



// Instrument News & Reviews

David Gallant checks out the latest musical instrument and technology launches

Yamaha Venova Wind Instrument

Launched at the recent Frankfurt Musikmesse trade fair, this new addition to Yamaha's woodwind line turned more than a few heads. The Venova is not a 'pro' instrument, and doesn't pretend to be, but is rather a continuation of a line that supports Yamaha's strong commitment to music education. Marketed as a 'step up' instrument from the humble descant recorder (it's in C), its composite body is lightweight and utilises a soprano sax mouthpiece, reed and ligature. The saxophone connection continues with an octave key and right hand keywork. We initially found the Venova difficult to blow and realised that, like the recorder, it requires very little air. We're not sure why the mouthpiece is fitted with a plastic reed, as it doesn't do the instrument any favours. We can only assume that it is there for strength and longevity. We decided to replace it with a cane reed and set the ligature back to increase the lay and, as if by magic, the instrument came alive. We were able to run through the full range without difficulty. As it's aimed at progressing young players directly on to the saxophone, rather than going through the usual route via the clarinet, it does help with getting the embouchure right and with learning to use the diaphragm rather than the mouth for breathing. We were a little concerned however that young hands might find the distance between the octave key and the first tone hole too much of a stretch – it's a longer reach than the clarinet. But this is something

that, with practice, can no doubt be overcome. We also thought that the 'O' rings that hold the mouthpiece to the head could have been heavier to avoid any movement and consequential complications with intonation. But, overall, the Venova serves its purpose well. And coming in at just under £100, complete with a preformed hard case and shoulder strap, this is one tidy little travelling companion. In fact, it's the perfect partner for all those summer parties and music festivals! www.uk.yamaha.com

Jody Jazz Power Ring Ligature

The beauty of this Jody Jazz Power Ring is that it slips onto the mouthpiece so easily and, put on cold, delivers spot on tuning. Attached to a Jody Jazz DV mouthpiece on our house alto, we immediately realised how the Power Ring got its name! Because, if you want power, it's all there for the taking, from a scorching altissimo to a full and beefy lower end. But aside from this, it also offers plenty in the dynamics department, together with a terrific 'scoop' range and the ability to immediately achieve perfect subtones on the low 'C' and 'Bb'. What really caught our ear, however, was when we switched from the standard 'H' ligature to the Power Ring, to find that the latter actually softens the edge of the sound, and in a good way. In the past we have used a composite Drake 'ring', but are only too aware how susceptible this



is to damage. By contrast, the Jody Jazz Power Ring is solid, more secure and isn't going to crack or chip. Those players who have already used 'ring' ligatures will know that they have an Achilles' heel – you can't alter an instrument's tuning with the ring on. But, in our opinion, in this particular instance, that's a small price to pay for a ligature that really does add so much more flexibility to your sonic soundscape.

www.jodyjazz.com

Fiberreed Onyx Sax Reed

Synthetic reeds have been around for a while now, but they've never really caught on with the majority of professional players. They might offer longevity and operate well in fluctuating atmospheric conditions, but they can't be dampened and they won't 'open up' like a cane equivalent. We attached the medium hard black onyx to a Meyer ebonite mouthpiece and, apart from it feeling rather thin, immediately noticed

a problem... being black, it's not only very difficult to see if it's cracked, but it's also difficult to measure up. Clearly this reed would be better suited to a metal mouthpiece. We decided to test the

Fiberreed against the equivalent Rico Jazz Select cane, and though the Fiberreed was manoeuvrable enough soundwise, we found that we actually achieved more volume from the Rico product. Ideal, perhaps, if you're touring tropical climes, the Fiberreed is a very specific product for a very specific job.

www.fiberreed.de



Promark TXKTW Sticks

Promark have launched a new signature series drumstick line, designed in collaboration with top female session drummer, Kimberly Thompson. We loved the Vic Firth Peter Erskine's and these are very similar, but with an extra half-inch to play with. Made from hickory and sporting a high standard gold-flake sparkle finish, they come as a comfortable 0.535" 7A, with a long taper and small round tip with a wood barrel end producing a very focused, clear, well-articulated ride cymbal pattern. Their diameter, weight and balance make these ideal for jazzers and they feel very secure in the hands. But these signature sticks are only available for a limited time, so you'd better stock up while supplies last. We loved them.

www.promark.com

