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# Firchie Snare Drum

■ by Rick Van Horn

Yeah, it looks a little weird. But this unusual drum also offers some genuine innovations and unique performance qualities.

The Firchie snare drum is the brainchild of drummer/designer Ivan Firchie. It combines a free-floating, seamless aluminum shell (which I'll touch on later) and a rotational tensioning system similar to that of a RotoTom. The concept is that once the heads are lug-tuned evenly to a medium tension, the entire drum can then be rotated on its stand to proportionally increase or decrease the tension of both the top and bottom heads—thus raising or lowering the pitch of the drum. The sound of the drum can literally be changed from that of a piccolo to that of a 10"-deep drum (or anywhere in between) in seconds. According to the manufacturers, this eliminates the need for several snare drums in a studio situation, and makes the drum extremely versatile for use on a live gig.

To add to the versatility of the drum, it is equipped with a strainer and throw-off at each end of the snares. (These strainers are attached to the lower "rim," not to the drumshell.) By adjusting the tension of each strainer differently, one can achieve three separate snare sounds by virtue of using either one—or both—of the strainers. (Of course, both can be released for a tom sound.) The drum had a definite sweet spot in terms of snare response; it wanted to be hit right in the center. Off-center impact resulted in significantly less snare sound and a lot more head/shell ring.



For the time being, Firchie drums only come with a 4 1/2"-deep shell. (A piccolo model is being experimented with.) The thin, one-piece aluminum shell features specially rounded bearing edges for the drumheads, and a unique contour. While the shell sits squarely within the hoop of the bottom head, it tapers so as to be over 1" smaller in diameter than the top head. That means that the top head extends beyond the edge of the shell over 1/2" all the way around—in much the same way that timpani or gong bass drum heads extend beyond their shells. Along with the "free-floating" nature of the shell, this top-head extension contributes to the resonance of the drum—which I found to be considerable. In fact, between the metallic sound of the shell and the timpanic head arrangement, the Firchie had almost *too much* resonance. In an attempt to address this problem, Firchie ships the drum with a Remo *Legacy* head (which has characteristics somewhere between *an Ambassador* and a *Fiberskyn 2*.) But I don't think the head alone does the job. Unless you are a *big* fan of the classic Alex Van Halen snare drum sound, you'll probably want to muffle this drum down a bit. But to be fair, the resonance gave the drum tremendous projection and

*killer* rimshots—no matter what the head tension.

There are a wide range of finishes available on Firchie drums, from brass and chrome to a variety of colors. The drums I examined looked wonderful. A thicker aluminum shell will soon be available as an option, and wooden shells are under development.

One potential problem with this drum is its size: The works of the rotational tuning system sit beneath the drum itself—making the entire assembly about 9" deep. This requires a snare stand that can accommodate deep-shelled drums. (Since different snare stands have baskets that clamp on at different angles, Ivan Firchie has thoughtfully provided points on the frame for snare-basket clamping at two different levels.) The extra depth will also require an appropriate bag or case. That bag or case should be heavy-duty, by the way, because the drum weighs a little over 15 pounds.

A second problem is acoustic in nature: The drum features single-tension tuning. That is, both the individual tuning lugs and the rotational tensioning system tighten both the top and bottom heads at the same time. I found myself wondering what would happen if I could lower the pitch of the batter head with-

out sacrificing the crispness of snare response I'd get if the bottom head remained tight. But this might be nit-picking, considering the variables of head tension and snare adjustment that were available to work with.

I took the drum out on several gigs, and enjoyed tweaking it from song to song to achieve the optimum snare sound for each. On funky tunes with lots of busy syncopations I kicked it up into piccolo range; on power ballads and disco dance tunes I dropped it down for a big-as-a-barn backbeat. For additional variety, I

fiddled a bit with the snares at each different head tension. It was like having a rack full of sampled snare drum sounds—without the hassle of triggers, interfaces, sound sources, and amps! I also had the added benefit of being able to change any aspect of the drum sound I wanted *as I was playing it*. Try doing that with a programmed sample!

When I first saw the Firchie drum, I was inclined to dismiss it as a gimmick, but after working with it I've been completely converted. It's an extremely useful tool for any drummer who appreciates

versatility and quality performance from a single instrument. Prices vary with the finish: An all-chrome (shell and hardware) drum lists for \$800; a custom-color shell with all-black hardware goes for \$910. Other finish combinations fall in between. While these prices sound a little steep, remember that one Firchie drum can create dozens of snare drum sounds. Firchie is a new company, so if your dealer has no information, contact the makers at 2 World Trade Center, Suite 2210, New York, NY 10048, (212) 321-3210.

## Drumslinger Double Pedal And Extended Rack Bags

by Rick Van Horn

Designer-at-large Bob Gatzen and Tough Traveler, Ltd. have once again collaborated on some specialty bags offered under the Drumslinger brand. This time, they've come up with bags to handle double bass drum pedals and drum rack components.

### Double Pedal Gig Bag

This compact (20" x 10" x 7") cordura bag is designed so that the two halves of a double pedal can nest one atop the other, with their pedals reversed. A padded "tongue" slips between the two halves to prevent scratching, inner pockets are provided for the axle, a drumkey, allen wrenches, and other small paraphernalia, and a special strap secures the beater rods on the primary pedal. The bag is fitted with top handles, an end

handle, and a clip-on shoulder strap, and it has a nifty double zipper connected by a pull strap for easy access to the bag's contents. It isn't particularly padded, but you don't really need to be too worried about damage to metal bass drum pedals due to impact. The compactness of the bag and its ergonomic design are its best features. It sells for \$112.

### Extended Hardware/Rack Bag

This 50" x 14" cordura bag is designed to contain extended hardware (like straight stands and booms at full height) or drum rack components. It features double cinch straps (to securely bundle the contents into a more solid mass) and a handle specially designed to make carrying heavy items more comfortable. A padded shoulder strap is also provided.



The 50" length of the bag should be enough to carry most standard lengths of drum-rack tubing, but (in typical Gatzen fashion) the possibility of using longer components has been accounted for. A special 12" extension sleeve pops out of one side of the bag, increasing the overall length to 62". This sleeve tucks back into the bag and is secured by a *Velcro* strap so it isn't flapping around loose if it isn't needed. Even when longer items are fitted into the bag, the cinch straps bundle everything together neatly and make the bag easy to carry. The suggested list price is \$112. If your dealer doesn't stock Drumslinger bags, contact Tough Traveler, Ltd., 1012 State St., Schenectady, NY 12307, (518) 377-8526.