

## Gear

Since you're trying to establish a career based on performing on your instrument, it has to start with the gear; thus preparing it should be the first step. The functionality of your drumset should never be in question while on a gig. Otherwise you'll constantly be distracted and your performance will suffer. Prior to any gig, check the following things:

1. **Heads.** Make sure they are in good condition. If you suspect one may break soon, replace it immediately. Here's a tip: bring extra batter heads for your snare and kick drums. If either head breaks during the gig and you have no spare, you'll be in a REALLY tough spot. Just take an old head and throw it in the case with the drum. It doesn't need to be anything fancy, just something to get you through the gig.
2. **Tuning.** This subject is beyond the scope of this program, but the basic point here is to ensure your drums are tuned up and sound good. This is especially important when doing studio work. Engineers and producers love drummers who show up with good-sounding drums. It takes less time to mike them up and get good sounds to tape. Time is money in the studio, so taking the least amount of time to do your thing should be your goal (more on this in the "Studio Gigs" segment).
3. **Hardware.** Always check your stands, pedals and whatever else you use to make sure nothing is broken. One of the most annoying things to deal with is broken hardware on a gig. I can't tell you how many times I've had to borrow the sound engineer's gaffer tape and jury-rig a cymbal stand because the tightening thumbscrew was broken. This takes time, it's unprofessional and it creates stress that you don't need. Tip: to keep the weight down, use single-braced cymbal stands. The only things that require double-braced legs are tom-tom mounting stands. I also like to use a double-braced stand for my snare, but this is personal preference and by no means a necessity.
4. **Cymbals.** If you have a cracked cymbal, please PLEASE don't take it to a gig! This should go under common sense, but it still amazes me how often I see drummers using cracked cymbals. It looks bad and it sounds terrible, especially when recording. I know cymbals are expensive, but consider it

a sound investment (no pun intended) in your career. If you find a crack in a cymbal, replace it ASAP.

Once you have your gear in good functioning condition, the next question to ask yourself is: do you have the appropriate kit for the gig? In other words, will this set of drums/cymbals fit the genre of music you'll be playing?

For example, if you've been hired to play with a small jazz combo at a lounge, you probably should leave the 22" kick at home and take something smaller. If you have a gig with a rock band at a loud rock club, you can keep the 22" kick and use your loudest, largest cymbals on hand. See what I'm getting at here? Use the drums that stylistically fit the genre of music. If you're unsure, ask the bandleader. Don't be shy about this; bandleaders love drummers who take a proactive approach to preparedness. It's one less thing they'll have to worry about, and from my own experience as a bandleader I can tell you this is a great thing.

If you want to play different genres of music, you might want to consider obtaining several drumsets with different-sized drums. For example, you might consider a kit with larger drums for the louder amplified gigs and another kit with smaller sizes for acoustic gigs. However, drums are expensive, so if you're just starting out and you can only afford one drumset try to get something versatile. The following are some nice in-between drum sizes that I have used for many years in jazz (small combo and orchestra), funk, blues, rock and Latin ensembles:

Listed in depth x diameter:

- 14"x20" Kick
- 10"x12" Rack Tom
- 14"x14" Mounted Floor Tom
- 5.5"x14" Snare (metal shell)

The 20" kick is a nice size because you can tune it higher for jazz gigs or lower for funk/rock/Latin. The tom sizes also afford you this luxury. I specified metal shell for the snare because I feel the sound you get is more versatile than that of a wooden shell. For the tom and kick shells I feel that birch is more versatile, but maple works as well.

Cymbal selection is a little more difficult. In fact, I believe there is an art to putting together the right set-up for a given performance situation. In a perfect

world, we would all have dozens of cymbals to choose from, but most of us can only afford the bare essentials. Here are some things to consider:

- **Ride:** If you can afford it, buy two. One should be bright and loud in the 21"- 22" diameter range with a good bell sound. The other should be darker and have more stick articulation. I like darker cymbals in the 20"- 21" diameter range, but some sound good in the 22" diameter. If you can't afford to buy two, split the difference. Some crash/ride cymbals are good in this capacity. Avoid thicker, rock-style rides; they're only useful for very specific situations.
- **Hi-Hat:** A good basic pair of 14" hi-hats will work on any gig. Avoid anything too thick or too dark.
- **Crash:** If you can only afford one crash cymbal, get something around the 16" or 17" diameter range. Look for something that has a nice bright sound and that decays quickly. Avoid dark crashes or rock-style crashes, as they won't be as versatile. However, if you can splurge a little and get a second crash cymbal, find something that's a little darker and a little smaller – 15" in diameter is a nice size. The difference in size and the bright/dark sounds will establish some contrast between your crashes and add some artistic character. Also, the smaller, darker crash cymbal can work well on jazz, folk and other gigs that are purely acoustic and quieter.

I'd like to take a minute to talk about collecting drums and cymbals. First of all, consider that in order to sustain a career in any profession, you must invest in it. Acquiring gear and building a collection is an investment, and as with investing in company stocks, there are ways to go about doing this that will bring you the best return. The first thing you must consider is the type of work you foresee taking in the near future.

For example, at one point in my career I met several folk artists, and I loved the music they wrote. I really wanted to work with them, so I started studying the genre. In doing so I noticed that many of the drummers on those projects used older, vintage drums and darker-sounding cymbals in small diameters. At the time I didn't own any drums of this flavor, so I started looking for a vintage drumset, eventually landing some beautiful Ludwigs from the early '60s. Soon after I purchased the drums, I happened to get a call from a friend who introduced me to a local folk artist. She needed a new drummer, so we got together and jammed. I brought my vintage drums, and she loved how they

sounded. She invited me to play some live shows and on her new record. The investment I made on the drums was returned twofold for the work I did with this artist alone.

Another thing to consider is your identity. If you purchase a set of drums and use them consistently, people will identify you with them. This is something you'll notice more and more as you work as a professional; musicians identify other musicians in part by what gear they use. You'll hear people say things like, "Oh, Anthony the bassist. Yeah I know him ... plays a Fender Jazz Bass, right?" or "Jeff Muzerolle ... sure ... he has some gorgeous vintage Ludwigs." Think about what feels natural to you. Do you feel more comfortable behind a brand-new modern drumset with shiny new cymbals, or do you prefer vintage drums from the '50s or '60s with dirty old cymbals? Maybe you're like me and feel comfortable behind ANY kit. Whatever the case, determine what makes you feel the most comfortable and make decisions on gear with this in mind.