

Time Capsule

By Donn Bennett

1930

1940

1950

1960

1966

1970

1980

1990

2000



Buddy Rich's 1966 Fibes Fiberglass Set

In 1962, Bob Grauso was the drummer for Connie Francis, one of the top-selling female pop artists of all time. When he wasn't on the bandstand, Grauso would experiment with new shell materials to try to make a better sounding snare drum. At the suggestion of legendary drummer and educator Sonny Igoe, Grauso made a fiberglass shell snare drum, and found that it produced a very brilliant, crisp sound.

Partnering with John Morena, an aspiring chemical engineer and former drummer, Grauso founded the Fibes Drum Company in 1965, and began producing the world's first fiberglass drums. The next year Grauso met Buddy Rich and persuaded him to try one of his snares. Rich loved the drum and was soon enlisted as an endorser — a major marketing coup for a company that was still less than a year old. Rich went on to play this Fibes set from 1966 through '67. (Search for "Buddy Rich, A Little Trane" on YouTube to see the set in action.)

The kit consists of a 24" x 14" bass drum, 13" x 9" mounted tom, two 16" x 16" floor toms, and a 14" x 5.5" snare drum, all made of fiberglass

wrapped in a chrome finish. Rich didn't like the stock mounting hardware Fibes offered at the time, though, and asked for the bass drum to be fitted with spurs and cymbal mounts made by Meazzi, a small Italian drum manufacturer, as well as a Walberg & Auge tom mount.

Grauso and his partners at Fibes weren't very happy about making the hardware change. "We didn't want to put a competitor's hardware on our drums, but what Buddy wants, Buddy gets," he told me, many years later. "Ultimately, it was a small price to pay for having the world's greatest drummer play our drums."

Rich dropped his Fibes endorsement in 1967, and the fiberglass kit faded from memory until it eventually resurfaced at the legendary St. Louis drum shop Drum Headquarters in 2002. Grauso was helpful in authenticating it at the time. "The customized hardware made it very easy to identify," he says. "It was the only set we ever made like this." It wasn't pristine, however — the mounted tom and one of the floor toms had gotten lost somewhere along the line, and had been replaced with identical drums from the same era.

According to legend, Rich parted with his infamous acrylic kit and ended his Fibes endorsement deal in one fell swoop. Reportedly, a cocktail waitress in Atlantic City approached the drummer after a show in 1967. She gushed about how her son idolized Rich, owned all his records, and dreamed of being a drummer like him someday.

Buddy's response was brief: "Oh yeah? You think he'd like those drums? Take them!" This apparently spontaneous act of generosity marked an end of Rich's Fibes endorsement, although he never stopped playing a Fibes fiberglass snare throughout the rest of his career, no matter what other brands he endorsed. It's been said that whenever an irritated artist rep would complain that he wasn't playing one of their snare drums, Buddy would reply, "When you can make a snare drum like Fibes, I'll use it!"

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