

New Meinl Artist Signature Percussion Instruments

Bang...Clank...Shhhrrring!

HITS

Valdes timbales have a dry, powerful sound

Aronoff cowbells offer durability and power

Conte chimes feature a tonal-center design

by Norman Arnold

The folks at Meinl must lie awake nights dreaming up new instruments to introduce. And they're smart enough to enlist the aid of some pretty high-profile percussionists to help them in their creative process. Let's take a look at three of Meinl's latest signature items.

Amadito Valdes Signature Timbales

Contrary to how it might appear to the untrained ear, there really are subtle differences in timbales. Even when you're bashing away (like you're supposed to), there are overtones that can really make a difference in the overall sound of the drums—and, therefore, to the way you play them.

The choice of steel shells, "Floatune" tuning, and Evans heads gives the Amadito Valdes timbales a tight, crisp, dry sound. And that's "dry" in a really good way. It's not an edgy or overly ringy sound, just really smart and solid.

The "Floatune" system is Meinl's way of mounting the lugs without drilling holes in the shell. The mounting bracket goes around the entire drum. It's a cool system, and it works.

The drums are finished in what Meinl calls "Black Powder Coating." It's a matte black, which I thought looked great. I was a bit concerned at first about playing cascara (a stick hitting the side of the shell), thinking the finish might chip or discolor quickly. But I guess Meinl thought of this as well, because it wasn't an issue at all.

The 14" and 15" shells are mounted solidly on a double-braced, adjustable tripod stand. The stand legs also have the black powder coating. The cowbell



mount is simple and solid. I mounted both of the Kenny Aronoff signature cowbells (more on them later) and they didn't budge.

I recorded the timbales in a couple different ways. A faraway room mic' gives the drums that great, old-school, "Buena Vista Social Club" sound—kind of Perez Prado retro. Close miking picks up a tight and punchy sound. Like most timbales, these drums are super-loud, so be careful when you set your recording levels.

Overall, the Amadito Valdes timbales would be a great set for live or studio playing in pop, Latin, or any style you choose. Amadito must be a proud man, what with his illustrious career and all. I bet he's just as proud of the timbales that bear his name.

Kenny Aronoff Signature Cowbells

The Aronoff cowbells come in 8" and 6¼" models. If Kenny's playing is any indication, these bells are made to be hit hard with drumsticks, not the wimpy little timbale sticks I had lying around. So I enlisted the help of a drummer friend of mine, who took the bells to a gig and beat the crap out of them all night. He gave them full marks for sound quality, projection, and durability. When he returned them I could hardly tell that they'd been played at all.

I used the bells with the Valdes timbales and was pleased by the way they sound. The 8" has a lower pitch, perfect for your band's cover version of "Brown Sugar." The 6¼" is not a whole lot higher. It's definitely a small *drumset* bell—not like the smaller cha cha bells for timbales.

The bells come with little sticky pads that you can use to deaden the ring. I tried a couple, and they worked well. In addition, the mounting bracket on each bell was solidly constructed and durable. Each steel bell is hand-hammered and has a chrome finish that would fit in visually with any drummer's rig. The sound could be counted on to fit in musically as well.

Luis Conte Signature Chimes

The Luis Conte signature chimes would be a great addition to the sound palette of any drum or percussion rig. They're put together with sixty anodized aluminum bars that Meinl describes as being "tonally matched." What this means is that even though the chimes are set up as a double row, they actually have a tonal center at the top ("C" in this case). An additional single chime mounted on the top of the wood bar is actually the note of concert C. So at the end of your run up the chimes (into the downbeat of the next measure) you can create a definite ending

by hitting the mounted single bar.

I used to have a finger cymbal at the end of my chimes to achieve the same effect, but it sounded sort of random. The single chime bar on the top of the Conte chimes fits right in with the sound of the hanging chimes. It's a great blend, a good sound, and a cool idea.

The quality of construction is what you'd expect from Meinl. The chimes come with a good mounting bracket and a thin metal beater that's perfect for a light touch in the studio. (But the chimes would also work great on a live gig.)

Conclusion

All three additions to the Artist Signature Series are strong. Meinl worked with some of the most talented and respected players in percussion, and it really shows in the quality of the instruments and the musicality of their sounds.

THE NUMBERS

Amadito Valdes Timbales:	\$590
Kenny Aronoff Cowbells:	
8"	\$ 59
6¼"	\$ 49
Luis Conte Chimes:	\$190
(877) 886-3465, www.meinl.de	

Quick Looks

Meinl Marco Minnemann Alien Hats

Meinl's Marco Minnemann Alien Hats are part of the company's unique cymbal series called Generation X. Developed in cooperation with Marco (and also with Johnny Rabb), the cymbals feature what Meinl calls FX9 alloy technology. The metal seems lighter than that in most other cymbals, with a distinctive silvery-bronze color.

The Alien Hats are the coolest, most fun hi-hats I've ever played. They're available in 8", 10", and 12" sizes; the most entertaining and versatile of these is the 12" model.

The bottom cymbal has four sets of double tambourine jingles. Of all the "jingle enhanced" hats I've tried, these hats produced more "tambourine" sound than any other—especially when played with the foot. (On their own, the hats themselves generate a thin but well defined "chick" when played with the foot.) Stick definition is super-clean, which makes intricate patterns come alive.

Just for fun I switched the top and bottom cymbals, which produced an even more pronounced "tambourine" effect. There are also many percussive possibilities when placing the bottom "tambourine" cymbal on top this way, such as playing the cymbals with your

fingers and creating accents by striking the jingles.

The 8" and 10" models were generally similar in sound to the 12", but neither was as versatile. They seemed to have the same size bell as the 12", which left them with much less cymbal body to work with. Still, both produced a surprisingly well-defined "chick" when played with the foot. When played with sticks, the tone of the smaller models was thin and shallow, with a quick bite. This worked well for short accents and intricate sticking patterns. And when all three models are set up together, they work well in creating very cool-sounding patterns between them.

Each Alien Hat model comes packaged in a specially designed carton printed with helpful information on all the Alien Hats, along with a complete transcription of Marco Minnemann's famous triple hi-hat groove. The 8" model is priced at \$175, the 10" at \$198, and the 12" at \$225. With Marco being the extra-terrestrial drummer that he is, it's no wonder he helped develop some of the most out-of-this-world-sounding hi-hats on the market.

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