

Ludwig



**DRUM
BUSINESS**
MODERNDRUMMER
MAGAZINES • MULTI-MEDIA • ONLINE • EVENTS

100 Years And Counting

by Lauren Vogel Weiss

Founded in 1909, the Ludwig Drum Company is celebrating its centennial this year—a noteworthy milestone for any business, especially in the music industry. Jim Catalano, director of sales and marketing for Ludwig/Musser School And Concert Percussion, explains part of what makes this anniversary so special. “There was no ‘Mr. Yamaha.’ There was no ‘Mr. Pearl.’ But there was a Mr. Ludwig!”

WILLIAM AND THEOBALD: BROTHERS OF INVENTION

William Frederick Ludwig was born on July 15, 1879, in Germany and came to America with his family at the age of eight. They settled in Chicago, where younger brother Theobald was born in 1888. Their father was a professional musician who played trombone and baritone sax, so the boys were raised in a musical family, taking lessons on violin, piano, and drums.

In the fall of 1909, William Ludwig worked for the Ziegfeld Follies orchestra, playing more than six dozen arrangements, many of them in the popular new ragtime style. When the show was in New York, it used two drummers, but in Chicago Bill had to cover all the parts. Despite his attempts to play with a swing pedal (a forerunner to the modern bass drum pedal), he could not handle the fast ragtime tempos. As necessity is the mother of invention, Ludwig came up with a crude model of a pedal with a shorter beater rod connected near the playing spot. It worked!

Thanks to the assistance of his future brother-in-law Robert C. Danly, Ludwig soon had a metal model instead of the original wooden one. William asked his brother Theobald to join him, and they opened a small drum shop called Ludwig & Ludwig, patenting their revolutionary idea and making pedals as fast as they could between shows.

During the 1910–11 season, William Ludwig was the timpanist with the Pittsburgh Symphony. It was during this period that he came up with the idea of pedal-tuned tim-



Ludwig's 100th Anniversary 24-karat-gold-plated brass shell snare drum

pani, another of the company's famous inventions and one that was extremely innovative for its time. But the business beckoned Ludwig back to Illinois. He accepted a position with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, working at the drum shop during the day and playing with the orchestra at night.

When America entered World War I in 1917, the government restricted the use of metals for nonessential items, so Ludwig & Ludwig began to make rope-tensioned drums. During a trip to the East Coast to bid on a large order of field drums (which was eventually awarded to Gretsch), Theobald was exposed to the influenza epidemic that was rav-

aging the country, and he died in 1918 at the age of twenty-nine.

THE NEXT GENERATION

William F. Ludwig Jr. was born on September 13, 1916, in Chicago. (He officially changed his name to William F. Ludwig II in the late 1990s, joking that he was too old to be called “Junior.” This also alleviated the confusion between his father, “Bill I”—William F. Ludwig Sr.—and his son “Bill III”—William F. Ludwig III.) “Bill Senior” resigned from the orchestra by the time his son was five to devote all of his time to Ludwig & Ludwig.

The 1920s saw an expansion of Ludwig & Ludwig, including its first

million-dollar year (1928) and more new product inventions. “Senior” designed the first brass-shell snare drum, known as the Black Beauty. “That’s the pièce de résistance of everything,” Catalano says proudly. “It’s nothing more than black nickel on a brass shell. But there’s something sonically special that this type of finish does to the drum—it darkens it up, dries it up, yet still allows the drum to sing. As [Rooney’s] Ned Brower says on our anniversary DVD, ‘The Black Beauty has to be in every professional drummer’s quiver.’”

Ludwig also sold numerous sound effects for silent films during the '20s. But by the end of the decade, talking pictures put a lot of theater drummers out of work and the Great Depression created more economic downturns. So in 1930, the elder Ludwig sold the business to the C.G. Conn Company.

In 1937, Senior began his second manufacturing endeavor, the William F. Ludwig Drum Company, located at 1728 North Damen Avenue in Chicago (where it would remain until 1984). Since Conn objected to the use of the Ludwig name, the W.F.L. Drum Company (using Senior’s initials) was created. One of its premier products was the twin-spring Speed King pedal. Bill Junior joined his father full time in 1938, withdrawing from the University Of Illinois to work as both



Ludwig general manager Grant Henry; Ludwig director of marketing Kevin Packard with Ludwig/Musser School And Concert Percussion director of sales and marketing Jim Catalano

LUDWIG DRUMS OVERVIEW



1



2



3



4



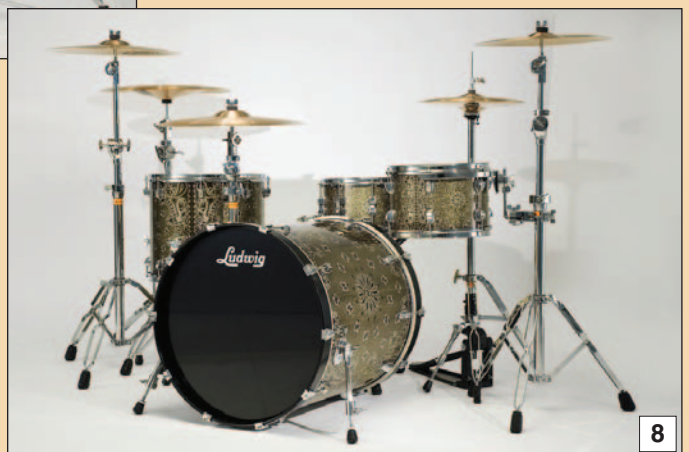
5



6



7



8



9



10

1. LEGACY EXOTIC

This line of professional drums uses a 3-ply combination of woods: plies of North American maple surrounding a poplar core ply, plus solid maple reinforcement rings. The result is a rich, warm sound. Three exotic hardwoods were chosen for the outer ply, for their visual elegance and tonal contribution to the Legacy shell: African black limba, Amazon sumauma, and Australian lacewood.

2. STAINLESS STEEL LIMITED EDITION

Only a hundred kits of the new Anniversary Edition Stainless Steel Pro Beat will be made available, all hand rolled and tooled by drumsmith Ronn Dunnnett. Half feature a polished chrome steel finish and brass hardware; the rest have a brushed stainless steel finish and chrome hardware. The ultra-thin stainless shell and bearing edge of each drum help create a huge sound.

3. LEGACY CLASSIC LIVERPOOL 4

In the spirit of the original "Ringo kit," Ludwig offers the Liverpool 4 setup in the original black oyster pearl finish. The set features the configuration and 3-ply shells heard most on classic recordings and is the first Legacy kit to feature standard-size classic lugs and the new Rail Console tom mount. The first hundred sets will feature Ludwig's 100th Anniversary badge.

4. EPIC X-OVER

American walnut is known not only for its dark color and grain but also for its warm sound. The new Epic X-Over expands on darker overtones by using a poplar core with walnut outer plies. Three-ply birch reinforcement rings are added for extra cut and focus, resulting in a sound that speaks articulately in the lower register.

5. EPIC X-OVER STRIPED

The theory behind segmented shell crafting is that if the darker quality of walnut can be fused with the warmth of North American maple, a new tonality will be released. Epic X-Over Striped offers a balance between rumbling lows and sparkling highs and features 3-ply birch reinforcement rings and poplar core plies.

6. EPIC MODULAR

Epic Modular comes standard with two rack toms, two floor toms, and two 8x20 kick drums that connect together for one big sound. Played separately as a double bass set, Epic Modular's twin kick drums have punch, and their shallow depth allows for faster rebound. The included rack and floor toms can create multiple creative setups for gigging drummers; they can also be played as two separate kits for smaller club performance or interactive education.

7. EPIC SERIES

Taking the focused, cutting tone of birch and fusing it with the warmer qualities of maple, Epic series drums offer a powerful sound that's well suited to high-volume situations. Epic's new ultra-thin 6-ply shell vibrates evenly and walks the line between subtlety and bombast. Four classic finishes are augmented by new Vintage Bronze hardware plating for a brilliant look and feel. In addition to three 6/4/5 setups (six drums for the price of five) offered during Ludwig's anniversary year, Epic also features two classic four-piece shell packs.

8. ELEMENT SE

Element SE (for "special edition") showcases an evolving array of customized features for the gigging player. Limited to shorter production runs, these specialized shell packs may disappear quickly.

9. ELEMENT LACQUER SERIES

Element Lacquer drums have two poplar plies at the core of each thin 6-ply shell. This adds a warmer fundamental tone to the bite and volume of the inner birch plies. Each of four available high-gloss finishes over marbled birch wood is accentuated by new Classic Keystone lugs, 2.5 mm and 2 mm snare and tom hoops, and options like black hardware (limited to select finishes). In addition to three available 6/4/5 packages, Element also features the Emo four-piece shell pack with a 20x22 kick drum.

10. ELEMENT SERIES

Element series drums offer an array of custom-inspired options to the student-level player, including Vibra-Band suspension mounts, new Classic Keystone lugs, and two new finishes.

Ludwig

the sales and advertising manager.

The company's first catalog was published in 1939, and soon several name drummers were added to the W.F.L. artist roster: Lionel Hampton, Frankie Carlson (Woody Herman), George Wettling (Paul Whiteman), and Ray Bauduc (Bob Crosby). By 1949, W.F.L. had even added Buddy Rich to its list of endorsers. The younger Ludwig was on the road visiting stores and searching out drummers until 1942, when Uncle Sam drafted him for World War II service. When the war was over, Bill rejoined his father in the family business. And in 1955, son William F. Ludwig III was born to Bill and his wife, Maggie, joining daughter Brooke.

THE LUDWIG DRUM COMPANY

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, W.F.L. enjoyed the economic boom that was spreading across the country. The company added more famous drummers to its roster—including Roy Haynes and Mel Tormé—and reached its second million-dollar milestone in 1954.

Twenty-five years after he sold it, Senior purchased the Ludwig name from Conn. The W.F.L. Drum Company became the Ludwig Drum Company and brought back many of the original Ludwig dealers, which increased the company's sales and, in turn, increased the factory's size to handle the rise in volume.

Ludwig was not the first company to make metal-shell drums but was the first to make them popular. "We made the aluminum-shell Supra-Phonic snare drum," Catalano says, "which is probably *the* most played, recorded, and purchased snare drum anywhere. We also developed the Super-Sensitive snare strainer. It's not as popular today as it has been, but it was the first parallel-action-style snare strainer. It was primarily a symphonic strainer but was also successfully marketed to the drumset crowd."

The 1960s brought the Ludwig name to the rest of the world as the company began to export its products in Europe. On the Ludwig 100th Anniversary DVD that Catalano referred to earlier, Ringo Starr recalls the first time he saw a Ludwig drumset: "I was walking down the streets of London with Brian Epstein and some of the boys. I saw this kit in the window—it was black [oyster] pearl. It looked great!

The dealer went to take off the decal that said Ludwig, and I said, 'Leave it on.' I just loved everything American!" And with that simple decision—and the Beatles' appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9, 1964—Ludwig became a worldwide household name.

"The very next day—February 10—the phones were ringing off the hook at the Damen Avenue factory," Catalano says. "Dick Schory [director of marketing from 1957 to 1971] told me that everyone wanted the 'Ringo set.' That was interesting because black oyster pearl is not an attractive finish! But Ringo gave aspiring drummers a license to consider that product, which is what all endorsements do anyway. I was one of those ten-year-old kids watching the show, and I told my parents that night that I was going to play Ludwig drums." Catalano not only played them, he made his career with Ludwig.

The 1970s saw another decade of growth and success for the company. By then, Ludwig had acquired the Musser Marimba Company, completing the concept of "total percussion." In 1971, William F. Ludwig II became president of Ludwig Industries, succeeding his father, who passed away in 1973.

As rock 'n' roll remained a dominant part of the music industry, Ludwig continued its tradition of innovation. Although it was not the first company to make acrylic drums, it was the one that made them popular. "We need to thank our artists for that," Catalano says. "Guys like John Bonham and Carl Palmer—they were out there playing Vistalite drums and making the kids say, 'Wow, that's what I've got to have!'" And who could forget the model with Tivoli lights?

As Bill Ludwig II approached his sixty-fifth birthday in 1981, he decided to sell the business to the Selmer Company. Three years later, the doors closed on Damen Avenue as the Ludwig factory moved to Monroe, North Carolina, where it remains today. Bill continued to be involved with his namesake company, appearing at music and percussion conventions for over two decades. His legendary "History Of Percussion" lecture/demonstration was a true living tribute to both the instrument and the company. "The Chief" passed away on March 22, 2008. (Read more about him in the October 2008 issue of *Modern*

Drummer or in his autobiography, *The Making Of A Drum Company*.)

Although Bill Ludwig III did not succeed his father and grandfather as president of the family business, he's been involved with the business over the years, serving as Ludwig's first full-time artist relations manager as well as advertising manager. He continues to consult with the company and plans to continue his dad's percussion lectures.

THE PRESENT

In 2002, Ludwig became a division of Conn-Selmer, beginning yet another chapter in the company's story. With eight years of steady growth and success, Ludwig continues to update little things in addition to releasing new products. "For example," Catalano says, "we've developed a whole new series of lugs. They still have the traditional Ludwig three lines, but they're a smaller type of lug that have an arch in them, similar to what you see with some of the other companies. They're 'Ludwig-esque,' yet they're totally different. We also have new types of tom holder systems and new cymbal tilters, and we'll have new stands and hardware by next year."

Ludwig has gone all out to celebrate its hundredth anniversary, and the special DVD celebrates the drum maker's rich history. "It's a retrospective of the company," Catalano explains, "but it also involves many of our artists. They talk about the historical value of the company, key products, and what Ludwig means to them."

Ludwig has always been known for its "dream books." "There was a personality to those catalogs," Catalano says with a sigh. "Inside that front cover you saw William F. Ludwig the first, second, and third, and Maggie Ludwig. You saw the family. You even saw the salespeople. All of a sudden, you weren't buying products from a company that made merchandise, you were buying products from a family. And that makes all the difference in the world. That's why our slogan going into this hundredth anniversary is 'Be a legend. Join the family.'"

New products created especially for the company's centennial include a special collection of snare drums; the line features a replica of the 1928 Gold Triumphal snare. (There are only seven original ones accounted for, according to the

Curotto Collection.) With a hand-engraved 24-karat-gold-plated brass shell, this 100th Anniversary snare drum retails for \$10,900. "We're only making a hundred of them," Catalano says. "Each drum is serialized by the date in Ludwig's history. The first drum is serial number 1909, the second is 1910, and so on. The date is actually engraved into the shell as part of the artwork on the drum. Even the hoops are engraved. It's a beautiful drum. And whoever gets 1964—that's going to be a pretty special piece of history!"

"We also cooperated with famous drum engraver John Aldridge for a new 100th Anniversary Black Beauty snare drum," Catalano continues. "It's the most ornate Black Beauty that we've ever created, even more so than the drums from the '20s. They have brass shells, and John incorporated not just beautiful artwork but also the names of William F. Ludwig the first, the second, and the third. Another beautiful drum."

"We know we can't just make expensive products for collectors," Catalano admits. "We have to be able to hit the mainstream market too. So we have a snare drum series that we introduced this year called Black Magic. Instead of a seamless-shell drum, like the ones made here in the U.S., these would be seamed-shell drums that we're bringing in from offshore. Like a Black Beauty, the Black Magic is also laser engraved to honor our hundredth anniversary, but it's more affordable for the everyday drummer."

The Snare Drums Of A Century anniversary collection also includes the Chief Supra-Phonic snare drum, labeled with a special "Chief" key-stone badge commemorating William F. Ludwig II's nickname. And there are Epic Centurion Exotic snares featuring bubinga, sapele, and American walnut burl woods.

"We redesigned the entire product line from the ground up," explains Kevin Packard, director of marketing, combo percussion. "We introduced new USA drums, reissues of old drums with a new swing on them. For example, in the '70s, Ludwig was the first company to commercially make a stainless steel drumset. So we partnered up with Dunnett Classic Drums and reissued that set but in a new configuration to make it more exciting. We also took our 3-ply shell formula [maple-

Ludwig

poplar-maple]—which created a lot of buzz several years ago with the Legacy Classic—and incorporated some new finishes with exotic woods that are imported from Africa, Australia, and the Amazon. This is our new Legacy Exotic line. It creates a depth that really can't be applied to any other drum shell because of the way the woods work together to resonate. We're taking everything that we've always done and making it more exciting, new, and current."

Packard continues enthusiastically, "We've got this new kit called the Epic X-Over. It was one of the sets that *Drum Business* picked as a 'spotlight kit' in the NAMM wrap-up. We've taken inner and outer plies of walnut and segmented them with plies of maple, so it looks like a striped finish, but actually it's a segmented shell. We then put a poplar core in the middle of it, so you've got three different types of woods that are being combined for one drum shell, with birch reinforcements. In essence, there are four different types of woods in one shell—that's unheard of!"

THE FUTURE

With over a quarter of a century at the company, Jim Catalano is the "fifty-five-year-old guy with all the experience," he says with a grin. "I still remember the night in 1988 that I had dinner with the Chief—a nickname I coined for him out of respect. He took a drum key out of his pocket and put it in my hand. 'This represents the keys to the company,' he said. 'I'm trusting you with the legacy of the Ludwig Drum Company.'" Catalano chokes up a little at the memory. "At that moment, I symbolically became a part of the Ludwig family. And in a way, even though I don't own the company, I feel like I have a lot of heart in it.

"But now," he continues, "we need people who have a new vision and new creativity to connect with a younger, more discerning market. Ludwig is going into a phase of continuous product development—and there's a cost to that. Although there will be more sourcing abroad to get price points, we understand that our legacy is with our factory in the U.S. We will continue to make high-end, pro-level products for gigging drummers. Conn-Selmer understands, and they are now willing to make that investment in both product

development and promotion."

Ludwig general manager Grant Henry agrees: "Ludwig was always known for bringing innovation to the forefront. We are returning to our roots and re-creating that magic by reintroducing the vintage feel of our past with the innovative flair that today's drummers demand." He joined the Ludwig family four years ago, after serving as vice president of marketing for all of Conn-Selmer, Ludwig's corporate owner.

Henry's current team consists of sales coordinator Bob Henry and marketing coordinator Gary Devore, along with Kevin Packard and Jim Catalano. "Jim brings experience," Henry says. "He's watched Ludwig go through phases during the past twenty-six years, both internally—company politics—and externally—how the market perceives the brand. When you combine that with the vision and momentum of a Kevin Packard, it makes for a pretty powerful team."

Packard joined the company in February 2008. With his background in the percussion industry (ddrum and Peace), he brought fresh ideas to his new home. "As famous as Ludwig is for having this rich vintage tradition," he explains, "we don't want to be stuck just making vintage products. We want to make things that are new and exciting for every level of player, not just the vintage enthusiast. My real goal is to take a name like Ludwig, which has this amazing history, and live up to its original roots. And my desire is to take the passion that I have for drums, drumming, and drum gear and make it relevant, new, and exciting.

"Where I see us in the next five years," Packard adds, "is listening to drummers and making the kinds of drums that they want to play. Our entire staff is made up of actual players who have the opportunity to test the products and say, 'Yes, that's something I would play,' or 'No, I really wouldn't be into that.' Our team is very dedicated and focused on making the best drum out there and making it accessible.

"We tried something new this year that we've never done before: working with artists to make signature products," he says. "For exam-



Ludwig collaborated with L.A. Ink tattoo artist Corey Miller on a special edition Element kit.

ple, we devised a snare drum for Alex Van Halen using a very expensive type of Honduran rosewood called Santos rosewood—it just made the most brilliant sound and looked so...sexy!

"We're dealing with drummers who not only have a passion for drums but also a passion for the gear that they play on," Packard continues. "We want to make sure it appeals to that sense of 'Wow, I really, really want that.' The Alex Van Halen drum—incredible. The new engraved Black Beauty—unmatched. The Epic Centurian snare drums—unbelievable!

"Anytime I have a hand in creating anything with this team and it lives up to the standards of a Bun E. Carlos [of Cheap Trick], I know I've done my job," Packard says. "There are so many out there who are very staunch in their opinions about Ludwig, and if we can satisfy them and at the same time look fresh to the newer player—or to people who have an eye for design—then we've done what we set out to do. Bun E.'s collection encompasses every single thing from Ludwig's history. Yet the drums we're making now are his favorites because we've taken all the ingredients that made the drums of the past great and made them new and fresh. That was our goal. After all, Grant Henry reminded me that Ringo Starr didn't

play a vintage drumset—he played a new drumset!"

Where does Ludwig see itself in five years? "We want to be positioned as the drum company that has the right product and the right relationships with our dealer network," Henry says. "There are a lot of people vying for a top position in the drum game. With our credibility—we can honestly hold true to being a drum company for drummers—the financial results, including those of being a publicly owned company, will come with it. We want to be a successful business model, but we also want to be the name in drums that actually has prestige—and heartstrings—attached. We want to make people proud to play Ludwig."

"The economy in 2009 is a difficult thing for everyone," Catalano confesses. "I wish it wasn't happening during Ludwig's centennial year...but Ludwig's been a survivor. In the twenty-six years that I've been involved with the company, we've always been able to keep a balance. There were times that the combo side of the business was roaring but the concert side was struggling, and the next year or two it would switch around. But we've been able to keep things balanced. The Ludwig brand has always persevered over time."