

MY FIRST DRUM SET

I remember so well getting my first drum set. It was so exciting and the best £150.00 I had ever spent. That red sparkle finish and all those flimsy little chrome fittings just waiting to come loose, buzz throughout a gig and collapse the set into an unrecognisable mush of wood and metal at the sight of the meagrest of drum fills. It didn't damp my enthusiasm though, not for a few months at least. I then slowly began to acquire the basics of what to look out for, borne mainly from experience of what could go wrong.

I thought it would be OK because I got it from one of the drum teachers in the local store whom I trusted. However, suspect things soon started to become evident. The things of note with that set form a nice little checklist of gremlins to look out for.

Although I didn't realise it at the time, the kit was actually very flimsy, from the stands right through to the bass pedal, which regularly came loose and hi hats, which regularly turned inside out. The stands were skinny single braced affairs, which were top and easily knocked over. The drums were single headed and the skins were thin and 'pingey'. These were soon forced into retirement on health grounds, as was the kit.

Beginners drum sets have changed a lot since those days and it is a lot easier for someone to enter into the world of drumming on a small budget and start out with something more than reliable and sturdy.

There are a number of ways that shops sell kits. A shell pack is just the drums with no cymbals or stands. Most commonly you can get a basic kit which includes all the stands and finally, an all in deal which includes cymbals as well. The inclusion of cymbals is made easier and more affordable by the new range of budget cymbals offered by

top-flight companies such as Zildjian. They do various basic box sets of cymbals at a price, which does not send the cost of the whole kit into orbit. A good set of cymbals is vital to a good sounding drum kit. Sonic qualities are something you will develop an ear for but in the first instance, make sure they are not thin and flimsy and that there are no cracks anywhere, especially around the central hole and all round the edge.

You then have to decide how many drums you want. A four-drum set is bass drum, snare drum, small tom and floor tom, with a five drum set having a medium tom. (I.e., two toms mounted on the bass drum.) I would recommend buying a five drum set but learning on a four-drum set. I think it challenges your imagination more, makes corny rolls round the toms impossible and builds a better player. Then move on to five drums after a couple of years.

You can get double or single headed drums. Try to go for double headed because you can always take off the bottom head for that 'concert tom' effect. Don't forget to tape up the unused bottom lugs to stop them rattling though. Sizes are really a personal thing but on the whole, smaller sizes are for Jazz and lighter music (20" bass, 10", 12" 14" toms) whilst larger sizes are common in heavier music.

Skins are really important. If they have clear pinstripes or Evans heads, great. If they are thin ringey heads then, depending on what music you play; you might go through them quite quickly. A good set of heads can make a budget kit sound amazing but they can be very expensive.

Fittings and stands are less of a problem than they were. Check how sturdy they are. Are the cymbal stands heavy, double braced and difficult to knock over. (Double braced means that each leg of the tripod has two strips which are bent together to form one stronger leg. This obviously makes it much more stable.) Are the tom tom mounts and

snare stand easily adjustable and can you really manoeuvre them to get the drums in different positions. Flexibility here is very important when you get home and want to set the kit up exactly as you want it. Check that the snare stand is also double braced and sturdy. Floor tom legs need to be strong and easily adjustable. Alternatively, if it is mounted on a stand check that that is sturdy and easily adjustable and that it goes low enough for you.

Check that the snare drum has an easy mechanism to turn the snares off. Again, a good skin is important here. If you want to play Jazz then a coated skin such as an ambassador would be appropriate. Alternatively, some of the pinstripes or Evans heads can be good for a rock 'crack'.

The hi hat pedal really needs to be double braced and sturdy. It needs an easy and fluid motion, as does the bass pedal. Check that the bass pedal secures easily and firmly onto the bass drum rim and that the spring tension is easy to adjust. A wooden beater can be a good choice for rock but get a small round adhesive pad from the drum store to protect the skin. (Some people use a fifty pence piece taped to the head where the pedal strikes to get that extra aggressive definition of each strike.)

Finally, check that the bass drum has sturdy legs/feet, which will prevent it wandering away from you during a show. This is amazingly annoying. Having your own carpet is vital to help avoid this. You can also mark on it where all the stands go to assist you setting up. Do this with gaffa tape so you can change it later without having a matrix of confusing crossed out settings. You can also put a wooden stop of some sort in front of the bass drum to stop it wandering.

You should now be ready to get famous and make millions!

Selection of kits at good prices....

Yamaha stage custom, standard set. Five drum kit with all stands from pro perc, London. £499.00 (rrp £699.00)

Yamaha stage custom Advantage set. Five drum kit with all stands from pro perc, London. £599.00 (rrp £799.00)

DW Pacific EX series, five piece kit with Stool, Sticks, Stands, Hi hat and Ride from House of drums Southend. £449.00

Yamaha Rydeen rock Five drum kit with all stands and Zildjian planet Z cymbals from Andertons in Guilford and Rimmers music branches, Lancashire. £399.00!!!!)

Mapex pro M series, five piece kit with Stool, Sticks, Stands, Hi hat, Crash and Ride from House of drums Southend. £759.00 DATES 02 2004

