

Doc Sweeney

Classic Collection Snares

Era-accurate reproductions of legendary solid-wood drums from the early 20th century.

Doc Sweeney is one of only a few companies that specializes in steam-bending snares and kits out of premium domestic and exotic wood. We've reviewed some of their more innovative drums in the past, like the hybrid bubinga/aluminum RX series. This month we're checking out the recently introduced Classic Collection, which comprises steam-bent snares designed to replicate the look, sound, and feel of some of the most coveted models of the 1920s.

Specs

We were sent two samples from the Classic Collection to test. Both had 5.5x14, 5/16"-thick, single-ply steam-bent shells. One was made from maple, and the other was made from walnut. Both had solid-maple reinforcement rings, ten chrome-plated solid-brass tube lugs, double-flange steel hoops, vintage-style strainers, and classy embossed badges. The maple version came with a special Pacific Pearl wrap, which pays homage to the legendary Peacock Pearl finish from the '20s. The walnut drum had a hand-rubbed oil finish to protect the shell and emphasize the gorgeous wood grain.

Doc Sweeney based its Classic Collection drums on the legendary Ludwig & Ludwig Standard-Sensitive solid-shell snare of the 1920s. The unique bearing edge shape of that vintage drum, which has a special 45-degree round-over profile, was matched as exactly as possible on these new drums.

To emphasize the unique sound quality, feel, and versatility of each drum, Doc Sweeney added an internal round-felt muffler on the maple model and included a calfskin-like Remo Diplomat Skyntone batter and Ambassador Hazy bottom. The walnut drum had a slightly thicker Diplomat





Fiberskyn batter and a warmer-sounding Ambassador Renaissance bottom. Both drums came with classic sixteen-strand German steel wires.

Sounds

Vintage solid-shell snares have a sound that's nearly impossible to replicate with a modern-style drum. They have a full, chunky tone with a round, blunt attack, a short decay, and a throaty midrange projection, all of which contribute to an unmistakable vibe that adds a lot of warmth and personality to a track. The problem with those older drums, however, is that the hardware is usually junky, so tuning is unstable and the throw-off often slips or loses tension over time. Also, they were inconsistently built, so one drum might sound incredible while another sounds like a wet cardboard box.

What Doc Sweeney has achieved with its Classic Collection is to capture all that sonic coolness while maintaining super-tight, consistent quality control. The lugs held tension throughout our review period, which included playing tests utilizing hard rimshots. And the tuning range extended

from low and slack all the way up to tabletop tight, with endless options along the way. The precise bearing edges made the tuning process very smooth and easy to dial to a focused, pure tone. The snare response was much more articulate and crisp than on comparable vintage drums, which gave the Classic Collection a more focused, detailed high end.

The maple drum had a decidedly old-school vibe, with a lot of midrange thwack and a dense punch. Had I not known this was a new drum, I would have guessed I was playing on a pristine vintage snare that had been used on countless hard-bop, early rock 'n' roll, and classic R&B cuts. With the batter tight and the wires loose, it was a spot-on replica of the round, sloppy sound Billy Higgins used on dozens of Blue Note jazz records in the 1950s and '60s. Tuned a touch lower, and with tight wires, I heard echoes of Aretha-era Bernard Purdie. The internal muffler was great for shutting down the overtones entirely when going for an upfront, dead tone, à la Harvey Mason with the Headhunters. Or it could be dialed back to shorten the decay slightly without killing

the high-end ring.

The walnut Classic Collection snare also featured a dense, warm sound, but had a more modern-leaning personality with a cleaner attack, drier decay, more balanced frequency range, and an extended tuning range in the upper and lower registers. Walnut is a unique timber for drums because it has a dark and controlled tone that leans towards what we consider vintage-sounding, but it also has a more modern-style EQ profile with cleaner highs and deeper lows. Therefore, to my ears, Doc Sweeney struck gold with the walnut Classic series snare. It records beautifully, sounds as appropriate articulating light, delicate jazz as it does cracking through aggressive pop-rock, and requires almost no fine-tuning or mixing.

As a do-all solid-shell snare, the walnut is the one. If you're shopping for something a bit more retro and "vibey," then go with the Pacific Pearl maple. Each is available for around \$850. Check out our demo videos of these two Classic Collection snares at modern drummer.com.

Michael Dawson