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Creative Percussion

Hex Stax and Groove Chain-ger

Handmade metallic accessories that provide funky, trashy textures.

Creative Percussion was founded by drummer and carpenter Kevin Feeney with one stated mission: to produce high-quality, creative percussion products with no limits. Two such products are the Hex Stax, which comprises three layers of hand-hammered and torched stainless steel for short and trashy yet musical sounds, and the Groove Chain-ger, which is a steel ring with chains attached that sits atop 12", 13", or 14" drums to produce a rattling natural reverb. We were sent the 7" Hex Stax (\$33.99) and the 14" Chain-ger (\$39.99). Let's check them out.

Hex Stax

This unique stacker consists of three layers of hex-shaped steel that are cut, hammered, and torched by hand. As a result, no two versions are exactly alike. The company currently offers three models: a 7" set, which we were sent, a 9" set, and an 11" set. A combo set featuring one of each size is also available.

The steel layers are hammered on both sides, which is done strategically to create asymmetrical patterns of indentations and protrusions so that the plates never lay perfectly flat against each other. This results in a livelier sound with an adjustable amount of attack, trashiness, and rattle, depending on how tightly or loosely you set them on your cymbal stand. The torching process used on the steel not only gives the Hex Stax a colorful patina, but it also softens the steel a bit to draw out more musical tones.

Most small stackers comprise two layers of cymbals—either splashes, mini Chinas, or bells. In my experience, those combos are often limited to either a very short, trashy snap or an indistinct blast of bright rattle. You also have to deal with whether or not the bells sit properly within one another or if one of the cymbals has any lingering overtones to contend with.

Being that the Hex Stax consists of three layers of metal, you can get a much trashier sound by resting the plates lightly on top of one another. And that sound is essentially all white noise, meaning there's no discernable pitch or overtone. When tightened down fully, the Hex Stax transforms into a perfectly synthetic-sounding "chip" with a sharply gated decay.

I found that the Hex Stax sounded best with the plates tightened down enough to keep the rattle controlled but not choked, to where the sustain lasted for about the length of a 16th note. At that tension, I was able to play quick, articulate figures or short, sharp quarter notes that spoke clearly and with a funky, digital-sounding timbre. The Hex Stax also had a bit more volume and projection than a typical two-splash stacker.

Groove Chain-ger

Creative Percussion created the Groove Chain-ger for players looking for a more



controllable way to place chains, bells, and other rattling objects on their snare drums. The simple yet ingenious accessory is available in 12", 13", and 14" sizes and comprises a lightweight steel outer ring that is covered in clear plastic tubing and has eight 1" steel loops attached. The loops are used to thread on one or more of the three supplied chains. The chains vary in size and shape, from a thin beaded necklace to the thicker and more industrial-looking linked version that comes pre-installed on the Groove Chain-ger. The clips on the chains allow them to be quickly locked into place or removed.

The company suggests that you experiment with different combinations and placements of the chains to achieve different degrees of vibration, bounce, and rattle. Utilizing a full circle of chain produces the most controlled and integrated rattle, while a U-shaped half circle produces a denser and trashier texture. The suggested D shape, where the chains are threaded through only the lower six hoops, allows the chains to bounce more freely, resulting

in a slower and less distinct rattle. For those interested in customizing their snare sound even further, Creative Percussion offers attachments such as a loop of five jingle bells.

I'm a big fan of exploring effected snare sounds, especially when going for customized tones in the studio. But I rarely get that adventurous on live gigs, mainly because it requires too much time and effort to get the chains, bells, or rattles to stay put throughout the course of an entire show. But Creative Percussion's slick and secure Groove Chain-ger could turn out to be a sonic *game* changer.

Michael Dawson

