

SOUNDLAB TRX

Young Turks

NOT YOUR DAD'S TURKISH CYMBALS

By David E. Libman

Until the last decade or so, I always viewed Turkish cymbals as sort of a Holy Grail of jazz cymbals for older professional players or younger jazz nerds. Times, however, are changing. Today, drummers both young and old and from every genre are incorporating Turkish cymbals into their setups, and with good reason. There's a certain expressiveness and musicality that emanates from a handmade cast plate of B20 bronze that's hard to deny. Still, modern amplified music often

requires drummers to play at a volume level and with a degree of physicality that can overwhelm the dynamic capabilities of the thinner, more delicate jazz cymbals that we used to associate with Turkish manufacturers. Here's where the TRX Young Turks cymbals enter the mix.

TRX has been around for six years or so, with its international headquarters in Studio City, California. TRX cymbals are made at already-existing Turkish cymbal manufacturing facilities that also make cymbals for other brands. TRX differentiates itself by developing specific, unique designs with specifications geared toward younger and/or modern players. As a consumer, this means you get a cymbal made by someone who already knows what he or she is doing, but with a sound that, at least in theory, has a more modern sensibility.

The TRX set I received consisted of a smattering of new cymbals TRX has released over the last year: (1) from the ICON series, an 11" splash, a 12" China, a 16" Stacker crash, and a 22" heavy ride; and (2) from the other series, 15" BRT/DRK hi-hats, a 19" LTD China, a 21" MDM crash/ride, and a 22" BRT crash/ride. Although not necessarily designed to go together, I tested these cymbals as a set and found that they blended together exceptionally well — both sonically and visually.

Old Soul With A New Face

All the TRX cymbal series I re-

ceived are cast from B20 bronze (80 percent copper/20 percent tin) and completely handmade. From there, manufacturing techniques differ slightly. The ICONS and the MDM crash/ride utilize traditional lathing on top and bottom. The ICONS have a brilliant finish that comes from buffing (no lacquers or other finishes), whereas the MDM has a non-brilliant (i.e., classic, or less shiny) surface. TRX perforates the 16" ICON crash with six large holes for air venting, each approximately 2" in diameter. The surface area of the 19" LTD China receives micro-lathing top and bottom with a raw (unlathed) bell, brilliant edges (from where the cymbal inverts), and a remaining non-brilliant/classic surface area.

The BRT 22" crash/ride has an unlathed top and bottom with myriad scattered hammer marks and one of the most gorgeous brilliant finishes I've seen on a cymbal. The 15" BRT hi-hat top has the same gorgeous brilliant finish. The 15" DRK hi-hat bottom has an earthy, non-brilliant look that comes from virtually no lathing — except for a series of approximately eight spaced lathed stripes near the cymbal's edge.

All of the TRXs I received have expertly applied black logos with eye-catching, modern bold fonts. The all-caps large "ICON" black logos that adorn the cymbal playing surfaces have some purposefully missing paint on some of the letters — giving them an already-worn jeans look that says, "I may

be young, but I'm not inexperienced." The BRT, MDM, and LTD logos — also in all-caps, in what appears to be a bold Times New Roman font — are a nod to the acronym obsession that seems to pervade everything modern. (Does anyone remember when KFC actually used to be called Kentucky Fried Chicken?)

The only aesthetic remnant of old foggy Turkish cymbals that the TRXs retain is their black stamped size indicators. For example, the underside of the 22" ICON heavy ride has a not-very-stylish bold black stamp that says, "22" 55 cm." I've come to expect these stamps on most Turkish handmade cymbals, but I've rarely seen this sort of size indicator on a Western or Euro-style major-label brand. Those brands use cool fonts and paint applications for size indicators. TRX should do the same (or otherwise, include no size indications at all). Aside from that small nit, I found all the TRX cymbals to be visually impressive and professional on every level.

Roar Of The Young Turks

The ICON 11" splash, 12" China, and 16" Stacker crash can obviously be played separately, but they are also designed to stack atop one another. I stacked them, at least initially. As expected, as a stack, these three cymbals produce the sort of shrill, short, glass-shattering sound that everyone seems to love from stacked cymbals — except for me. Honestly, I think the stacked cymbal concept is an acquired taste that

DETAILS

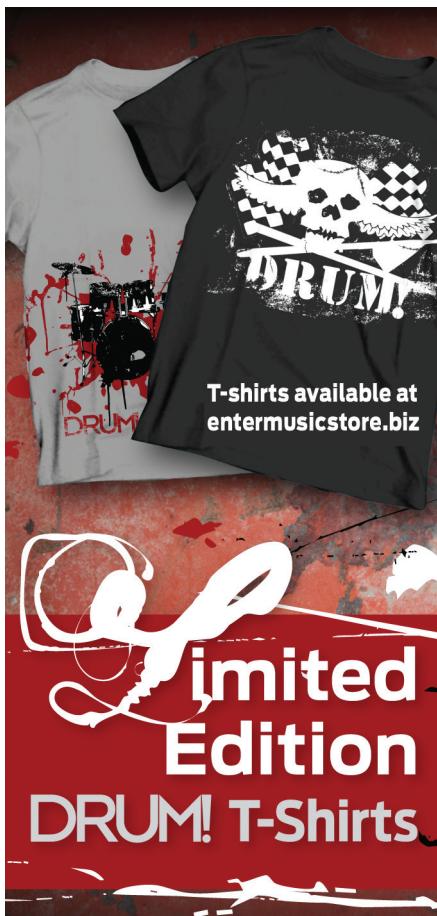
MODELS/SIZES	LIST PRICE
11" ICON Splash.....	\$240
12" ICON China.....	\$300
15" BRT/DRK Hi Hats.....	\$575
16" ICON Stacker Crash.....	\$375
19" LTD China.....	\$450
21" MDM Crash/ride.....	\$500
22" BRT Crash/ride.....	\$525
22" ICON Heavy Ride.....	\$700

FEATURES Cast B20 bronze cymbals handmade in Turkey to specifications designed for younger/more modern applications. ICONs and MDMs are lathed on top and bottom, but ICONs have a brilliant finish whereas MDMs do not. LTDs have micro-lathed tops and bottoms with raw bells, brilliant edges and non-brilliant other surfaces. BRTs have unlathed tops and bottoms with brilliant finishes.



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has yet to catch my fancy. It's not that cymbals sound bad stacked, it's just that they usually sound better by themselves.

On its own, the 11" splash explodes instantly with mostly highs, enough supporting undertone to keep the splash sounding full, and a lovely overall pitch that makes this cymbal exceptional. The 12" China has the same quickness and explosiveness, but instead of a splash sound, it barks with an endearing pitchy, quirky *kang*. This 12" China also has surprising expressiveness for its small size. The 16" crash is relatively thin, which, in combination with its six perforated holes, gives it a trashy, almost instantaneous burst of white noise. The 16" model is a one-note cymbal in the sense that you can't ride it or get much from it other than the crash sound.

The 15" BRT top/DRK bottom hi-hats accomplish a well-matched blending of two TRX lines. The BRT top, with its brilliant finish and lack of lathing, allows these hats to produce crystal-like stick definition. The foot *chick* from these hats is crisp and pleasant, although I did have some problems with air pockets unless I got the angle just right. Wide-open splash and half-open spizzy sounds from these hats are stellar, making this a versatile hi-hat pair that sounds both modern and nuanced.

The 19" LTD China does everything you want from a China cymbal of this size without being overly abrasive or harsh. It has lots of low-end roar, a hint of trashiness, and a nice quality hi-pitched *kang* at the top end. Beyond that, this China blends well on a dynamic level with the other TRX cymbals I tried, since it is neither too soft nor too loud.

With its medium weight, the 21" MDM crash/ride has enough heft to make it an excellent jazzy-sounding ride cymbal that retains stick articulation even at fast tempos. As a crash, this cymbal's weight requires you to whack it with some force before it fully explodes. The bell cuts through clearly and distinctly while still bringing with it the sound of the rest of the cymbal. This 21" MDM crash/ride would be better named a "ride/crash"; it works well for both applications but slightly better as a ride.

On the other hand, TRX named the 22" BRT crash/ride just right. This cymbal has an incredible, large crash sound that opens up with very little effort from the stick. Miraculously, this 22" plate still manages to produce alluring glass-like stick articulation when played as a ride at slow through medium tempos. At faster tempos, the wash from this cymbal starts to overwhelm stick definition. Overall, this 22" crash/ride has a versatility that allows it to cross the line between musical styles in a surprisingly agile way.

The 22" ICON heavy ride feels and plays heavy. It has what can be best described

as an aggressive and clean rock-oriented sound with a few more overtones than you might expect from your typical rock ride. When played with stick tips, this cymbal cuts through with mostly mids accompanied by a well-balanced second set of highs and lows with some shimmer (but not much). The bell is clear and open, but nothing spectacular. This ride always sounds big and sometimes borders on being indelicate, but it manages to remain musical.

At The Gig

I played the TRX Young Turks at home (a lot) and on two very different gigs. The first gig was a Vegas-style show with lots of amplification, horns, and a singer. The second gig was an intimate jazz-trio session with no amplification, an acoustic piano, and an acoustic bass in someone's living room. At my Vegas-style gig, these cymbals blended well with each other, crossed musical styles effortlessly, and were generally fun to play.

The same qualities that made me love TRXs on the Vegas-style gig made me nervous to take them to the jazz-trio session. I worried they would be too loud and generally overwhelm the room. To my pleasant surprise, this was not the case at all. In the acoustic setting, I found myself gravitating toward the 22" BRT crash/ride and 21" MDM crash/ride because of their expressiveness and their ability remain delicate. With brushes, hot rods, and even sticks, these cymbals allowed me a sensitivity that was refreshing. They have the shimmer and breathiness that I would expect from Turkish cymbals, but with a brightness and clarity that's more modern. The selling point here, for me at least, is that I could buy this set of cymbals and use them for most styles of music, regardless of whether it is old-school, new school, amplified or acoustic. □

VERDICT

TRX is but one of many companies in an already crowded field of handmade Turkish cymbal makers vying for a highly competitive market share. Yet the TRX cymbals manage to differentiate themselves from some of their competitors by offering a different take on what we generally expect from traditional Turkish handmade cymbal fare. The sound that comes from the Young Turks is bigger, louder, more modern, and brighter than many of the other Turkish cymbals currently available. Are they as nuanced as jazz cymbals? No. Are they as musical? Yes. I would definitely recommend that you give these TRX models a try — especially if you like to play loud.

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