

Vintage Drum Catalogs

by Andy Youell

Vintage drums are great; designs evocative of an era gone by and sounds that modern drums just don't seem to match. But drums are big, bulky things and those living close to drummers might not always appreciate the nuances of that vintage drum sound. Many drummers supplement their collection of vintage drums with an assortment of catalogs, adverts and other paraphernalia. These provide both a reference source for the specification of drums and hardware and an insight into how drums were marketed and what target audience the manufacturers were trying to reach.

The market for catalogs and other collectables tends to follow the market for the drums themselves and some collectors have started to produce CDs of old catalog scans; Clay Greene (www.ludwigdrummer.com) and Alan Buckley both offer extensive catalog collections on CD and these provide a wealth of detail about options and changes over the years. Many original catalogs and adverts are offered on eBay in addition to those sold by vintage drum dealers throughout the world.

Catalogs and adverts sometimes provide an interesting glimpse into the stories behind the drums. For example, there appears to have been some confusion at Ludwig about the name of the new acrylic drums back in 1973. The "Ones to see for '73" Ludwig advert (December 1972) showed a Vistalite kit with the label "new clear plastic drum outfit". The first Vistalite advert carried the title "New Ludwig Clear VISTALITE drum outfits" but invited readers to write in for a "...brochure on Stratosphere drum outfits"; this line was changed to "...brochure on VISTALITE drum outfits" in later adverts.

Vistalites are one of those quintessentially 70's things - a bit like flared trousers and disco music. Vistalites were up to date and the Ludwig promotional material reflected this in the choice of layout, colors and font. The launch of the multi-colored "Rainbow Vistalites" in 1975 was accompanied by

adverts and catalogs with great splashes of color and the tag-lines "Stripe up the band" and "Stripes are in". The marketing campaign was driven by Frank Baxpehler (Vice-president, Merchandising at Ludwig) and included such artistic devices as striped shirts, beach towels and sails to emphasize the striped patterns available. The USA held its bicentennial celebrations the following year, presenting Ludwig with the opportunity to continue the (Stars and) "Stripes are in" campaign with clever juxtapositions of drum kits and flags.



At the other end of the corporate spectrum, Asba produced very simple yet elegant catalogs and brochures for their products. In keeping with the distinctly homely feel of the small French company, a number of the Asba catalog photos appear to have been taken in a back garden, somewhere in the Parisian suburbs. Like many catalogs of the era, the 1960s Asba material included female models to add an air of glamour and sophistication to the material. The 1965 Premier catalog elevated gratuitous use of the female model in a drum catalog to an art-form while Trixon tried a subtle combination of pretty ladies in dresses and puppies in their 1964

offering. They would never get away with that now.

Famous drummers play a prominent part in the marketing of drum kits and there have been a variety of approaches to the promotion of endorsees in catalogs and adverts over the years. Gene Krupa's relationship with the Slingerland drum company is displayed on the cover of a number of Slingerland catalogs and the endorsement career of Buddy Rich put him on the front of WFL and Rogers catalogs. With the explosion of pop in the 1960s,



artist endorsements became a big part of the business and catalogs became crammed with more and more drummers who had signed on the dotted line. Where they were used in catalogs, the endorsements moved from the front cover to the back pages. Hayman took this practice to its logical conclusion in 1971 with a 32-page catalog, the last 22 of which contained photos and kit details for their roster of endorsees.

Not all companies followed this pattern. Scan through the 1975 and 1980 Ludwig catalogs and you will find pictures of the Ludwig family members, the sales and administration staff; Ludwig endorsees like John Bonham and Buddy Rich did not make it into those hallowed pages. Ludwig did however produce an issue of *Ludwig Drummer* in 1976 that contained the signatures of all 500 company staff and family members.

Sonor is another company with a strong family heritage and various members of the Link family appear in Sonor catalogs in the 1970s. The company has a reputation for engineering excellence and a scan through their 1979 catalog shows that this reputation has been carefully promoted by the company. Cut-away diagrams of shell and hardware assemblies appear alongside pictures of drums being "tuned by an electronic tuner". Other catalogs from that era show Premier kits outside art-deco buildings and Fibes drums relaxing on a sandy beach.

The importance of promotional material grew in the 1970s and drum companies were spending increasing amounts of money on large, glossy colorful catalogs. The growth of the Japanese manufacturers in the 1970s was based on recreating the attributes of the major American companies and this approach can be clearly seen in their catalogs. The 1975 Pearl catalog bears more than a passing resemblance to the Ludwig 75 with similar colors and layout and identical kit configurations. The Ludwig idea of the "Octaplug" (eight concert toms from 6" to 16") turns up in the Pearl catalog as the Samurai-inspired "Eight Brothers". The following page features a Rogers-inspired champagne sparkle "Dyna-max" kit. Being Japanese, the Pearl catalog is half the size of the American equivalent.

Thanks to Tam Rankin and Robert Pfaff for supplying examples from Premier and Trixon catalogs respectively.

Vintage catalogs and adverts are widely available on the various web sites devoted to vintage drums. The following links will take you to a wealth of catalogs and material covering a variety of collectable drums:

- www.asbadrums.com (Asba)
- vintprem.moonfruit.com (Premier)
- www.rogersdrums.com (Rogers)
- www.sonormuseum.com (Sonor)
- www.trixondrums.de (Trixon)
- www.vistalites.com (Vistalites)

