

A Closer Look

Wuhan Dream Cymbals

Built From The Ground Up—Literally

by T. Bruce Wittet

Remember the first time you spied an authentic Wuhan Chinese cymbal? With their cylindrical bells and cups, and their roughly hewn surface, they filled a specialty void, and drumset players snapped them up for their exotic sounds and reasonable prices. Today these previously rare instruments are readily available, finding popularity among a wide range of players.

Well, there's a new wave of Wuhan cymbals washing up on our shores, thanks to a small Canadian company that manufactures high-end percussion instruments, Mountain Rythym. MR is importing Western-style and traditional Chinese cymbals in a big way, and they debuted them last winter at NAMM. Drummer reaction to the modest selection was positive, particularly regarding the Western rides and crashes. In fact, some claimed that the more crudely fashioned cymbals of that lot resembled the best of the '50s Turkish cymbals. It's almost as if some of these crawled out of the *Journal Of Industrial Archeology* to take a breath of modern air. If Mountain Rythym has its way, they'll stay out and running.

DB recently checked out models from three of Mountain Rythym's Dream line: The E (for Energy), the B (for Bliss), and the C (for Contact). All are Western-style cymbals.

MR obtains the E series from one factory and the others from another facility. They assure us their supply is stable. Currently, in fact, the company warehouses over a hundred units in each model designation. This should spell relief to fans of such cymbals, such as master jazz drummer Terry Clarke, who has used a selection of similar cymbals on record dates and in concert for over a decade. His selection, like the crudest of our test group, displays ink-stamped indigenous Chinese script. Ours add English characters: "Gaojiahe Gong Factory. Made in Wuhan China."

B SERIES

The B Series is arguably the flagship of Mountain Rythym's Dream cymbal line. They're also the cheapest, making them a real bargain for customers.

Bliss cymbals carry the traditional Chinese characters and indicate place of manufacture. They also have a discrete "Dream" logo ink-stamped on top. All are heavily hand-hammered out of ingots of B20-B22 metal. The hand-hammering here is critical. Whereas Western cymbals come out of the fire as ingots, which are rolled and then bumped into shape, the Bliss cymbals are completely hand-hammered into shape. The brute strength required to do this explains, perhaps, why these cymbals are available only in relatively light



From top: The B series ride, the C series ride, and the E series crash ride

weights. The totally hand-made process accounts for the unique, mottled appearance, soft feel, relaxed metal tension, and diverse sonic properties. The rippled surface is due to the variations in human force and raw material, and explains the number of sonic "sweet spots" on these cymbals, a result of variations in metal distribution. The lathing style is what the majors would call pin lathing; it's extremely fine and does not gouge deeply into the metal.

Given the extensive cold work involved, it's surprising that the Bliss cymbals are so consistent around the edges. But watch the same edges when the cymbals are ridden with a stick or rolled upon with a mallet. They commence wobbling and convulsing, seemingly fighting against themselves, generating a thundering low wash that augments complex highs and moderate mid tones. Drummers employing maple sticks (and who play with a light touch) will find these controllable and immediately useable. Those who favor 5Bs will want to experiment with adhesive tape. Several among our test group required four strips of tape on the underside to focus the wash, but the result was a trashy, exotic character equal to that of the most sought-after ancient Turkish cymbals. Make no mistake, these are not for every drummer. But they are quality, pro-level cymbals, totally crafted by hand, and your customers can own one without mortgaging their house.

C SERIES

Whereas the B cymbals carry no usage designation, the Cs are marked "Crash Ride," "Crash," and so on. And whereas most of the Bliss cymbals exhibit a low profile, the Contacts are bumped higher and display extra treatments. Atop the pinpoint lathing is an extra round of lathing that results in deeper score lines. This lathing is so even, it might have been done by machine. One heavier 22" sported a huge bell that posed a considerable target and a offered a harmonious tone,

suitable for Latin or rock—though we doubted its "crash ride" designation. But hats off to the Wuhan lathe masters: The combination of the cymbal's extremely thin edges and large bell promoted a hearty, quick crash that normally would not be possible from such a large, heavy cymbal. This would be an ideal instrument for just about any style. Dealers may well appreciate such a do-it-all cymbal, especially at its street price.

E SERIES

Energy cymbals are currently marked simply "Dream" followed by the designation "Ride," "Crash," etc. These cymbals are machine-hammered and, sure enough, they were the most consistent of the bunch. Lathing and hammering were such that these could easily go up against many an expensive Western cymbal—balanced in tone, responsive, long-sustaining, and lacking in some of the haunting overtones that distinguished the other lines. For many, this will be the ideal compromise between trash and treasure, all at a substantial discount. The crashes hint at the exotic Chinese indigenous overtones, but lean to the Western side of the sonic divide. For now, the E series features everything from hats and splashes to crashes and rides.

COVERING ALL GROUNDS

While Mountain Rythym's E cymbals provide stiff competition to the budget offerings of other companies, they are emphatically pro instruments. That stated, we found the gems of the Dream line to be the Bs, warts and all. They could constitute an excellent set for the contemporary jazz player, or the perfect add-on for the rocker. And then there's the charm of owning something hand-made in a machine world—without paying hand-crafted prices!

Dealers should contact Mountain Rythym at drums@mountainrythym.com.

The Numbers Of The Beasts

B (Bliss) Series

10" Splash	\$60
12" Splash	\$75
14" Crash	\$90
16" Crash	\$115
18" Crash/Ride	\$135
20" Crash/Ride	\$165
22" Crash/Ride	\$225
14" Hi-Hats	\$190

C (Contact) Series

10" Splash	\$62
12" Splash	\$79
14" Crash	\$100
16" Crash	\$120
18" Crash/Ride	\$165
20" Crash/Ride	\$260
22" Crash/Ride	\$290
14" Hi-Hats	\$220

E (Energy) Series

8" Splash	\$55
10" Splash	\$66
14" Crash	\$120
16" Crash	\$150
18" Ride	\$230
20" Ride	\$280
14" Hi-Hats	\$220