



## Elvin Jones' 1990s Yamaha Maple Custom

**E**lvin Jones was one of the most influential, inspirational, and beloved jazz musicians of all time. Few artists have touched the world as deeply as Jones. Shortly after he passed in 2004, I got a call from his trusted friend Gregg Keplinger. Jones' wife needed help cataloging his huge collection of drums and preparing it for sale and he suggested I could help. I caught the next flight to New York and by the next morning I was standing in Jones' fabled "downstairs apartment," a second apartment in his Manhattan building where he kept all his drums.

A drum collector's dream.

Virtually every drum, cymbal, stick, and brush he'd ever used over the past five decades was piled floor to ceiling in every room. We spent the next several days cataloging the huge collection. I felt like an archaeologist uncovering treasure beneath the pyramids. Every case we opened produced amazing discoveries. Drums from Gretsch, Tama, Camco, and Yamaha. Huge cases of cymbals loaded with over 100 cymbals from Zildjian and

Istanbul including Jones' prized old Turkish K's. Boxes of used sticks and brushes. Trunks full of his stage clothes. I was given the opportunity to purchase the entire collection and jumped on it. It took over five years to negotiate the sale and transport everything across the country to Seattle, where much of the collection still remains.

The greatest treasure to come from this whole experience has been the relationships I've developed surrounding these drums. I've met countless Elvin fans, including many of the world's most notable drummers, all eager to share their admiration for Jones and acquire a piece of his legacy. The most significant of these relationships is the friendship I developed with Jones' wife, Keiko, an extremely powerful, sharp, and strong woman who dedicated her life to her husband and his music. She was his wife, manager, and drum tech. She managed every detail of Jones' life, allowing him to focus his entire genius on playing music. Because she was so deeply involved in his career, she was extremely knowledgeable

about his drums and invaluable in recalling their history.

One of the many sets we acquired was this Yamaha Maple Custom. One of four identical sets Jones required for his globe-trotting itinerary — one each for East Coast, West Coast, Europe, and his home in New York. Jones began his relationship with Yamaha in the early 1990s and maintained it for the remainder of his life. The set consists of an 18" x 18" bass with "Elvin Jones Jazz Machine" logo head, 12" x 8", 13" x 9" toms, 16" x 16", 18" x 18" floor toms, and a 14" x 5" snare. "ELVIN JONES" is engraved in the badges on the snare, bass, and floor toms. The cymbals are all Zildjian K's. The drums are finished in Jones' signature gold sparkle "champagne" finish with all gold lugs. These were the drums he played from the mid-1990s until the day he passed.

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*Donn Bennett is a world-renowned collector and dealer of rare and vintage drums. His collection is on display at Donn Bennett Drum Studio in Bellevue, Washington.*

Elvin Jones Photograph: LEE WHITEMAN

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