

Craviotto Drum Company

Snare Drums

Johnny Goes Solo

HITS

unique construction and materials

distinctive sound

by **Kevin D. Osborne**

In a world of plastic and technology, where everything is molded into man-devised forms, it's a joy to see and handle something originally brought into being within the natural realm. An object made of wood never really loses its connection with the basic stuff of the universe.

Drums are made of wood, and the center of the drumset world is the snare drum. There are more types and models of snare drums available than any of the remaining drums in a drumset. As a result, there are quite a few drum makers who make *only* snare drums. One such craftsman is John Craviotto.

The Product

After twenty years of building custom shells for other drum makers, John recently launched his own Craviotto Drum Company. He's very excited about the chance "to create some pretty outrageous, truly unique instruments for serious drummers—and perhaps make a small contribution to advancing the art of drumming along the way."

The Process

Most wood snare drums are made of several thin plies that are glued together to create their shells. It's an exacting process that produces many fine drums. John Craviotto, on the other hand, makes his snare drums from solid planks of wood that are steam-bent and formed into a circle.

The process starts by milling each board to the desired drumshell thickness, then trimming it to the specific length and width needed to create the desired shell depth and diameter. The ends are then beveled where they will overlap and be joined together to form the seam. Now the plank is ready for steaming so that the wood can be made pliable enough to be bent.

The planks are steamed for a predetermined time, depending on the type and thickness of the wood used. After steaming, each plank is bent into a circle, glued on the seam, and placed into a spe-



4x14 Mahogany



5 1/2 x 13 American Ash

cial mold to dry. Once the shell is stable, reinforcing hoops are glued into it.

The top and bottom of each shell is then trued, and the shell is lathed to precise tolerances “to enhance its circular shape and musical performance.” After the bearing edges and snare beds are cut, the shell is ready for finishing and assembly into a completed drum.

Our Review Group

The four drums we received for this review included a 5½x13 American ash, a 5½x14 bird’s-eye maple, a 6½x14 black cherry, and a 4x14 mahogany. Several other sizes are available in these same woods.

The American ash drum has a very pronounced grain, with wide streaks and dark ripples across the light tan wood. The grain is so strong that, although the drum is highly finished, you can feel it as you lightly run your fingers across the drum. It’s as if the wood has set a natural limit as to how far it can be shaped or formed, thus preserving its own personality. What you *can’t* feel is the seam where the ends of the steam-bent plank come together. The finish is that good.

The bird’s-eye maple snare is visually stunning. The wood itself has kind of a 3-D effect, with shadows and ripples moving as the light plays across it. Among the thin ripples and swirls are numerous freely scattered speckles that look like the small dark eye of a bird (hence the name). Set against the blond background of the wood, these speckles cause your eye to dart around the surface of the drum, “following the dots” instead of moving with the flowing grain.

The black cherry snare is made of the kind of wood you would expect to see in a stately office or high-class mansion. It has a reddish-brown color with darker ripples running all around the surface of the drum. This creates an undeniably classy look. After the ash and the maple, it almost looks stark. But what it lacks in eye-catching busyness, it makes up for in its strong, regal beauty.

The mahogany drum is close in color to the black cherry. But the grain runs through it in very small streaks, darting across the drum like a school

of small fish running together. These tiny dark stripes wrapping their way around the drum give it a livelier appearance than that of its staterier black cherry sibling.

The Details

The bearing edges on all the Craviotto snares are angled mostly to the inside of the drum, across the width of the shell and further on down the reinforcing ring. The outer edge is almost fully flush, with only the tiniest counter-cut to join with the sharp, inner angled edge.

The hardware, including the badge, all follows a tasteful diamond-shaped pattern. The tube lugs are each attached to the shell with two squares of chrome, angled to be diamonds, rising to form stems and knobs through which the tubes pass. The diamond shape is continued on the snare butt plate with a thick, classy base that nicely anchors the snares (and the design) in place.

To complement his fine woodwork on these drums, John Craviotto fits them with Puresound Percussion snare wires and Nickel Drumworks Piston throw-offs. He offers a choice of 2.3-mm triple-flanged steel, vintage-style brass, or heavy-duty die-cast counter-hoops.

The Sounds

With ten lugs and a 6½" depth, the black cherry snare produces a very tight, focused sound with lots of good stick definition. That sound is dark and throaty, bouncing around in the depths of the drum before emerging. And since the sonic depth matches the physical depth of the drum, the sound does not get soaked up and lost. The drum also produces a solid snare response in the center, with lots of presence—and ringing rimshots.

The 5½" bird’s-eye maple is brighter than the black cherry drum, with a lighter tone and quicker response. Its crisp and clear sound is more on the surface. There is all of the traditional punch and resonance of maple—and plenty of ring—without any loss of definition. You can clearly hear the stick attack with normal sticking and rimshots. This would be a great all-around drum.



5½x14 Bird's-Eye Maple



6½x14 Black Cherry

The 4x14 mahogany snare is a little dream. This time-tested choice of wood for drums is full, warm, and resonant. The Craviotto mahogany is a little darker than the maple drum, and a little more muted than the American ash. But that doesn't mean it can't be clearly heard and appreciated. The very traditional sound is full of snare vibration. I loved this drum's concentrated, controlled delivery. I could hear every nuance of the snare sound: buzz, crack, click, and zip, with plenty of kick to the rimshots. This is one snare that would enhance any drumset.

American ash is not a material commonly used in drum manufacture, but it turns out to be an insightful choice. The drum produces a bright, quick, and responsive sound. Sticking is especially well defined. With the crispest delivery of the four snares, the ash produces a penetrating sound that would let you cut through the music without having to pound the drum. Even tuned low, it retains a brightness, pop, and presence that will definitely anchor the beat.

The Wrap-Up

John Craviotto has created a series of solid-shell snare drums that expands and complements the range of high-end snare drums available today. These drums are worth searching out to see and hear for yourself. They're finely crafted and beautifully finished, and they possess distinctive sounds. You can't ask more from a custom instrument.

THE NUMBERS

5½x13 American Ash (also 5½x14)	\$1,495
5½x14 Bird's-Eye Maple (also 5½x12 and 5½x13)	\$1,495
6½x14 Black Cherry (also 5½x13)	\$1,495
4x14 Mahogany (also 5½x14)	\$1,495

(831) 763-0855, www.craviottodrums.com.

Copyright 2004 by MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.