

CYMBAL TALK



With Zildjian's

LENNY DIMUZIO

by Cheech Iero

Some of the world's finest drummers depend on Lennie DiMuzio. Pictured at left with DiMuzio are: (clockwise) Danny Seraphine, Ed Shaughnessy, Buddy Rich, Harvey Mason, Billy Cobham, Gene Krupa and Max Roach.

As Manager of Sales and Selection for the Zildjian cymbal company, DiMuzio advises and selects cymbals for Zildjian's prestigious clientele. According to Louie Bellson, "Lenny DiMuzio is the only guy besides me who knows the individual sound I'm after."

DiMuzio is a professional drummer, beginning his career at age 12 and later studying at the New England Conservatory and the Berklee School of Music. For the past eighteen years, DiMuzio has been affiliated with the Zildjian company, working closely with Armand and Robert Zildjian.

CI: What is the difference between the K and A Zildjian cymbal?

LD: The K Zildjian cymbals were manufactured in Istanbul until recently. They will now be produced at the Zildjian Canadian factory in Meductic. The factory has been in operation for 10 years, manufacturing and distributing the Avedis Zildjian line (Azco Ltd.) to the European and Canadian market exclusively. We do not sell K Zildjian cymbals from the Norwell factory. Gretsch manufacturers will naturally be involved with the distribution of the K line in the United States due to their long association with the product.

The methods of fabrication used result in the difference in sound. The K cymbals are totally hand-crafted, whereas machinery is also used to make the A line. The use of machinery facilitates bigger production and a wider selection of cymbals. In the Canadian factory they probably have different cup sizes. K Zildjian cymbals do not have a variety of sounds because much of the sound relies on the cup of the cymbal. There isn't a variety of weights.

A small group of workers migrated from Istanbul last year and will work exclusively on the K line in Canada.

CI: The variety of sounds you get from K Zildjian cymbals is not due to the type of metal used, but depends on fabrication?

LD: Yes. The alloy is the same, it's just in the fabrication. When the company first started, all the cymbals came from Istanbul. Mr. (Avedis) Zildjian went to Istanbul to learn the Zildjian cymbal making process. Avedis Zildjian was one of the only descendants left in line for the inheritance of the secret Zildjian process. Mr. Zildjian set up the Avedis Zildjian Cymbal Company here but the Zildjian factory in Istanbul continued making the K. He naturally called his the A.

CI: Is there only one person now that knows the "secret formula?"

LD: No, there would be Avedis Zildjian Sr. and his two sons, Robert and Armand. Probably their sons might know.

CI: Could you compare this secret prescription to the mysterious make-up of Coca-Cola for example?

LD: It is very similar to the secret of Coca-Cola; something that is memorized. If you were to document it and patent it you would have to expose it. Anyone could make a cymbal but they certainly would not be able to devise the secret.

CI: Is the secret in percentage of alloys or in the process of hammering?

LD: Anyone can figure out how to make it. There are other cymbals on the market and they can shape them, make the cups, and get a fairly decent sound. But, I believe it's in the combination of alloys for example, with the combination of metals that we are using. The metal should be breaking. Metallurgists tell us that we are violating the code of physics with those alloys. The cymbal should not be so durable. Bell metal will break, but because of the strength of the metal and the way it's mixed, the end result is durability, plus sound. Of course, the sound is enhanced by making the cymbal correctly. Before the cymbal is made, that sound is in the casting. There is a combination of metals that are melted and blended together; so there is a secret, no doubt about it. With today's modern technology you think someone would be able to duplicate it, but everyone else who decided to make cymbals made them another way, and would not use the basic alloys like that. They would start with sheet metal, or pour the metals in a different sequence. That is why you were not allowed to enter the room where the process is completed. That's never been opened to anybody. I don't even know what goes on in there and I've been here 18 years.

CI: There must be some workers behind that door.

LD: One elderly man has been with Mr. Zildjian for forty years. An old dedicated Swedish man and that is it. He may know something about it.

CI: Has any espionage ever surfaced due to this mysterious formula?

LD: I don't think you could actually pin-point the secret. Even if you could see the process, you wouldn't understand it. I think more than one thing is done. I don't believe that anyone over the years that knew anything about it could document it. That is why no one has actually tried to make a cymbal like that. Take for example, the Paiste Cymbal Company. They make their cymbals entirely different than the way we do. Their cymbals don't sound all that bad, though they lack the volume, projection, and cutting-power of Zildjian cymbals. There is something natural about the Zildjian cymbal sound. I guess you can tell I'm a true salesman all the way. The question has been asked plenty of times, "there really is a secret?" The metal stands up where a lot of other cymbals break. All Zildjians have that quality throughout the process and the individuality of sound changes. Even if there is something wrong in the process, the cymbal doesn't really get bad, the sound just changes. All the cymbals are good, they all have their own unique sound. You're talking about cymbals that go back to 1623 when this process originated and was discovered.

CI: By diminishing the bell of the cymbal, I notice that the overtones decrease and you get much more stick clarity. Do the overtones originate from the bell of the cymbal?

LD: Yes. The "rule of thumb" is that the bell of a cymbal projects the amount of ringing qualities the cymbal will give off. A cymbal with a big cup will give a lot of ring. As you shrink the cup size, you take away the overtones. When you eliminate the cup altogether, you have the least amount of overtones. The ride cymbals sequence includes the *Mini Ping* ride, *Medium* ride, *Medium Ping Crash* ride and the *Rock 21* with the big cup. Cup size determines the amount of tightness in a cymbal or its ringing qualities. The curvature of the cymbal (called the bow area or the taper) determines the pitch. The higher the taper, the higher the pitch: the lower the taper, the lower the pitch.

Another relative factor is weight. You have to have weight in a cymbal to get ping qualities. The weight and thickness of the metal is what gives the rebound. Thin cymbals sound higher pitched but they are lower. You see, it's contrary to what you hear. The high pitched cymbal comes from the heavy ones. Heavier metal produces more stick sound and ping qualities. It's confusing to most drummers. They want a high pitched cymbal so they buy a thin one. No way can you get a high pitched cymbal in a thin cymbal unless you bow it like a balloon. Then, because it's so bowed you might get a tinkle or high pitched ping quality. The response of a cymbal and amount of volume is all contingent upon the size. Be careful of the size of a cymbal based upon the size band that you work with because you could over work a cymbal. For example, buying 16 inches to push a 10 piece band won't work because you don't have enough body in the cymbal to project.

CI: What is the process used to make cymbals brilliant?

LD: Just a buffing process. We use high tolerance buffing machines which are water cooled and done by an expert. You don't want to apply heat unless you know exactly what you are doing.

CI: After cymbals are made brilliant will they wear and tarnish?
LD: They will stay cleaner and brighter a lot longer than the

regular Zildjian but you still have to clean them periodically. That sheen will last indefinitely.


CI: Tarnished cymbals seem to lose their brilliance and resonance. The sound is held back by the dirt and built up tarnish in the tone grooves.

LD: We were skeptical about putting a cleaner on the market up until four years ago when we introduced our particular cleaner. Since we put our cleaner on the market other things have come along that also work well. Naturally you take a formula and make it better! There are things that are good but our stuff really cleans the cymbal. It doesn't polish — it cleans. I think we should investigate some advanced methods of cleaning cymbals. It would be nice to have a method of cleaning cymbals without all the rubbing that is necessary. It is hard work. Maybe that's why some drummers leave their cymbals dirty. I've heard of so many things over the years used for cleaning cymbals. Did you ever hear of using a salt solution? Take a half glass of salt and pour in concentrated lemon juice. Mix them until you get a thick paste. Then apply it to the cymbal and use a little elbow grease. It cleans! My theory is you can only get so much out of a cymbal, the rest is in the hands.

CI: How many cymbal testers do you have?

LD: Seven professionals altogether. Six and myself. About forty-five employees altogether.

CI: For how long are the finished cymbals aged?

LD: Finished cymbals are aged for one month to stabilize the sound. Like a fine wine fermenting! Cymbals change in color while heating from black to rust and finally after the outer crust of metal is taken off they take on a natural color. It's activated at this point. The unfinished cymbal would only be used by a few drummers who are seeking that concentrated sound. We are looking into that. We want to meet the needs of all the drummers. We are working out four or five new things: testing and researching. By the end of the year possibly two or three new products will be on the market. Percussion is growing so fast. Drummers are into everything. 



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