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Leedy Strainers

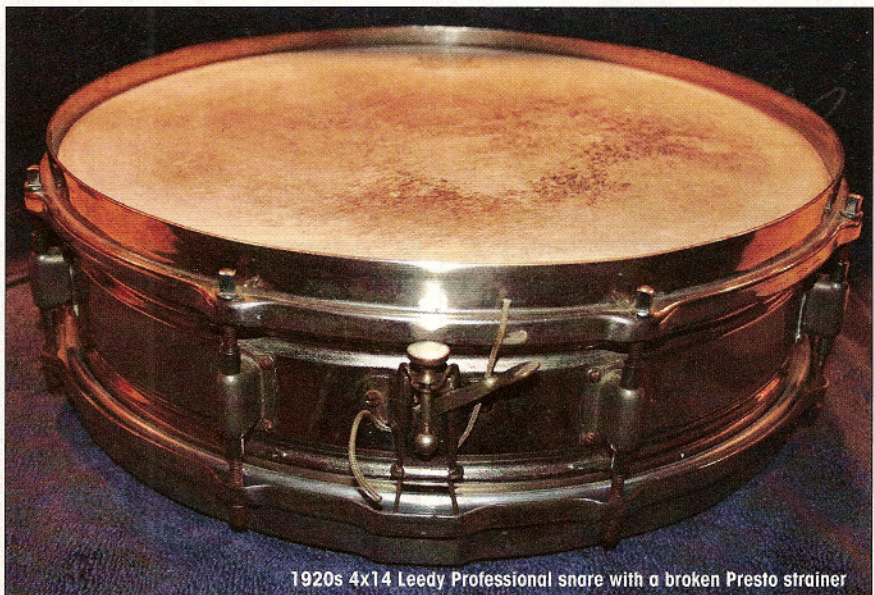
by Harry Cangany

I feel a bond with U.G. Leedy, the orchestral percussionist who began making drums in Indianapolis around 1900. I have walked the halls of his old factory, spent time with his children, gotten to know one of his supervisors, and handled hundreds of his products. His snare drums are works of art, destined to last for centuries. The solid shells are still round, the metal parts are well made, and the brass is thick and strong. But the snare strainers are a common weakness among drums that were made before the time that Conn, which bought the Leedy company in 1929, invested in new engineering.

As a result, a lot of Leedy snare drums have been forever silenced due to broken strainers. Some impatient drummers have drilled holes to mount new strainers or robbed parts or replacement units from other drums. I waited years to find a working Presto or Speedway strainer so I could reassemble a 6x14 solid mahogany Leedy Professional drum.

An Italy-based drummer named Adrian Kirchler, who was once a goldsmith, decided to make his own custom snare drums and hardware. He also does engraving, restores vintage drums, and makes reproduction strainers and T-rods. Adrian is well connected in the worlds of vintage and new drums, so when I found out about his work I wrote him to order a replica Leedy strainer. After discussing the plating options—Adrian can do brass, copper, nickel, and gold, and he can “age” the plating so that it matches the original hardware—we agreed that an aged-nickel Speedway strainer would be closest to the original.

While I waited for my order to be delivered, I found another Leedy snare; this time it was an eighty-year-old



1920s 4x14 Leedy Professional snare with a broken Presto strainer



The same drum with a Leedy Speedway replica strainer made by Adrian Kirchler

4x14 nickel-plated brass Professional. And yes, the strainer was broken. So I decided to use the new Speedway strainer on the 4x14 Leedy Professional, since it's a terrific drum that could be played in just about any situation. (The mahogany drum has more of a “vintage” sound, due to its rounded bearing edges, so it has more limited musical applications.)

Although I didn't find a mint-condition original strainer to get this drum up and running again, I'm sure Ulysses Leedy would approve of the minor “upgrade.” Because of Kirchler's exceptional work, these wonderful drums can be reborn to play another day.

For more info on Adrian Kirchler's work, visit www.ak-drums.de.

