

CYMBAL DOCTOR

CYMBAL CLEANING SYSTEM

by J.R. Frondelli

There's nothing quite like the topic of cymbal cleaning to turn a discussion among drummers into a heated debate. After all, cleanliness is next to godliness, right? Well, when you're talking cymbals, many drummers might not agree.

A GREASY MYTH

It's a common notion that the dirt and oxides that build up naturally are part of what contributes to the mellowing of a cymbal's sound. While it's true that a layer of anything extraneous will help to mellow the tone of a cymbal, a good portion of this phenomenon is due to the aging of the metal, as the tension is beat out of it under normal use.

In addition to dirt buildup and the aging of the metal, there's a third factor, called etching, that assists the mellowing process. This occurs when moisture gets into the mix, whether it's from outdoor beach gigs, dank clubs, or damp basement practice rooms. Moisture mixes with the contaminants on the cymbal surface, rendering them acidic and causing micro-etching of the metal. The point of all this backstory is to dispel the myth that good, mellow-sounding cymbals have to go unpolished. The truth is, your cymbals will mature over time no matter what. So if you want them to look clean, bright, and shiny like the day you bought them, then go for it!

CALL THE DOCTOR

For those of us who prefer some bling on our cymbal stands, there's a new and quite extraordinary cleaning system on the market called Cymbal Doctor. This system is a collaboration between Larry Jaworske, a drummer, machinist, and former custom automotive speed shop owner, and Sam Lankford, an independent chemical engineer who specializes in creating cleaning and polishing compounds for major manufacturers. After spending a lifetime creating fast, shiny speedsters that traversed New York-area roads, Jaworske decided to put his vast knowledge to use on cymbals.

From the outset you can tell that Cymbal Doctor is different from all the other cleaning systems out there. It's not a one-step panacea. In order to render a cymbal as shiny as possible, multiple steps are necessary. First, the surface contamination must be removed. Next, you polish off the metal oxide dendrites (microscopic tree-like crystal growth) sitting on the cymbal surface. This is what causes a cymbal, freshly denuded of its contaminant layer, to still

appear a bit dull. Finally, the metal surface must be sealed to preserve the clean finish.

Utilizing their collective knowledge of metals and chemicals, Jaworske and Lankford went through a lengthy trial-and-error process of selecting, and ultimately creating, the correct components for their Cymbal Doctor kit. The three chemical preparations (cleaner, polish, and preservative), despite looking like some commonly available substances, are totally proprietary, even down to the foam polishing ing pads.

WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

Cymbal Doctor comes as a complete kit, with everything you need for the process packaged in a kitschy-yet-cool Cordura tote that looks very much like the bags carried by house-call physicians from years back. Included in the kit are an orbital polishing machine and pads; Step 1 (cleaner), 2 (polish), and 3 (sealer) chemical preparations; an empty spray bottle for water; sealer applicator pads; microfiber towels; disposable gloves (mainly to keep your hands clean, since the products are not caustic); logo-protection film; and a 24" square nonskid work pad, which keeps the cymbal in place and protects your workbench from wayward funk. An instructional DVD is included as well.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Jaworske instructed me to clean my shiniest cymbal first. I was told that the cymbal, which ended up being my prized 21" Zildjian Sweet brilliant ride, would look *better* than it did when it was new. Well, the results were astounding! My son even asked, "Hey, Dad, did you get a new cymbal?"

The real test, however, was listening to the results. The cymbal sounded much better, with a definite shimmer I hadn't heard before. This corroborates the initial findings by Jaworske, who employed a prominent New York recording studio to perform pre- and post-cleaning audiometric



testing on models cleaned with Cymbal Doctor. In addition, a thermal analysis was performed to make sure that the machine-polishing system wasn't raising the cymbal's surface temperature to a point where the temper could be ruined (220 degrees Fahrenheit). The system turned out to raise the surface temperature by only a couple of degrees.

I looked through my bags for my funky-est non-brilliant-finish cymbal, and I came across a 16" Grand Master that had seen better days. I'd actually shelved the cymbal because it had lost a certain something. I've since added it back to my working rotation, as it sounds great once again after the Cymbal Doctor treatment.

THE PROGNOSIS

Cymbal Doctor works beautifully, and there simply is no better product on the market in its price range. While it's not exactly cheap (\$239), it's designed to last. A single set of chemicals will clean a lot of cymbals, and refills are available for all of the chemicals and accessories. Therefore, the cost per cymbal is very low. In addition, the cleaner/brightener (Step 1) is available separately for drummers who want only to clean, but not polish, their cymbals. This preparation alone works wonderfully, with none of the etching or staining caused by other one-step liquid cleaners on the market.

cymbaldr.com

CONCERNING LOGOS...

Cymbal Doctor comes with clear plastic protective film sheets designed to be cut to shape and placed over your cymbal logos. During our testing, we found that if you go easy over the logos, you won't harm them. However, if going logo-less is your thing, you can accomplish this with Cymbal Doctor as well.