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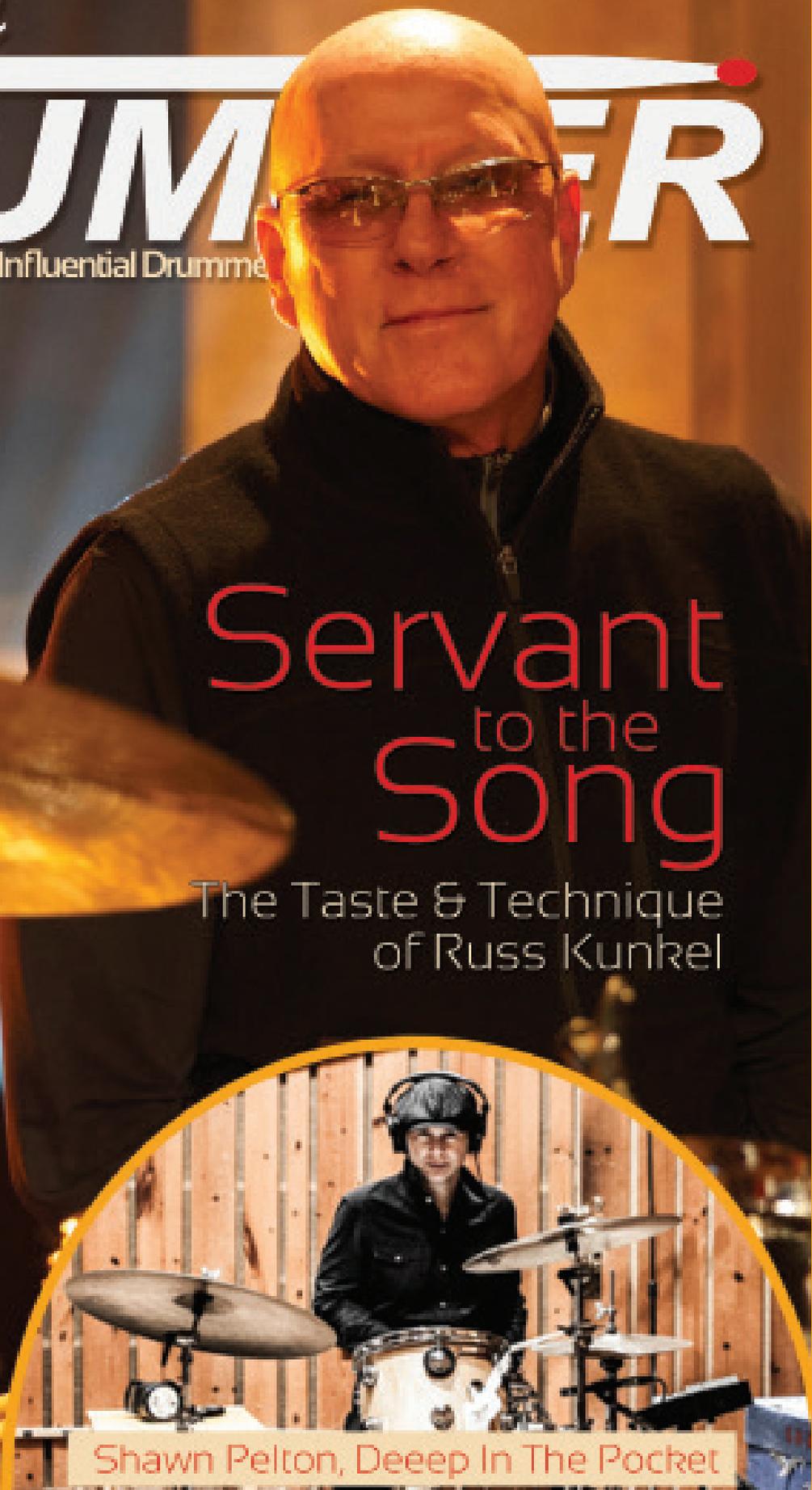
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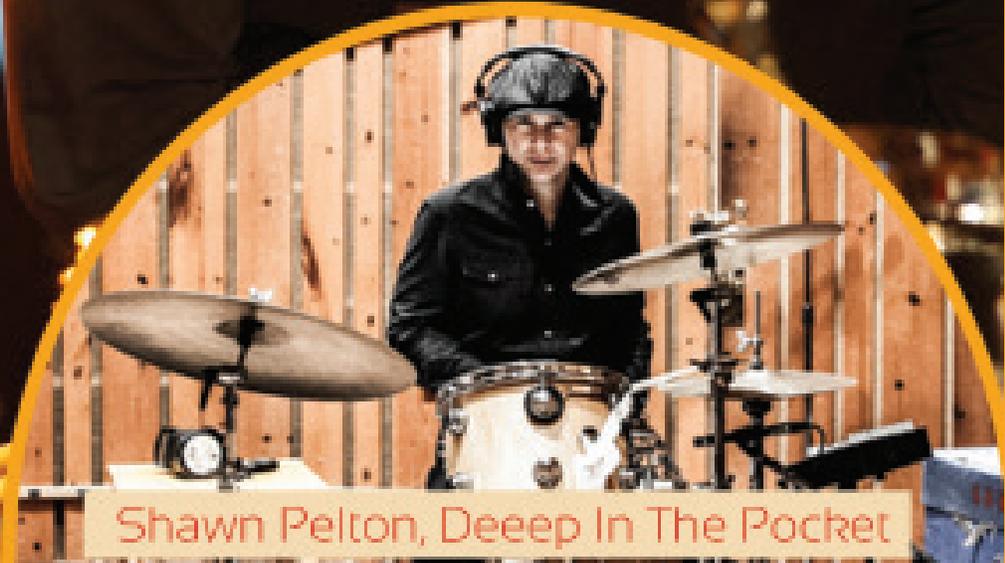
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And His Drumming
Adventures



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The Taste & Technique
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Shawn Pelton, Deep In The Pocket

Ringo's Holy Grail of Snares



Photo: Scott Robert Richie

The Rarest of Instruments and the Backbeat of Generations Ringo Starr's 1963 Oyster Black Pearl Ludwig Jazz Festival

By Gary Astridge, Ringo Starr's Beatle era equipment historian and curator.

As the historian and curator for Ringo's Beatle drum sets and gear, it's great to be able to share information that might not be known to Beatle fans. Speaking to this point, did you know that the snare drum that came with Ringo's first Ludwig drum kit landed up being his "Go To" snare during his career with the Beatles? From May of 1963, Ringo used it with all five of his Ludwig drum kits, in the studio, on tours, in film and in publicity photos. Take a close look at relative photographs, movies or videos of the Beatles and you will always see him using his '63 Jazz Festival model snare drum. Think about the long list of songs that this iconic snare was used on and the number of amazing sounds he managed to create with it. Priceless! Another interesting point of fact is that finding one just like Ringo's is virtually impossible.

To connect the dots regarding what makes a Ringo spec snare drum so rare and unique, let's step back in time to when he joined the Beatles in August of 1962. Ringo played a 1960 Mahogany Duroplastic Premier kit with a 4"x14" Royal Ace snare drum. That kit was replaced on May 12, 1963 with a Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl (OBP) Downbeat drum kit. Interestingly, the Downbeat model kit traditionally came with a 4"x14" Downbeat model snare and Ringo opted for a Jazz Festival instead. Ironically, his new snare had an odd sized drum shell that did not match what was listed in Ludwig's catalog and for decades, drum enthusiasts that sensed something was amiss, would debate their opinions without ever knowing the truth about its actual size.

April 18, 1963 is the stamp date inside of his Jazz Festival, which means it was 25 days from the time the drum shell was made to the time the snare drum was delivered to Ringo. That's a very short period of time when you consider we are talking 1963 and that the drum had to be built, packaged and shipped from Chicago to London to Birmingham, England into Ringo's hands. The short timeline indicates that this drum may have been a special order and shipped by air. Unfortunately, there are no records to verify this and the answer has been lost to time.

Let's now move ahead 50 years to June 7, 2013. That's when I had my first opportunity to see Ringo's snare drum firsthand. I was

with Jeff Chonis, Ringo's drum tech, and Ali Stuebner, the Grammy Museum's curator, inside the Clive Davis Theatre on the second level of the Grammy Museum in LA. Everything on that floor was in lockdown as workers prepared the room for the upcoming Ringo: Peace & Love exhibit.

Inside the theater were five large wooden crates containing Ringo's Sullivan and maple kits along with his Ludwig gold plated Super Sensitive snare drum. As Jeff and I carefully removed the contents, it was quite an experience to see the original drums for the first time and when Jeff unpacked the Jazz Festival, it was a 'Did The World Just Stop?' moment. I said "We have to see if the shell is five or five and a half inches deep!" Jeff said "What do you think?", to which I replied "Five and a half!" He did a quick measurement from top head to bottom head, chuckled and said "You are correct, it is five and a half inches." Finally, an answer to the

years of dispute and speculation. I have since had plenty of time to thoroughly document this important piece of Rock n' Roll history.

Here are the specifications as the snare drum is today:

- Pre-serial Keystone badge
 - Stamp date: April 18, 1963 (Black ink)
 - 5.5" x 14" shell (mahogany/popular/mahogany) with reinforcement rings and a white painted interior
 - Oyster Black Pearl wrap with minimal fading, no yellowing and a cigarette burn located on the second panel to the right of the throw-off. Wrap also has tape residue and small pieces of tape including grey duct tape. Left untouched as per Ringo's request.
 - Chrome over brass (COB) hoops
 - P-83 strainer with a slightly forward bent lever
 - 18 strand snare wires which to be original
 - Original 1963 snare side head
 - Calfskin batter head
- Since February 1964, an incalculable



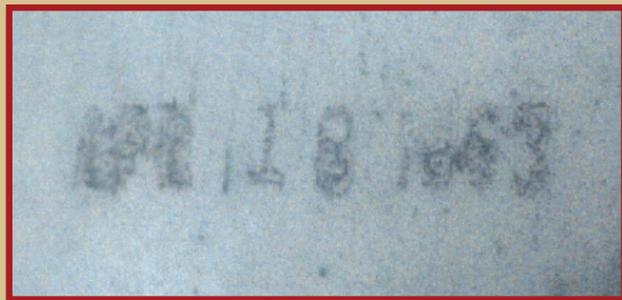
Historian Gary Astridge holding Ringo's snare, while Jeff Chonis, Ringo's long time drum tech holds Gary's rare exact duplicate.

lable number of drummers have bought or pieced together a 60's OBP Ringo kit and many would agree in knowing the difficulty to find and sometimes the affordability to purchase a 60's OBP Jazz Festival. For the extremely anal collectors in search of a 1963 Ringo spec snare, the odds of finding one are slim to none and if a collector was lucky enough to find one, they would hope that the owner would be unaware of its rarity and value. In my years as a collecting and researching in this field, I am aware of only five, including Ringo's. Now that these details are published, let's hope that a few others surface.

There are reasons why this drum is so scarce and that involves a history lesson of sorts. Before the Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan show, the Ludwig Drum Company's production schedule was based on eight hour days, five days a week. After the Beatles appearance, production steadily increased to three eight hour shifts,

seven days a week.

In part, when you reference an early 60's Ludwig catalog, here is how a Jazz Festival snare drum is described: Instant crisp response and undistorted snare action are provided in this popular 5"x14" model featuring Ludwig's new ACOUSTI-PERFECT shell design. Inside of shell is finished with Ludwig's exclusive RESA-COTE for greater resonance and tonal body. Popular P-83 throw-off offers instant trouble free snare control. Supplied with 8 gleaming self-aligning tension casings, the original triple-flanged hoops and matched THIN heads. No. 908L - 5' x 14" Choice of Lacquer Colors... Nickel: \$65.00 / Chrome: \$71.00
No. 908P - 5' x 14" Choice of Pearl Finishes... Nickel: \$75.00 / Chrome: \$81.00



April 18, 1963 snare delivered to Ringo on May 12, 1963.

throw-off

- 2) Repositioning the bass ball bat muffler to be three panels to the left of the throw-off
- 3) Transitioning the red felt muffler to white
- 4) Using chrome over steel hoops without the larger gated snare openings

These changes and the seemingly small number of Oyster Black Pearl Jazz Festival's produced in 1963 add to what makes a Ringo spec Jazz Fest extremely rare. Unfortunately, Ludwig's early records were destroyed and there is no way of knowing how many were actually produced.

Being ever conscious of the bottom line, Ludwig used existing parts from their inventory as the transition was made. That's why you will find early '64 drums with red felt mufflers and some with chrome over brass hoops. This efficiency would also account for some 5.5"x14" shells being used to build Jazz Festivals. Ludwig simply used efficiency to complete orders.

On February 10, 1964, the day after The Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, the craze began for Ludwig drums and Oyster Black

It's important to know that Ludwig made subtle design changes to the Jazz Festival that were introduced at the beginning of 1964. They included:
1) Repositioning the Keystone badge to be two panels to the left of the P-83



A rare look at the drum's snare side with tape left in place per Ringo's instructions.



A rare shell depth of 5.5 inches

Pearl drum sets, causing the production boom.

It's interesting to note that among Ludwig's pearl finishes, Oyster Black and Oyster Blue were not actually setting the drum world on fire prior to February of 1964, adding to the reasons for a Ringo spec snare to be so uncommon. (Note: There has always been some speculation that Ludwig originally shipped slow moving product to Ivor Arbiter at Drum City in London. Drum City was the original distributor in England to carry the Ludwig brand and this was where Ringo's kit was purchased. In a recent conversation with well known, Welsh drummer, Peter James, he told me a story that verified the rumors. He was with Ivor Arbiter when the first shipment of Ludwig drums was delivered to Drum City. In a conversation as Ivor was opening and removing the new drum kits from their boxes, Ivor made mention to Peter that Ludwig was supplying oyster pearl kits and nothing in sparkle colors because they were too much in demand in the US.) During the sales explosion, Oyster Black Pearl kit orders varied

in the snare drum department from a Downbeat, a Pioneer, a Jazz Festival or a Supraphonic model.

For collectors, the most desirable years for an



5.5"X14" dimensions

OBP Jazz Festival are 1963 through 1965, the years of Ringo's four OBP drum kits. The Oyster Black Pearl finish was available through late 1969, at which time it took on a new look, with the nickname Bowling Ball. The reason for the change was in the manufacturing process of the oyster pearl laminates, which were deemed too hazardous to produce.

Because Oyster Black Pearl Jazz Festival own-

ers prefer to keep them, you'll normally find a feeding frenzy when one becomes available. On average, selling prices range from \$2,000 to \$10,000. If you think that's crazy, a collector has a standing offer of \$30,000 for one of the four '63 Ringo spec Jazz Festivals with a 5.5" x14" shell. Amazing!

On December 4, 2015, Ringo's 1963 Ludwig Oyster Black Pearl Downbeat model drum set (minus his Jazz Festival) sold at Julien's Auctions in Beverly Hills for \$2,110,000. It was purchased by Jim Irsay, the owner and CEO of the Indianapolis Colts of the National Football League.

A limited edition print featuring five photos, personally selected by Ringo of his favorite Jazz Festival snare drum is available at Shop.RingosBeatleKits.com. A portion of the proceeds benefits Ringo and Barbara's Lotus Foundation charity.



Ringo and Gary at the premier of the Holy Grail's limited edition and numbered prints.