

# Dream Cymbals

One Man's Trash Is Another Man's Treasure



by T. Bruce Wittet

## KEY NOTES

- Affordable yet pro-quality B20 alloy cymbals
- Diverse range of sounds
- All hi-hats are matched extremely well
- Bliss series offers stunning, trashy sounds



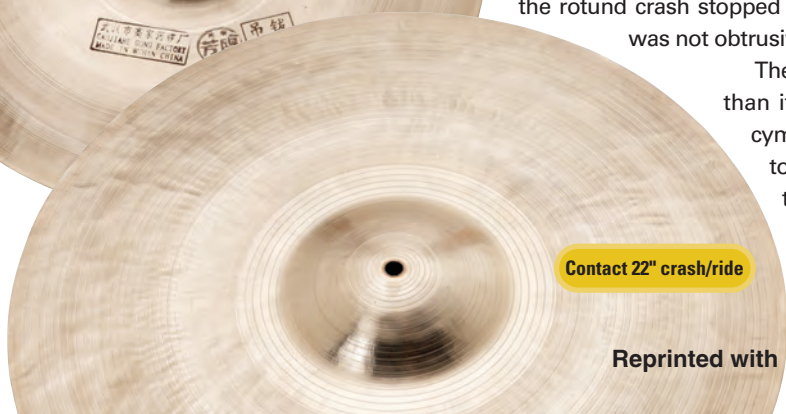
Energy 20" ride



Energy 16" crash



Bliss 16" crash



Contact 22" crash/ride

In forty years of drumming, I've rarely encountered a group of cymbals as diverse as these. And it's all good.

Dream cymbals are made in China, from B20 bronze alloy. They're imported by the Canadian company Mountain Rythym, who has heretofore been known primarily as makers of premium hand drums. The three Dream lines range from fairly accurate replications of "Western style" cymbals to wildly hammered thin plates that wobble like a floppy hat in a windstorm. The folks at Mountain Rythym sent *MD* selections from each of those lines.

### E For Energy

The Dream E series cymbals boast an even, "finished" appearance that compares well with that of American and European brands. I started with the 20" crash-ride, and I enjoyed its pleasant, shimmering tone and good sustain. The bell was strong without exhibiting any jarring qualities. The ride characteristics were similar to many name-brand medium rides, with the addition of an underlying exotic "Chinese" component. I'd be happy using this cymbal on any gig from country to pop, although I doubt it would cut a metal gig except as a crash.

The 16" E series crash was bright in pitch, with a quick explosion and a fast decay. Again, a slight exotic timbre lurked in the background, affording a little extra tonal body. Although I didn't record the cymbal, I'd gladly add it to the cymbals I reserve for that purpose.

The Energy 14" hats were relatively bright in tone and quick in response. They yielded nicely clipped open and closed patterns when played with sticks, and had a solid chick.

Finally, the 10" splash was everything a splash should be: bright but not clangy, full in bandwidth, and capable of quick accents (and even mallet rolls).

### Full Contact

The Contact (or C series) cymbals are quite obviously made by hand. In fact, one 22" ride looked similar to a Turkish-made hand-hammered cymbal I purchased as a young drummer in the 1970s. The Dream model featured relatively deep lathe impressions set about 1/4" apart, atop a surface indented with narrow- and wide-peen hammer blows.

That 22" cymbal was marked as a crash-ride. After lifting the thing, I was puzzled. It weighed seven pounds...what sort of crash could I hope to get from such a beast? But when I looked closer, things began to make sense. First off, the bell was disproportionately large. Large bells promote crash power and sustain. In addition, the otherwise heavy ride was surprisingly thin around the edges, which is another crash-promoting feature.

This cymbal intrigued me. It had me playing straight-8th Euro-jazz ride patterns, and being rewarded by a crystalline ping. It also had a remarkable ability to open up for short crash punctuations. Yet when I played the cymbal at a rockabilly gig using 5Bs, it held its own against a particularly loud guitarist. The ride sound was penetrating, while the rotund crash stopped traffic. And while the large bell provided a good target, it was not obtrusive in tone.

The 20" C series ride featured slightly less hand hammering than its larger sibling. The bell was more in proportion to the cymbal's diameter, and the weight was medium as opposed to heavy. Again, the body tapered from thick bell and bow to thin edges. This cymbal began to wobble fiercely as I laid into it. The Contact 18" crash was simply serviceable, with good projection and not overly long decay.

The C series 14" hats were well matched, emitted a

good chick, and responded well to sticks for open/closed patterns. When I played them on a loud pop gig, I particularly liked the way I could ride them with both cymbals barely touching, producing a consistent sizzling swish. And finally, the C series splash was a nice bit of work, with perhaps a hint more trashiness than the E series model.

### Heavenly Bliss

The Bliss, or B series, is, in my opinion, the flagship of the entire Dream cymbal catalog. These cymbals remind me of a cross between older Turkish cymbals and certain Oriental copies of Western cymbals I'd seen in the '80s. The feel is soft, the response is immediate, and the undertones are thundering.

All Bliss cymbals feature a fairly flat profile, which lends a low fundamental pitch. Whereas some Western cymbals are pressed into shape hydraulically and then hammered, I'm told that B series cymbals are completely hammered into shape.

Because of the eccentricities inherent in intensive hand labor, Bliss cymbals have areas of inconsistent thickness, which I would call "sweet spots." Some of the review "rides" revealed five or six such spots. I put the word rides in quotes because the cymbals are not designated as such. They're stamped only with their diameter on the underside, and "Gaojiahe Gong Factory, Made In Wuhan China" along with some Chinese characters on top. Bells are of modest size, while the lathing is light, narrow, and tightly packed. Although this lathing style tends to minimize harmonics and provide focus, focus is not the strongest point of this line. Rather, the appeal lies in an extremely guttural, trashy, and exotic response.

I brought a set of B series cymbals to a jazz trio gig: a 22", a 20", and 14" hats. The first time I gently rode the 22", the pianist remarked on the "strange overtones." I shut him up by repositioning the cymbal lower than his ear level. The bass player's comment was, "Cool!"

Even at extremely quiet dynamics, the 22" cymbal spoke clearly. Each note from my 5A wood-tip sticks was clean and clear. As we ramped up the excitement level, the cymbal began to undulate. I mean, it really wobbled at the edges, and with that wobble came an undercurrent of smoky, trashy, low-pitched harmonics that recalled Art Blakey.

While the 22" Bliss cymbal's ride sound was impressive enough, a good blow set off a thunderous low-pitched crash. I had to work to control the swell from overpowering the stick attack. Two 4" strips of adhesive tape on the underside helped greatly. When I used lighter, "jazz model" sticks, I got away with less tape.

Mountain Rythm sent a few extra 22" Bliss rides to demonstrate the tonal variation inherent in these handcrafted cymbals. Even the heaviest of these (they peak around 5½ pounds) felt very soft under my sticks, and exhibited that signature wobble. One bore telltale scars that attested to a molten birth on a brick oven floor. Whether I played the cymbals with the tip of a stick or crashed them at various dynamic levels, they kept reminding me of a couple of my early-'50s Turkish cymbals. In fact, they were a little lower in pitch. In other words, these are not garden-variety rides. But they're sure fun to play!

I placed the 20" Bliss on my left side, where it proved equally useful for riding and crashing. It, too, wobbled and behaved erratically and revealed several sweet spots. Mallet crashes were extremely effective. I cannot overemphasize the uniqueness of



Bliss 12" splash

Contact 14" hats

Energy 8" splash

these cymbals—deep in pitch, frothing with thick overtones, and swelling in a manner that begged to be tamed.

The 14" B series hats had me second-guessing myself, trying to figure out which was the top cymbal, since neither was marked. I'd happily play these at a jazz or blues gig. The marriage of the two thinnish metal plates was exceptional, helping them to respond well to hand work. The foot-operated chick sound, however, was a little quiet.

There were no B series splashes included for testing, but there were two Chinese Lion traditional China cymbals with a cylindrical bell and flat outer edges. They performed well in the manner of other commercially available authentic Chinese cymbals.

### Bliss On A Budget

Many drummers have never experienced a totally hand-made cymbal. For various reasons—tactile, musical, aesthetic, and historic—I recommend checking out a Dream Bliss ride. When you consider that a 22" Bliss cymbal lists for \$225 (and that the street

price will likely be significantly lower), you can hardly lose. At the least, you'll be content to gaze at the extensive hand hammering. At most, you'll be at the cutting edge of modern jazz, world music, or singer-songwriter genres.

Mountain Rythm has gotten it right with all three Dream series, in terms of price and sound. With the Contact and (especially) the ragged Bliss series, they've done the cymbal world proud.

### THE NUMBERS

<b>Energy (E) Series</b>	
8" splash .....	\$55
10" splash .....	\$65
14" hi-hats .....	\$220
14" crash .....	\$120
16" crash .....	\$150
18" crash/ride .....	\$230
20" ride .....	\$280
<b>Contact (C) Series</b>	
10" splash .....	\$62
12" splash .....	\$79
14" hi-hats .....	\$220
14" crash .....	\$100
16" crash .....	\$120
18" crash/ride .....	\$165
20" crash/ride .....	\$260
22" crash/ride .....	\$290
<b>Bliss (B) Series</b>	
10" splash .....	\$60
12" splash .....	\$75
14" hi-hats .....	\$220
14" crash .....	\$90
16" crash .....	\$115
18" crash .....	\$135
20" ride .....	\$165
22" ride .....	\$225
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