

on either hand. The best part was that there was hardly a noticeable difference between the sounds of the playing surfaces. Made of poplar and slightly larger than the Tone cajon, the Rumba also appeared to have slightly thicker structural sides. Because of this, the bass tones were far deeper than the Tone's, and the open tones were significantly high pitched. The large separation between the two tones even allowed me to avoid switching to darbuka for a short point of a song that called for it. The slap pad in this case was quite useful in producing a cascara pattern while still allowing me to cover other parts between them. At one point, I had the cascara going with a bass drum to match the bass player's tumbao and a rumba clave on my left foot with a pedal – all tones sounding true to form.

BUZZ. With less sustain than the other boxes, the Snare had tones more along the lines of a traditional Peruvian string cajon. Far from traditional, however, is the method used to achieve the snare sound. On the cajon's top panel were two large-headed Phillips screws. Beneath this

panel were two groups of snare wires identical to those used on a snare drum. Snare tension was adjustable via the Phillips screws – in effect controlling how much “snare” was added to the sound. The buzz could be cranked up to what sounded like a swarm of bees. At no tension, however, did the buzz sound as subtle and traditional as a string cajon's, but it sure served its purpose. Not only did this system project the snare effect better than a string set up, but it also allowed me to get a Caixa-like sound in one of our Brazilian Batucada numbers.

A NEW ANGLE. Of the four boxes, my favorite by leaps and bounds was the Wedge, affectionately named for its nontraditional but ergonomic shape. The playing surface is angled toward the player, minimizing the amount of lean needed to reach the sweet spot of the bass tones. For comfort, I found myself playing this drum for the majority of the two and a half hour gig. The largest of the four drums, the Wedge is also huge in sound, producing tonal extremities so spread apart that many audience members were looking

for a drum set on stage. My favorite design feature was the placement of the slap pads in the corners where you would normally slap. Though they were fixed to the playing surface, they didn't appear to take away from the resonance of the bass and open tones. Also, the design of the slap pads was terribly forgiving to technique. The bass and snare parts spoke perfectly no matter how poorly I may have struck the slap pad. The slap pads were also quite sensitive: A soft and deliberate stroke produced a subtle tone perfect for mimicking the subdivision of a closed hi-hat, while a strong, quick slap gave a nice, full backbeat. The Wedge also had a second, smaller sound hole to allow for mike placement without the drum changing pitch from sound-hole obstruction. No doubt, this is the ultimate cajon for today's drum-set cajonero.

VERDICT. It would be a challenge to find a musical situation in which a Kotz couldn't out duel the average box. Once you get a hold of a Kotz cajon, you'll soon find yourself wishing – just as I did – that you had four more arms.



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