

# A 'Striking' Origin Story

## JodyJazz's Hand-Hammered HH Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece

The mouthpiece is an integral part of any saxophonist's sound, but what if transforming your tone was just one blow away? That's what JodyJazz set out to achieve with its new Hand-Hammered HH Tenor Rose Gold Limited Edition Mouthpiece line. Launched earlier this year, the JodyJazz HH mouthpieces feature the same hand-hammering technique cymbal makers use to warm up the sound of bronze and other metals, opening up a totally different tonal palette that some have described as sweeter, more mellow and even easier to play.

But how did JodyJazz get to the idea of hand-hammering mouthpieces?

"It's an interesting story," said Jody Espina, founder and president of JodyJazz. "Colin Schofield [vice president of sales and marketing for JodyJazz] worked with Zildjian for many years and was good friends with former Zildjian cymbal craftsman Paul Francis. One day he asked me, 'What about hand-hammering a mouthpiece?' And I was like, 'Whoa, I never thought of that.' At first I didn't think it would work because the metal of a mouthpiece is thicker than a cymbal."

But after considering Francis' 32 years of experience and expertise at Zildjian, Espina decided to give it a try.

"We went through a lot of experiments and a lot of different steps with

Paul, but once we got to try a mouthpiece that was hand-hammered, we found that it made a huge difference to the overall sound," Espina explained. "I had obviously never done this before, but we had a finished version back in February 2022 — it was actually going to be in our DB series — and we finished it to the point where I had about 100 models plated in Rose Gold. But, at the last minute, I decided it wasn't special enough, so I went back to the drawing board and went through tons of prototypes again until we found what we have today."

### The Hand-Hammered Difference

When first approached by JodyJazz to hand-hammer mouthpieces, Francis said he was intrigued by the idea.

"I didn't have a deep familiarity with mouthpieces, but I was very interested," he said, adding that he has been making cymbals in his Massachusetts workshop for his own company, Cymbal Craftsman, since leaving Zildjian. "Hand-hammering a mouthpiece is a little different because a mouthpiece is cylindrical, so we went through a lot of prototyping with mouthpiece designs. It was about a year-long R&D process. We wanted to make sure that hammering the mouthpiece didn't change the



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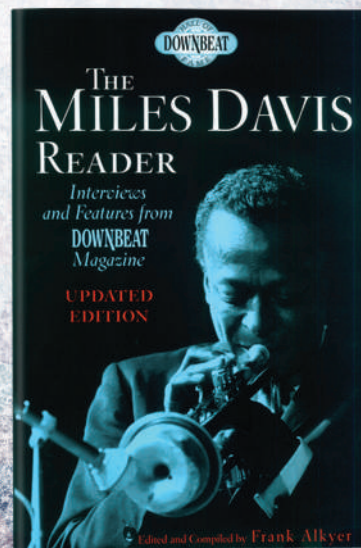
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cylindricity of it. The biggest goal was to compress the metal.”

Francis explained that hand-hammering brass and bronze compresses the metal, making it stronger, which changes the sound.

“When you compress the materials used for cymbal making, the sound waves travel more quickly through the area where its been hand-hammered,” he said.

Espina noted that hammering the HH line changed the company’s production process.

“We typically use machines to make our mouthpieces and then do the hand work,” he said. “But when we put that hand-hammered blank on to cut a mouthpiece with a 7-star tip opening, that process makes it an 8-star because it has this hardness, and harder material cuts better and easier on a machine. It cuts 10 thousandths of an inch difference in the tip opening. We were shocked by that.”

Expert play-tests are a normal part of JodyJazz’s R&D process. Espina said the company gave its artists both unhammered and hammered mouthpieces to try in the development stage.

“With the hammered models, you’d hear a sweetness in the tone,” Espina said. “When you play it, it vibrates better. It’s more mellow and more pleasing. People have even said it’s easier to play. The mouthpiece is designed to be right in the center where a lot of people can really like it, and it’s got a huge, massive bottom.”

“When we brought them to the Savannah Jazz Festival a few months back, we got saxophonists telling us that they thought it was some of our finest work,” he continued. “They liked how they could transform their sound from one week to the next.”

Espina added that the weight of the hammered mouthpiece also plays an integral part in its tone production.

“It’s very heavy,” he explained. “It’s the heaviest tenor mouthpiece



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Cymbal craftsman Paul Francis says the main goal of hand-hammering a mouthpiece is to compress the metal.

you've ever held. Many players and manufacturers are experimenting with more mass. You would think a big, heavy mouthpiece wouldn't vibrate as much, but the hand-hammering process makes it more alive."

Espina came up with an innovation for a different type of bite plate on the HH line as well.

"I put a recessed pocket and a patch in there," he said. "With this recessed pocket, you can just put another patch right in if you wear it out. It's a very comfortable feel on a metal mouthpiece."

Espina said he thinks the HH line is "one of the most exciting mouthpieces to come down the highway in a long time."

"The amount of sound it delivers along with the quality of sound and the deep fullness of it, it's just really cool," he said. "The HH line is a limited edition in a special Rose Gold finish; only 300 models are available. Because they looked so beautiful once finished, I couldn't stand to put a regular ligature on them, so we also made a hand-hammered JodyJazz Power Ring and, as you'd have it, the hand-hammering made the Power Ring play better."

Espina said he plans to apply his company's hand-hammering techniques to more than just HH Tenor Saxophone Mouthpieces and Power Rings.

"The hand-hammering process is something we have to continue doing. This is a technique that we want to keep experimenting with. I want an alto version, too," he said. "The end result is so beautiful, and Paul is an expert craftsman."

When asked who should consider giving the hand-hammered mouthpieces a test-drive, Espina said "everyone."

Francis agreed, concluding with, "Anyone who plays saxophone needs try this."

—Katie Kailus

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