

LP

Giovanni Hidalgo Compact Congas & Bongos

From £99 | Giovanni Hidalgo's new hand drums are full of surprises. **Charlie Price** looks at LP's award-winning creations.

ESSENTIALS



PRICES

LP Compact Conga	£195
Quinto	£148
Bongos	£249
Conga Mounting System	£99

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Giovanni Hidalgo has taken the art of playing congas to new heights with his unique technique and highly melodic approach. Born into a musical family in Puerto Rico, he has played with a stellar list of artists, including Tito Puente, Dizzy Gillespie, Carlos Santana and even Paul Simon and Mickey Hart. He has taught at the Berklee College of Music and, with a couple of teaching videos out, seems keen to share his wealth of percussive knowledge with the world.

With this in mind, LP have been keen to be associated with Giovanni, and the marriage has created a staggering array of hand drum lines that bear Hidalgo's name. There are already two sets of full-size signature congas, a set of bongos and a djembe on the market, and now, a line of compact congas and bongos.

The Giovanni Compact Conga was introduced first and featured an 11" head providing the diameter and feel of a quinto. This was a big success for LP; so much so that they have added an 11¾" conga and, more recently, a set of Compact Bongos too.

Talking heads

To look at these drums you think, 'Fine'. There's full-size conga, quinto and bongo heads that sit high and proud of a

comfort-curve style full-size rim and then... gulp! Nothing else! What on earth are you going to hope to hear from a conga with nothing even resembling a drum to be seen? The answer is that you get considerably more than you expect...

I must admit that I was astonished with the sound of these drums, and I'm sure this is to do with the lightweight but full mass of the special aluminium alloy rims, coupled with the replaceable synthetic heads, which are made by Evans. The rims have a removable bearing edge that the head rests on and is independent from the rim – I'm sure this is one of the integral factors in getting such an impressive sound from such an unassuming instrument. The rims can be disassembled via Allen key-operated lug holes on the underside of the rims. The drums are also tuned from underneath the rims via conventional size tuning lugs with a standard drum key.

The 11" quinto has nine tuning lugs and the 11¾" conga has 12, which results in a surprisingly wide tuning range. When tuning, I mounted them on LP's Compact Conga Mounting System which enables you to securely mount one or two congas from any cymbal stand and even tilt the stand to allow you to position two congas anywhere around your drum kit or percussion rig. I positioned them above my own set of Natal fibreglass congas in order to make a direct comparison; if you do the same, just make sure that you tighten all the bolts sufficiently. Their collapsible design means you will get an unpleasant squeak when you strike them if they are at all loose.

So, how do they sound? Surprisingly authentic in fact. The conga and quinto blend beautifully with superb slap sounds and resonant, warm open tones. When comparing them with my full-size set, I was amazed by how similar they sound, not just in tone, but in volume too, which is what really impressed me. They almost

matched the volume achieved by their full-size cousins. Their only slight shortfall is bass tone. With full-size congas, you get deep and resonant bass tones, played with the palm of the hands, thanks to their cigar shape and 28"-32" height. With the Compact series this is simply not possible, but that shouldn't prevent you from using these fine-sounding instruments for practice or even studio use. I used one on a session recently and the producer, engineer and studio owner (not to mention a well-known drummer) all loved its sound. The Compact Congas are mutable for quieter practice and I found they sounded and felt best when mounted on a conventional snare stand, the heavier the better to stop the drum moving about too much.

Eastern and exotic

The newest addition to Giovanni's Compact series is a rather fine set of bongos, constructed from the same aluminium alloy as the congas. They consist of a full-size 7¼" macho and an 8½" hembra (both with six tuning lugs) and feature synthetic heads both in one lightweight unit. They can be played with hands or sticks, and sound wonderful with either. The macho cuts beautifully when played by hand, while with sticks it sounds exotic and somewhat Middle Eastern in flavour.

The hembra contrasts really well with its deeper tuning range and goes low enough to be really effective. The Compact Bongos can be mounted on most bongo stand bases with an included mounting post and this is best, as playing them on your lap is tricky when you start to really lay into them – and when you hear them you will surely want to do just that! **R**



KEY FEATURES



LP's unique Conga Mounting

System allows you to mount the congas from any cymbal stand and position them around your kit.



The lightweight aluminium rims have a removable bearing edge that the head rests on.

These body-less drums sound surprisingly authentic and provide an impressive level of volume.

RHYTHM VERDICT

Having recently seen Giovanni mesmerising a jam-packed Jazz Café with Eddie Palmieri, I assure you that he needs little introduction. Giovanni's association with LP over recent years, and the many signature hand drums already devoted to him, is testament enough to how highly he is regarded in the percussion industry. These newest additions reveal a dedication to innovation and the level of quality that LP have become known for, while keeping the finished article reasonably affordable to most serious players. So now there's no excuse for not practising – slip one into your rucksack and set off to the park. Genius!

 Great sounding, highly durable, extremely easy to transport, easy to incorporate into your set-up.

 The absence of a drum shell means the conga and quinto have virtually no bass tone.

RATING



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