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At left: Hand-hammerer Paul Francis.
At right: JodyJazz HH Tenor series mouthpiece.



REINVENTING THE MOUTHPIECE

How JodyJazz's recruitment of a cymbal hand-hammerer has given its latest mouthpiece a tonal twist. - By Katie Kailus

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, JodyJazz's HH mouthpieces feature the same hand-hammering technique cymbal makers use, opening up a totally different tonal palate that some have described as sweeter, more mellow and even easier to play.

But how did JodyJazz get 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

cymbals for many years and was good friends with former Zildjian hand-hammerer 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 expertise at Zildjian, Espina decided to give it a try. "We went through a lot of experiments, but once we got to try a mouthpiece that was hand-hammered, we found it made a huge difference to the overall sound," he explained.

A TONAL 'SWEETNESS'

When first approached by JodyJazz to hand-hammer mouthpieces, Francis said he

was intrigued.

"I didn't have a deep familiarity with mouthpieces, but I was very interested," he said, adding that he makes cymbals in his Massachusetts workshop for his own cymbal 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 designs. It was about a year-long R&D process. We wanted to make sure that hammering the mouthpiece didn't change the cylindricity of it. The biggest goal was to compress the metal."

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 quicker through the area where its been hand-hammered," he said.

With blindfold tests as a normal part of JodyJazz's R&D process, Espina said the company gave its artists both unhammered and hammered mouthpieces to try.

"With the hammered models, you'd hear a sweetness in the tone," Espina said. "When you play, it vibrates better. It's more mellow and more pleasing."

Available exclusively through JodyJazz retailers, the HH line is limited to 300 models in a rose-gold finish.

"Because the mouthpieces looked so beautiful once they were finished, I couldn't stand to put a regular ligature on them, so we also made a hand-hammered power ring," Espina said. "And, as you'd have it, the hand-hammering made the power ring play better."

Espina said he doesn't plan on stopping with tenor mouthpieces and power rings.

"The hand-hammering process is something we have to continue doing," he said. "It's a technique that we want to keep experimenting with. We're learning that the hand-hammering technique is very special." **MI**