and its sound is ideal for a main snare. It had a wide tuning range, but I really liked the way it spoke when tuned medium tight. The snares were very responsive. This drum had a versatile sound that would work in a wide range of musical styles.

VELVETONE

The 5 1/2 x 14 Velvetone (\$579) is made of a combination of walnut, maple, and burl maple. The finish is a good-looking vintage burst. This drum's tone was warm

PHANTOM

The Phantom (\$439) is an ear-popping 5 x 12 snare with chrome hardware and tube-style lugs. At first I was happy with the high pitch that it produced naturally. When I lowered the head tension I was rewarded with a tone that would work as a main snare sound for a dry and articulate Gavin Harrison-type vibe. Even though the Phantom is a small drum, I tried playing it with brushes and was happy with the results. I had to restrict my movements, but I found a tone quality that worked great with wire brushes.

This drum also offers a lot of control. For that reason, it could prove very effective in the studio as a main or auxiliary snare. When I placed the Phantom on the left side of my hi-hat, I cranked up the head tension until the drum produced an excellent timbale-style tone.

RETROSONIC

The Retrosonic (\$729) is a 5 1/2 x 14 walnut drum with a natural walnut finish

Phat Bob

The Phat Bob (\$649) looks to be a loud and aggressive drum because of its 7 x 14 maple shell with black hardware. But it has rounded bearing edges, so its sound is closer to that of vintage snares. When I added a little muffling to the top head and tightened up the tension, I was thrilled with the combination of deep tone and excellent stick response. At a variety of head tensions I was still able to get plenty of articulation and snare response. This drum recorded well and sounded great for rock ballads and old-school grooves.

yet powerful, with a smooth quality and a wide snare sound. I used the Velvetone in a jazz setting, and it blended well with my vintage Gretsch drums. This would be an ideal candidate for players who have the budget for only one snare.

SLEDGEHAMMER

The Sledgehammer (\$589) is a 6 1/2 x 14 hammered brass drum that really cuts. Its hardware, including the tube-style lugs, is finished with an antique brass look. In addition to producing a very sharp attack, the drum had a lot of body. This characteristic is typical of most brass drums, but I was able to get a bit more body in the higher dynamic range from this model, where other brass snares might start to choke. Tuning the drum to a medium tension yielded a massive crack with a lot of low-end tone. This snare will make guitar players reach to crank their volume knob.

and tube-style lugs. It had an open sound quality that was reminiscent of many vintage drums I've played. Walnut is a hard wood, and this drum had an almost metal-sounding ring to it. I found the Retrosonic to be a great general-purpose snare, and it worked well at a wide variety of head tensions. As I tightened up the coated Ambassador batter, the pitch went up without choking the resonance of the shell. The articulation was outstanding, even at whisper-quiet dynamic levels.

WRAPPING UP

The majority of these new Black Panther snare drums will be sold for under \$400, which is a great price point for drummers looking to expand their collections. If you can't wait for the drums to hit the stores, visit Mapex's Web site and listen to audio examples of each one.

mapexdrums.com



Phantom



Retrosonic

