

*Rocking to a
"Different" Drummer*

MUSICAL

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REVIEW

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Rocking to a "Different" Drummer

How a rock drummer, in his search for the "full sound," got it all together

WHAT A DRUMMER—a pro, that is, and particularly a rock or jazz stickman—wants from his set of skins is a "full" sound. And that does not mean simply loudness. To the percussionist, "fullness" is an all-embracing quality that includes depth, richness, tone and overtone, clarity, dynamics, and percussive control of a full range of volume: i.e., all the way from a sub-whisper to a super-amplified salvo of heavy artillery. In other words, not simply noise, but rhythmic music.

A few years ago, rock drummer Bill Zickos, unsatisfied with what he felt were the limitations—insofar as true fullness—of conventional wood and metal drum construction, began experimenting with plastic plexiglass as a potential material for an improved full sound. Two additional factors encouraged this concept also. First, the esthetic appeal of transparency. And second, the almost universal conversion among rock groups to electronically amplified instruments, par-

ticularly the guitar, bass guitar, organ-cum-piano, synthesizer, even violin.

For years, the conventional drum section of a jazz group, even in the "big band" era, could hold its own volume-wise with the brass, reeds, keyboards, etc., even in full band crescendo. But with the almost incredible decibel range afforded by amplification even for a small mandolin, the rock percussionist found that just keeping pace, sound-wise, began to prove a struggle.

Perfection = A Plastic Sandwich

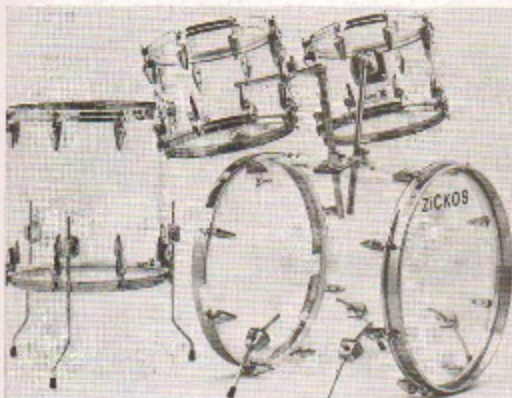
For the drum head, prior to his work with plexiglass shells Zickos arrived at what he considered the near-perfect plastic composition: a sandwich of two layers of 7-mil (7/1000ths in.) polyester film separated by a microscopically thin layer of oil and air, except at the perimeter or edge under the hoop of the drum head where the two films are laminated (bonded together). These heads were provided on a "made-to-order" ba-

sis by Bob Beals of Evans Products Co., Dodge City, Kansas, well-known manufacturer of drum heads.

Zickos first attempted to fit this composition transparent head on conventional wood shells with metal hardware, and then on aluminum shells. However, the vibrations or wave lengths of sound in this combination were either distorted or dissipated; metal tends to echo and return unwanted resonance, wood tends to muffle because it absorbs.

Zickos next turned to an all-plastic concept. After further experimentation, he evolved a shell of plexiglass (of the plastic family of acrylics), bonded at the seam, with a minimum thickness of ¼ in., which imparted enough stability to support the heads and the hardware during the typically aggressive playing pattern of the average rock drummer.

Guiding Zickos in his experimentation was a prime consideration: overall compatibility throughout the entire drum construction: i.e., assuring that not only the drum head but also the shell and any contingent hardware vibrated on the same wave lengths (for that's what all sound is a reflection of, especially insofar as



The "400" drum set, outfitted here with a long bass.



The "650" drum set—two each basses, small toms, floor toms—all fitted here with blue transparent heads.



Production manager David L. Dyché tries out the "400" drum set, shown here with an extra floor tom; Dave is the stick man with a Kansas City rock group.

the quality of the sound: wave lengths that are audible).

Zickos' first hand-made sets were a hit with several top rock players and groups by 1971. They were tough, they were attractive, they were novel, they could take abuse, they stood up, and—most to the point—they gave a sharp, clean, full sound. Among the earliest (and still) Zickos fans were Floyd Suede (with Three Dog Night), James Brown, Leon Russell, Billy Preston, and Keith Moon (the Who). New rockers include Buddy Miles and the stick men with Iron Butterfly, Jefferson Airplane, Grass Roots, Black Kangaroo, the Beach Boys, and Up With People.

Equal Vibrations = Sound Insurance

Under president Fred McCraw, further hardware refinements were developed for the transparent drums being made at the Zickos Corp. plant in Lenexa, Kansas. (The Zickos drum design, thanks to the "transparency" of its construction, has been awarded U.S. patent No. 3,626,458.)

All hardware is cast of the best heavy material; all parts are triple chrome-plated for additional long wear and looks. At every point where hardware would be in direct contact with either the plastic head or shell, a plastic "buffer" (of soft vinyl) in the form of a fitted or shaped washer, sleeve, or gasket separates or forestalls this would-be contact. This buffering further insures that the vibrating wave lengths, which are equalized throughout the head and the shell, run no risks of even minimal distortion through direct contact with even the smallest piece of metal hardware, such as a bolt, pin, lug, etc.

During the fastening of hardware to the shells, proper distribution of tension (i.e., tensioning) is assured through the fitting of full back-up plates. For sturdiness, tension screws are thicker and stronger than those used in conventional construction. For quick changeover of heads, the tension screw and "hook" assembly simply lifts and hinges away; it does not require being taken completely



Bass spur housing and curved spur; inset shows full backup plate characteristic of all Zickos hardware fittings.

apart. There are no springs in the lugs, which eliminates the hazard of the "humming" undertone that can often result with spring-loaded lugs; Zickos lugs utilize free-floating pins. On every drum, the all-metal hoops are triple-chrome-plated; in the Zickos design, wood is simply non-existent.

The free-vibrating principle throughout the entire drum, incidentally, is a concept unique with Zickos, according to McCraw; at this date, no other drum manufacturer is apparently taking this into consideration.

Zickos Marches to Its Own Drummers

Interestingly, and one feels very logically, all the production employees at the Zickos plant are drummers, practicing or experienced (a gourmet makes the best chef). At a rate nearing more than 100 drum sets a month, under production manager (and rock drummer) Dave Dyche, they turn out a variety of standard sets in a few standard sizes, with shipment guaranteed within two days of receipt of order.

Zickos bass drums are offered in the 22 x 14 in. "short" bass and the standard 22 x 18 in.; on special order, a "long" 22 x 24 in. bass is also available. The standard floor tom tom is 18 x 18 in., and the standard small tom is 14 x 10 in. Optional types, besides the standard "closed" or double-end drum, include the open-end "timbale-type" and 2-ply heads in dark blue transparent plastic.

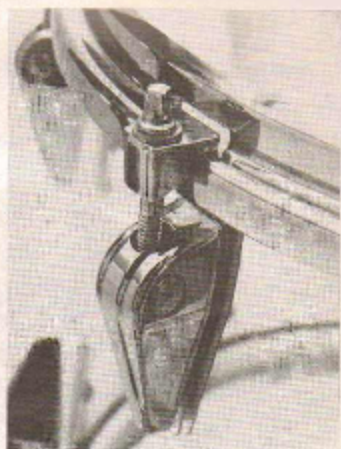
At present, there are five standard Zickos drum sets available:

- The 320—one each standard bass, floor tom, small tom; all open-end timbale types.
- The 380—one closed bass; one open-end floor tom; two open-end small toms.
- The 400—one bass; one floor tom; two small toms; all closed.
- The 550—two basses; one floor tom; two small toms.
- The 650—two each of basses, floor toms, and small toms.

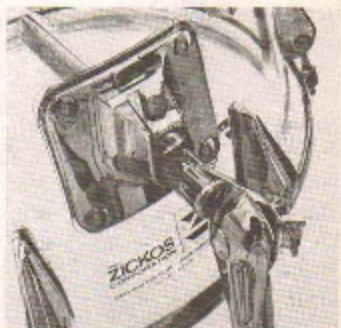
The "long" or "short" bass is optional with any set; blue heads are optional with any closed drum, but not for the open-end timbale style inasmuch as the appearance factor with only one head is negative.

These Zickos drum sets, points out McCraw, are not designed for beginners or amateurs, but for maturing drummers and pros. Thus, Zickos offers no accessories such as foot pedals, sticks, or accessory percussive items such as small stands, cymbals, claves, woodblocks, etc. Most often, a Zickos set is purchased as a trade-up, and the customer already has his pedals, stands, and so on.

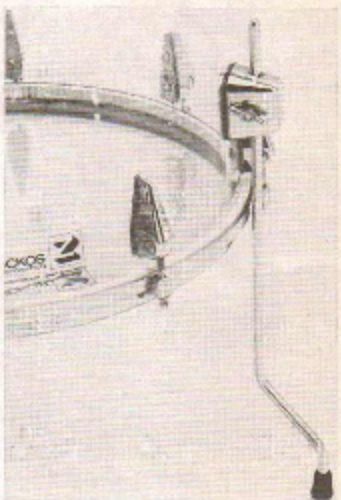
At the June NAMM Expo in Chicago, McCraw plans to unveil a few new Zickos combinations. One of these, for which he allowed us a quick peek behind the curtain, will be a unique small-size Jazz Set No. 300 comprising an 18 x 18 in. bass, a 14 x 14 in. floor tom, and a 13 x 9 in. ride tom. This is designed specifically for the small intimate supper-club type of pop or jazz group. ♪



Close-up of tensioning system and Zickos "streamlined" lug design, showing lug, lug pin, tension screw, and "hook"; all "cushioned" with plastic gaskets, washers, and sleeves.

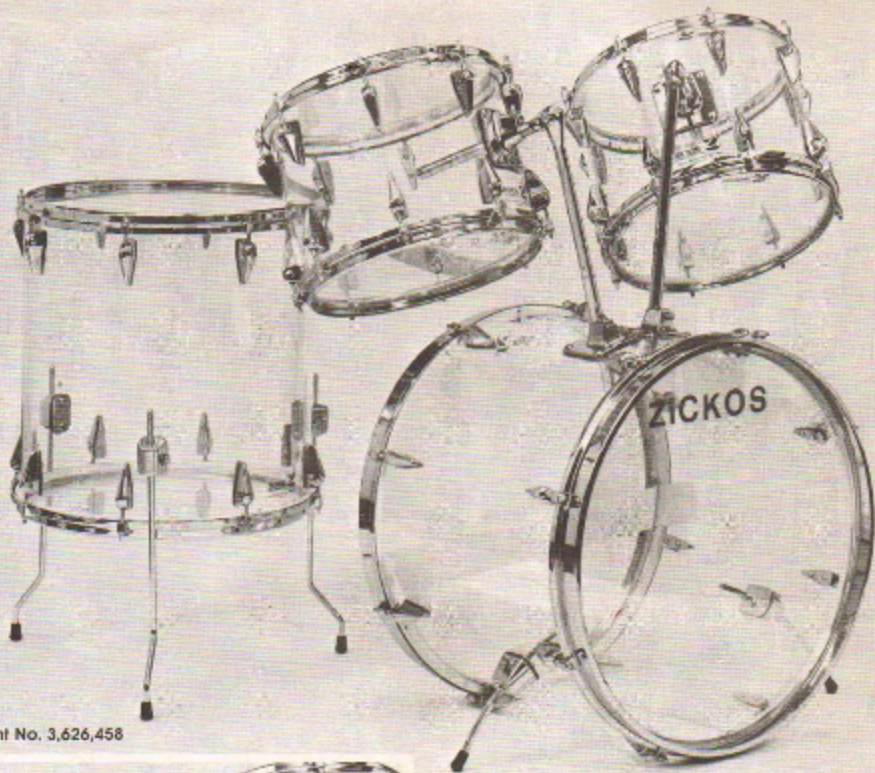


Close-up of small tom tom holder, showing swivel arm and mount.



Close-up of floor tom leg and leg housing.

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Patent No. 3,626,458



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10. Finest Sound Ever Engineered.

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