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DRUMMER



**The Boy with the
Golden Hands:
Adrian Kirchler**

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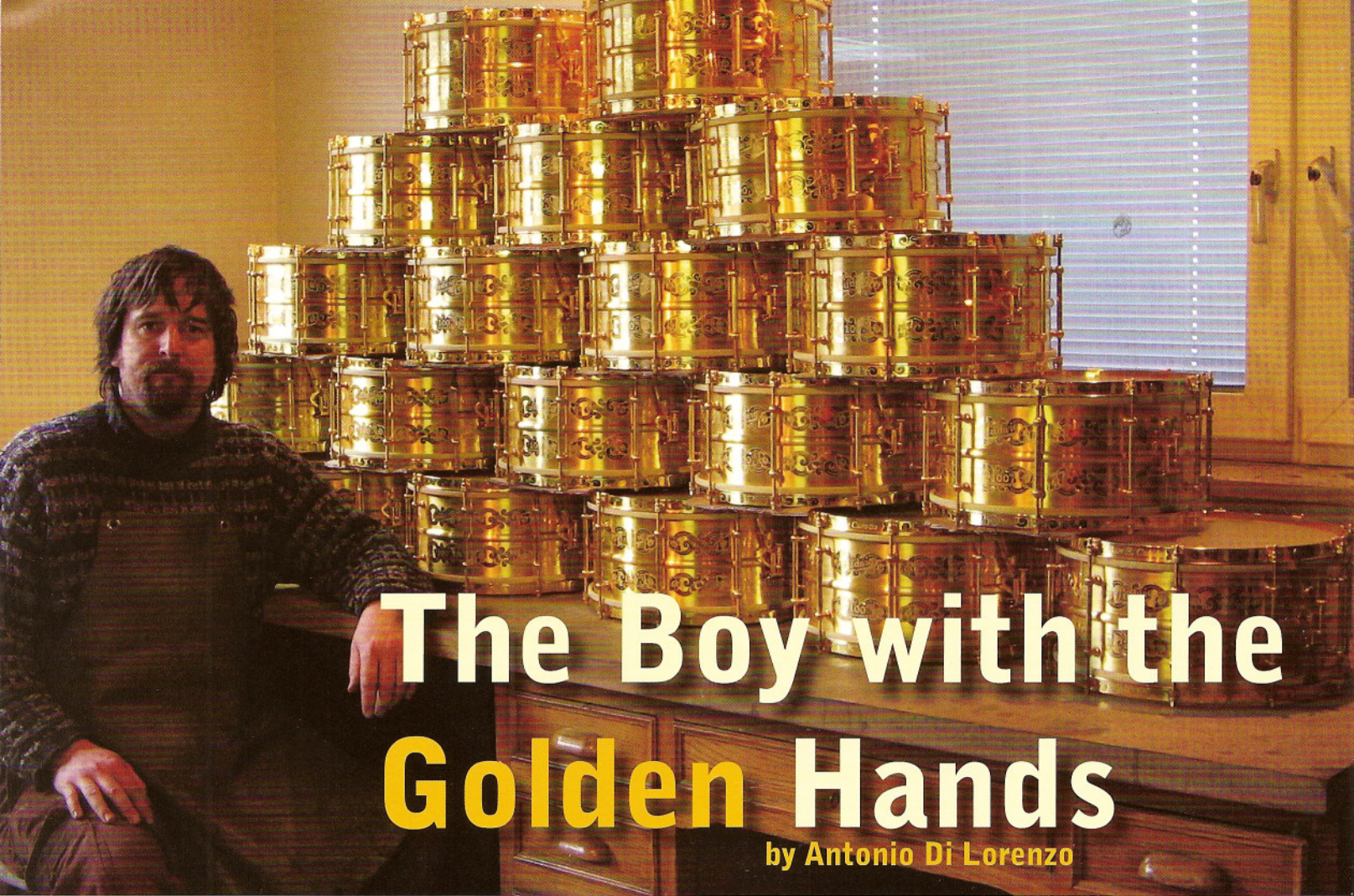
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The Boy with the Golden Hands

by Antonio Di Lorenzo

Interview with Adrian Kirchler

Adrian Kirchler is just a young man, born and living in Italy since 1974, but he has already built a reputation for himself as one of the best drum makers and drum engravers in the world. When he speaks you can really feel the LOVE for his job, and how he is so focused on every little detail and nuance in a single drum: the sound, the hardware, the finish. Adrian lives up in the Alps in a very small village called Valdaora/Olang, close to Bolzano/Bozen. In this region of Italy they speak both Italian and German - that's why some people think he is German, but he isn't! I still wonder how such a new Stradivari of drums, alongside with such great cooperation projects with Craviotto and Ludwig Drum Co., can be born in a place like that!

So Adrian let's start with the questions: I have tons!

NSMD- When did you start building drums and why?

AK - I started my first experiments in snare drum building about ten years ago. I was playing and collecting a little bit. The snares from the '20s to the '40s were attracting me ever since I played. The most fascinating drums to me were the Ludwig Deluxe Models (generally called the Black Beauty). BUT a real example was far too expensive for me, so I decided to try building a similar looking snare drum on my own. After five years, many prototypes and many ... troubles!... I was ready. Here they were - my first snare drums ready to be presented to the public.

I exhibited them at the Amsterdam Drum Show in 2004 and everything took its course from there!

- I suppose you are a really good drummer but when you started building drums did you already have that sound in your ears? I mean the sound of the old snares. Or did you build "normal" snare drums at the beginning of your career?

A good drummer? It's too much for me (laugh)! Due to my job, I didn't have much time to play during the last few years. Anyway, I know exactly what kind of sound I wanted. I really like playing old drum sets: BIG bass and snare drum with calf heads, a low boy sock cymbal, a few cymbals and a Chinese tom.... that's all. A typical set from the 1920s. This kind of drum set has a different sound that's really refreshing and I like it to tease all the different sounds out of such a small compilation of percussion instruments. I play mostly acoustic blues, ideal for bringing in all my visions of a "different" drum sound. My drums are made the traditional way, but they are definitely

modern instruments. You can hear snare drums with my shells NOW live or on recordings of the Killers, Green Day, Neil Young, Brad Paisley, Keith Urban, Tori Amos and others ... many Symphonic Orchestras use my instruments.

-You're building a lot of replacement parts for old drums: strainers, butt plates, clips, lugs and so on. Your Ludwig Professional strainer "the Timepiece" is amazing! How and why did you develop this, and is this also an important side of your job?

Many times when I receive a drum for restoration, parts are missing. In most of the cases it's not so easy to find original replacements for these old drums, since they are 80+ years old and out of production. So I started to amass an archive of photos, measurements and designs of different old Ludwig, Slingerland and Leedy drum parts. Now, if something is missing, in most of the cases I'm able to reproduce the part. Many times this is the only chance to complete a restoration project.

-What's your "philosophy" about restoring drums? Do you keep them original or do you add or replace the missing parts and all the parts that are not perfectly functional?

If I receive a snare in good condition I do only what it requires to be in working order again. Additionally, I do everything to preserve it for the future. If someone sends me a Ludwig Deluxe with the black nickel finish in good condition I only remove the old lacquer, clean all the engraving, and I put only a new coat of clear lacquer. This way the drum is protected for the next few decades. I always try to

do the least possible. But many times the snares are in really bad condition: the original finish has been buffed down, extra holes in the shell, many parts are missing and so on. In these cases my goal is to bring the instrument back to functionality and aesthetic appearance, but it should still show its "age". I'm able to re-plate a shell in black nickel without touching or having to redo the original engraving. This is a very important fact for my customers. Then, if they want, I can also add the replacement parts. In my opinion there is no reason to restore an old drum to a "like new" condition. Only when building a complete replica snare drum does this make sense to me.

-You have the opportunity to restore snares for great collectors. Do they tell you what they want or do they give you "carte blanche" for the restoration?

My customers really trust in me and my skills so I always have "carte blanche"; and I'm really proud of it.



-You have a list of collaborations with big international companies like Ludwig and Craviotto: did they give you exact specifications or were you free to experiment with sound and other features?

The foundation for the Craviotto/AK collaboration was laid at the Amsterdam Drum Show (NL) in 2004. A gentleman from the USA approached me and he bought one of my snare drums. His name was Johnny Craviotto but I didn't know who he was then! (laugh). I only realized who he was after I got back home, after doing some research. Approximately one year later he called

me and he told me that he wanted to launch a snare drum series with my shells, but on condition that the shell should be absolutely identical to the one he bought at the Amsterdam Show. It was the birth of the NOB "Craviotto Diamond Series". That way "Uncle Johnny" opened the door for me to the international drum scene. He had never hidden that I was making the shells in Italy and, due to the enormous success of the NOB "Diamond Series", that was invaluable publicity for AK Drums.

About the new Copper snares: we have discussed doing a copper shelled drum and Johnny asked me to create a prototype. I made one, showed it to him and he liked it immediately! So Craviotto Drum Co. introduced the new "Copper Diamond" series at the NAMM Show 2009.

At the same show, Ludwig Drum Co. launched another collaboration project with AK drums: the "Gold

Triumphal” model, that is part of the “Snare Drums of a Century Collection” for the Ludwig 100th Anniversary.

-I must confess that I'm really impressed that you are making the Gold Triumphal snare drums! How did Ludwig Drum Co. come to know your work and your ability as engraver?

A friend of mine, Jürgen Wiehler, introduced me to Todd Trent at the Frankfurt Musikmesse convention in 2007. At that time Todd was still artist relations manager for Ludwig Drum Co. and he had already heard about my work. During a short conversation he said that at Ludwig they were thinking about making something similar to the old “Triumphal Model” for the celebration of the 100th anniversary in 2009. I had already made some gold plated and engraved drums. So, one year later and having received the OK from Ludwig, I made a prototype and brought it to Frankfurt at the time of Musikmesse 2008. A meeting had been arranged and I showed it to the Ludwig Staff. (you can see photos of this meeting on www.goldtriumphal.com) A few months later, Kevin Packard, director of marketing, combo percussion for Ludwig, officially ordered the first snare drum (# 1909) for the official launch at the NAMM Show 2009.

-Do you think this is the peak of your career?

For me it's a more than excellent starting point. I can't really imagine a better publicity for my work! Due to the projects with Craviotto and Ludwig I got

a lot of new orders for AK snares and drum sets.

-About the engraving, how did you start? How important is the aesthetic aspect in your drum building?

I was a professional goldsmith and that's the reason why I already knew a lot of working techniques that are very useful to my drum building and restoration: engraving, galvanization, bending and cutting metal, etc. I have learned the real traditional way of drum engraving by studying the engraved snares that people sent me for restoration. Additionally, I have always collected photos of engraved snare drums from friends, collectors, and eBay. In the meantime



I have huge photos and engraving patterns archives that are very helpful. The beauty of an instrument is a very subjective matter. It's up to the customers if they like an ornate engraving or not. In the end it's just an aesthetic fact that is appreciated by a very small group of drummers. Most of them are collectors

and vintage drum connoisseurs....but the sound is not in the engraving! (laugh)

- Are you also building drum sets? What kind of sound are you trying to achieve? Do you have any inspiration or reference point?

Yes, the last one I made was for Matt Chamberlain. I always use copper as shell material because I'm trying to create drum sets that are not so... loud, high, crisp and metallic as someone might expect a metal shell to be! Copper is the ideal metal for this intent. My target is to achieve a warm and round sound for all kinds of acoustic music from Jazz to Classics.

-On your website it says that you are so busy that you can't accept new orders until the end of 2009? Are you planning to expand your workshop or to employ more workers?

I'm almost fully booked until the summer of 2010 now!!... but I want to stay alone. It's important to me and to my customers; we all are trusting in my hands only. ☺

-Can you tell me something about your current snare drum production?

I produce three main models: the Standard Model (all around snare), the Black Beauty Model (engraved, vintage style with single flanged hoop) and the Orchestral Model (German Style for Symphonic Orchestra). The shells are basically all the same. What really changes is the hardware depending on the music that will be played. Single flanged hoops are not made for hard backbeats with rim shots and some strainers are not made for..... heavy metal! (laugh). I also put on different heads, natural or plastic, and snare wires; gut, wire-wound, traditional snappy snares - depending on the needs.

- I know that you are making replicas of the famous two piece brass shell, the shell that you can find on the Ludwig & Ludwig snares of the 1920s!

Yes! Many people have tried to do that, without succeeding. I've been working on it for quite some time, and now it's ready: it's nothing new, but it was a real challenge for me! Now it's up to my customers if it's appreciated or not. Sonically speaking I find the two piece shell having more middle frequencies than the one piece shell. Anyway, I will send you one for reviewing very soon!

- You received a lot of compliments from many drummers...

... but I think the best compliment to me is when I hear one of my snare drums being played live or on recordings. One of the most important compliments I got is a very subtle one: Matt Chamberlain, as soon as he received the copper kit, he recorded the set and put a sound file on Internet! Would he have done it if he didn't really like his new drums ??! (laugh).

- Is it true that the old "seamless shell" aren't really seamless? I've read this observation on your web sites.

All the Ludwig, Leedy and Slingerland snares, just talking about drums from between 1920 to 1940, that I restored had a vertical joint; even the famous Ludwig & Ludwig two piece shells. If you take a look at page 131 in The Ludwig Book by Rob Cook you can find an article by John Aldridge explaining the construction method of the old Ludwig & Ludwig two piece shells - rolled & spun shell halves with vertical seams, joined at the center bead. But many collectors still call these shells "seamless"! Maybe they try to add some value to these snares or whatever, however, the only early "seamless spun" shelled snare drums I know are German made by the "Dresdner Apparatebau" Co., a well renowned company in the Classical field for their Tympani and for Orchestral snare drums (circa 1935)!

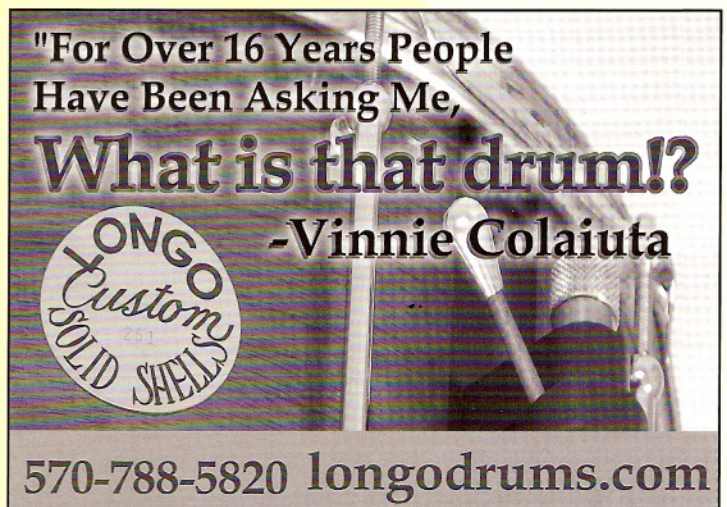
- What are your projects for the future?

...building drums with metal shells... Forever! (laugh).

-Thank you very much Adrian!

Thanks to you Antonio! And my compliments to NSMD! 🍷

Antonio Di Lorenzo is a professional drummer and the Italian distributor for NSMD. Dilorenzo.drum@tin.it



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-Vinnie Colaiuta

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