

# BRADY

## Spotted Gum Ply Drumset With Wandoo And Kosaka Block Snares

by Michael Dawson

**F**amed drum builder Chris Brady introduced the global drumming community to the rich, dense sounds of hard Australian timber back in 1980, when he carved his first solid “tree trunk” snare out of a single log of jarrah, a species that grows in the southwest corner of the continent. Since then, Brady has explored other ways to turn

his homeland’s indigenous hardwoods into top-shelf drums, including non-cross-laminated, 100 percent horizontal ply shells, as well as the vertical block (stave) shell systems that have come to define “the Brady sound.”

To celebrate his thirtieth year of drum making, Chris has added a new shell type to his catalog—

spotted gum. This ultra-dense Australian timber comes from the eucalyptus family and has an interlocking grain structure, which allows it to be cut into very thin shells without requiring reinforcing rings to retain its shape. While the tone of spotted gum falls in line with the crisp attack and deep timbre of Brady’s trademark jarrah and marri ply drums, these shells have a stronger and punchier sound, one that Chris claims “comes with unprecedented projection in a wood shell, while carrying a solid low tone.”

For review, we were sent a six-piece spotted gum kit (9-ply 16x22 kick, 5-ply 7x10 and 8x12

### THE BRADY EFFECT

**If you’re unfamiliar with the lively “crack” of Brady drums,** check out Aaron Comess’s nimble rudimental intro and bouncy ghost-note groove on the Spin Doctors’ “Two Princes” and Charley Drayton’s explosive rimshot throughout the B-52s’ mega-hit “Love Shack.” Both of those classic pop performances were played on Brady drums. You can also hear Steve Jordan grooving on a wandoo block snare on John Mayer’s *Battle Studies* tour.





Kosaka block snare



Wandoo block snare

rack toms, 7-ply 14x14 and 16x16 floor toms, 9-ply 8x14 snare), plus two block-shell snares: a 7x12 "Love Shack" wandoo (the same drum Charley Drayton used with the B-52s) and a 6½x14 condensed bamboo Kosaka, which was made in honor of Brady's friend and the long-time president of Pro-Mark Japan, Tat Kosaka.

All of the toms, which have fairly sharp 45° bearing edges, came with clear Remo Emperor batter heads and clear Ambassadors on the bottom. The rack toms have engraved suspension mounts, and the floor toms have traditional legs. The kick has a coated Powerstroke 3 batter and a Fiberskyn resonant. All three snares came with coated CS Ambassador batters, Dunnett throw-offs, 2.3 mm triple-flange steel hoops, and custom-made twenty-strand snare wires.

### STRENGTH AND ELEGANCE

Like all Brady drums, spotted gum models are built strong and sturdy, so they'll hold up under the most extreme playing situations. (Even the small chromed-brass lugs were considerably "meatier" than what you find on other kits with low-mass hardware.) These drums have an air of elegance and simplicity that commands respect, likely the result of the extreme care and attention to detail that Brady puts into every piece he builds. (Each stage of the company's manufacturing process, from measuring and drilling the wood to buffing and lacquering the finish, is done by hand.) Everyone who saw the drums, whether it was a fellow musician on the bandstand or friends who came to a show, commented on how much they liked the kit. And that was before I had played a note.

The wavy grain structure of the spotted gum shells is prominent, but the natural satin finish keeps the overall vibe subdued and subtle. Each drum also features a special badge that consists of thirty-one individual wood pieces carved from seventeen different species of timber. It's a very classy touch, and one you won't likely find on any mass-produced drumset.

All of the tension rods feature leather/steel/leather washers, which are said to allow for smooth tuning adjustments while also acting as shock absorbers to minimize detuning. During

our testing, none of the tension rods on the toms backed out, and only after about fifteen minutes of very loud rimshots did the two lugs closest to the impact point require a few turns to bring the drum back up to pitch.

### THE PLAYING EXPERIENCE

I checked out the spotted gum drumset on two very different gigs: an acoustic-based club date at a local brewpub where the drums were unmiked, and a loud outdoor festival with a roots-rock, Wallflowers-type band. In both situations, the drums performed above and beyond my expectations.

First off, these are some of the loudest wood-shell drums I've ever played, which allowed me to play lighter and more relaxed than usual, especially at the unmiked club date. During the first set, I even had to muffle the snare and toms with a set of Killer Rings in order to keep them from filling out the room *too* much. Interestingly, this extra volume didn't come at the expense of tone and warmth. Yes, the drums were loud. But they were also very musical, combining a strong bass punch, a rich midrange presence, and a singing resonance that you don't usually hear unless drums are close-miked and pumped through a PA.

The larger toms (12" and 16") had unbelievable low-end response that was deeper and fuller than what I've heard with other kits. I used these two drums at the loud outdoor festival. It took only a couple hits on the toms during soundcheck for the bandleader to look around and say with a smile, "That's the sound!" The smaller toms (10" and 14") were equally impressive, with a wide tuning range and an unbelievably clean tone that would make fusion great Dave Weckl proud. Like the toms, the 22" kick drum had a pre-EQ'ed quality, with a strong and punchy attack plus a big low-end thump that didn't have too much "woof." This drum sounded great with and without muffling and reminded me of what you hear on a lot of modern country recordings.

To my ears, the only low point in Brady's spotted gum kit was the matching 10-lug 8x14 snare. It wasn't a bad-sounding instrument—it

was very sensitive and articulate and had a thick, woody tone with a lot of midrange bite—it just didn't have that same extra-special mojo that oozed from the toms and kick. Plus it had the unenviable task of trying to compete with two *other* Brady snares that were downright ruthless.

### KOSAKA AND WANDOO BLOCK SNARES

Brady's block-constructed snares have a unique sound that's noticeably drier and denser than that of traditional ply drums. The 6½x14 Kosaka block is made from condensed bamboo, which, Brady says, has a higher pitch that is "loud and cutting, without being too abrasive." I used this drum at the acoustic club date, and it proved to be a great all-around snare for back-beat-based songs. It sounded best tuned medium tight, where it let out a chunky "crack" with every rimshot. The 10-lug Kosaka sounded particularly satisfying on punchy pocket grooves, like Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" (which we were requested to play at the end of the night). I ended up having to muffle the Kosaka with three pieces of rolled-up tape, not to dampen overtones but to bring down the drum's overall volume. Like the spotted gum, the Kosaka was *loud*.

As much as I loved the spotted gum kick and toms and the Kosaka block snare, the 7x12 wandoo block was the standout, both for me and for several other drummers who got a chance to play it. Despite its diminutive size, this little drum sounded much fuller than I expected, plus it had all the snap, crackle, and pop you'd need to make a track spring to life. The wandoo was also very articulate and sensitive at all dynamics. Even super-soft ghost notes spoke with a strong, full voice that had a lot of shell sound in the tone. This drum also recorded beautifully and didn't require any muffling to keep it focused. After spending a couple weeks with this special drum, I don't think any serious snare collection could be complete without one. For pricing, contact your nearest Brady dealer.

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