

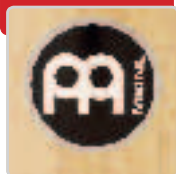


**Chunky rubber bases protect** the beautiful silky woodwork.

# Meinl

## Luis Conte Artist Series

### ESSENTIALS



#### PRICES

11" quinto	£212
11¾" conga	£226
12½" tumba	£245

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**From £212** | Meinl collaborates with Grammy-winning percussionist Luis Conte to create an signature range that leaves **Charlie Price** impressed.

At any given moment, Luis Conte could announce his intention to endorse pretty much any products and instantly have every company falling over their rivals in the struggle to sign him up. Endorsing a particular brand doesn't mean that players will stay loyal to them forever, but with a signature set of stunning brass timbales and now his Artist Series congas, it looks like Luis Conte has decided to develop a rather successful working relationship with Meinl.

#### Heads up

This set of three drums has a strong traditional sound and between them, they cover an impressive tuning range, from the 11" quinto tuned way up, through lovely mid-ranges of the 11¾" conga to the thunderous 12½"

tumba. When unpacking these instruments, you will notice their substantial weight and, when played sitting down, they feel really solid and certainly up to the challenge of withstanding a punishing playing style. These drums feature a wide topped (vase-like) shape that is said to combine the charm and sound of old Cuban drums with modern innovations.

All three produce extremely responsive, rich tones and generate quite a bit more volume due to their increased internal size. The open tones are satisfying and seem to have just the right amount of sustain which, I would imagine, has quite a lot to do with their handmade True Skin natural buffalo skin heads that Meinl claim provide an authentic and natural feel. In contrast, slap sounds are easy to achieve and cut

well, especially on the conga and the quinto. There's no fear of these instruments getting lost in the mix – they would sound superb in the studio with their warm, vibrant sound. Luis himself says they make his hands feel good and, after playing these for an extended period, I can only agree.

The shells on all the drums are made from two-ply rubberwood and are finished in a beautifully silky smooth, natural wood finish. There's not a hint of the overly lacquered finishes that abound on so many mass produced sets. This natural matt finish contrasts well with the black powder coating on all the hardware, which looks striking but retains a somewhat traditional aesthetic. These congas are topped off with Meinl's 4mm TTR-rims (traditional tuning rims), which have an minimal ▶

KEY FEATURES



**Vegan drummers beware...**  
Meinl's tough, tonal True Skin heads are carefully selected from genuine moo-cows.

design and, due to their spartan construction, lie very close to the drum shell. This simple design feels quite different from the bulkier, curved design of rim that so many manufacturers currently favour. These rims match the finish of the tension plates and the other hardware, and contribute to their slightly retro feel.

**Saving that finish**

When you come to tune the drums you'll find that Meinl has included a rugged accessory pouch that contains tune-up oil and an extremely robust and easy-to-use L-shaped tuning key. The 8mm tuning lugs (of which the quinto has five and the conga and tumba have six) are very strong and can be encased with a set of patented black plastic conga savers. These are included with each drum and provide a simple but effective way of protecting the finish on drums when they need to be positioned close together.

You simply slide one conga saver over each of the tuning lugs so that they

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act as a protective middle ground between the potentially damaging steel lugs and the smooth un-lacquered finish of the drum next to it. The conga savers are also available as an accessory pack in 8mm and 10mm sizes. Meinl also offer protection for the instruments in the form of their heavy-duty padded nylon conga gig bags, available as an accessory in each of the three drum sizes.

**Rocksteady**

As these drums are 30" tall, they would suit a seated player as well as being great for stand mounting, which results in an added super-bass tone response and quite a lot more volume overall. Whichever position you play them in, you will not want for either high or low

sounds. While certain other models seem to lose most of their bass tones when standing on the floor, the shape and construction of these instruments mean that they still produce some beautiful bass. I much preferred their sound when they were played resting on the ground and found the open tones a little more balanced than when raising them off the ground. Meinl finish the bottoms of the drums with chunky black rubber bases that protect the silky finish, provide stability, good grip on slippery surfaces and prevent any additional unwanted clicks and knocks on the stage floor. This is especially useful on the 'lead' drum if you play it between your knees and angled forward to let more bass tones out from the bottom of the drum.

Deep, rich and exceptionally warm to the ear, these drums provide a sound that is full of tones from the lower end of

the sound spectrum and they sit really well with other traditional Latin percussion as well as with mainstream pop/rock instrumentation. **R**

**RHYTHM VERDICT**

These congas won the Best Percussion MIPA (Musikmesse International Press Award) at this year's Frankfurt Music Fair – quite an accolade in such a crowded field. I have been pleasantly surprised with the production quality across Meinl's hand percussion range and these represent an extremely affordable professional set of drums, that are easy to tune, sound great and boast many practical features.



**+** Great sounds and build quality, robust, great value for money, have some innovative features

**-** Only available in the natural wood finish, but they are a signature set after all

**RATING**



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