

Meinl

Byzance Series Jazz Cymbals

From £253 | Meinl's new Byzance Jazz cymbals hit the spot regardless of drumming style, as **Adam Jones** discovers

ESSENTIALS



PRICES

Meinl Byzance Jazz cymbals	
14" Hi-hats	£295
18" Crashes	£253
20" Rides	£317
22" Rides	£430

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The latest addition to Meinl's acclaimed and highly individual Byzance range is this batch of Byzance Jazz models. The Byzance range represents Meinl's attempt to capture the qualities of the sort of vintage cymbals that drum aficionados talk about in hushed tones. Since its launch the range has been well received and has been extended to incorporate five distinct lines.

Don't be put off by the 'Jazz' label, as these cymbals – like any lighter, darker-sounding cymbals – are suitable for many applications. Both visually and sonically, there is plenty to distinguish the Jazz cymbals from other Byzance models.

Casting Vote

Like all Byzance cymbals, the Jazz models are a product of Meinl's Turkish factory, cast individually from tin-rich B20 alloy and worked by experienced cymbalsmiths. The cymbals have a natural finish and, beneath the lathing patterns, there are plenty of hammer marks visible (more so than, for instance, Byzance Traditional models). After the cymbalsmiths are satisfied with a cymbal's tuning it is transported to Meinl's German HQ for finishing. After a period of resting of up to several months to allow the metal to fully relax, the cymbals are then ready for playing.

Included in the selection for review are a selection of 20" and 22" rides, two 18" crashes and the sole pair of Byzance Jazz hi-hats. Other models also available are a 20" flat ride, a 20" Wolfgang Haffner signature flat ride that promises that sort of versatility that you wouldn't necessarily expect from a bell-less ride cymbal, and an intriguing-sounding 22" China ride.

Hats of Distinction

It's a rare thing for a manufacturer to be confident enough to produce just one model of cymbal, but Meinl must feel that what it has come up with in the 14" Jazz Thin hi-hats is so spot-on that alternatives are not required.

All in Hand

All Byzance cymbals are cast individually and worked by hand in Meinl's factory in Turkey



The top hat is conventionally lathed and finished, while the bottom hat has simply been hammered and left raw. First impressions are of bags of warmth and a soft feel. Sitting over them in a playing position, their almost total lack of top-end is at first disconcerting – in comparison with your average pair of hats they sound almost muffled. However, getting out front, especially when mic-ing up, sees the qualities of the hats shine through.

All too often hats that sound crisp close-up are reproduced as a blinding wash in the mix, with any underpinning body swamped out by the cutting top end. These hats are exactly the opposite: their deep tonality is naturally brightened by the mic-ing process, making them sound full and aggressive when needed, but all the while articulate and warm.

The absence of any harshness makes them ideal for acoustic settings – in all probability their intended use. However, that same mellowness pays dividends in louder scenarios (as I found out), where they very successfully occupy a different set of frequencies to most hi-hats.

Of the three types of crash, Meinl supplied us with the Extra Thin and Medium Thin models, both 18" in diameter (the only choice). Of the two, the Extra Thin crash was unsurprisingly softer and darker than the Medium Thin model. The thicker cymbal had a little more power about it and a more pronounced decay. Neither crash explodes in what could be described as a biting manner, but they are surprisingly authoritative when whacked.

They could both be used as left-hand rides, which almost certainly explains the choice of diameter.

It's a Hit

Our reviewer is about as jazzy a player as Meg White but he doesn't want to give the review models back!

Hats More Like It

The Byzance Jazz range features plenty of ride cymbals but only one pair of hi-hats

Hearing the Light

The standard rides are divided into three different weights: Extra Thin, Thin and Medium Thin, each available in 20" and 22" diameters. The 20" Extra Thin ride is extremely dark and warm, and gives a fairly wide stick sound. It really is thin, so a lapping wash is never far behind – getting the cymbal to open for a crash is just a question of flicking the stick. The next 20" model supplied was the Medium Thin ride. It's not as complex as the thinner model but has more focus as a result. It is still bathed in warmth and opens up almost as easily.

Moving up to the 22" rides, the Extra Thin model is a fabulous cymbal full of complexity. It has a huge, buttery stick sound, beneath which the wash shimmers, almost as though it was riveted. The 22" Thin ride sounds drier than the Extra Thin, but less wash makes

for a beautifully articulate cymbal that's still warm and gentle.

As well as the three weights of ride in both diameters, there is an extra category of ride termed 'Sweet', only available in a 20" diameter. The 20" Sweet ride supplied (the alternative being a Sweet Light ride) stood out from the other models on account of its more intensive hammering and larger bell. It possesses a markedly tighter stick sound and less wash, making it sound comparatively cleaner and therefore more able to carry. The very useable bell was the final icing on the cake for a cymbal that was, for me, an all-round success. **R**

RHYTHM VERDICT

Though by their very name these cymbals are pitched at jazz-orientated players, they could be employed in a wide variety of musical scenarios. The differences between the Byzance Jazz cymbals and other warm-voiced cymbals can be subtle, but are important nonetheless, and Meinl deserves credit for recognising this and commissioning the cymbals. As a company, Meinl could be viewed as a model of German efficiency, making strong creative decisions. These cymbals are both finely crafted and competitively priced.



Another great addition to the already impressive Byzance range



Some splashes and dedicated Chinas with the same voicing would be nice

RATING