

LUDWIG

VISTALITE JASON BONHAM ZEP SET

by David Ciauro

On December 10, 2007, Led Zeppelin reunited at London's O2 arena as part of the Ahmet Ertegun Education Fund benefit. News of the highly anticipated reunion caused absolute fan hysteria and a media frenzy. Jason Bonham proudly took the stage in honor of his father, John, paying tribute by debuting a revamped Ludwig Vistalite kit, akin to the amber Vistalites made famous by Bonzo in the classic Zeppelin performance film, *The Song Remains the Same*. The new kit sported some badass upgrades that Bonham and Ludwig were so stoked about that the company decided to offer the setup in a limited run of one hundred. We were lucky enough to get our hands on one before they were all snatched up.

The most obvious modifications Bonham made to the drums are the black powder-coated hardware and the yellow shells. Black and yellow naturally form a vivid combo, but the powder coating adds another dimension of contrast that makes the drums really pop. Although all the hoops and Imperial lugs are black powder-coated, per Jason's request, the swivel nuts and tension rods are black nickel-plated. The front head of the massive 26" kick displays the image of the ill-fated Hindenburg that graces the cover of Led Zeppelin's debut album. Whether intentional or not, to me the depiction of an album cover, rather than John Bonham's symbol of three interlocking circles, represents Led Zeppelin as a whole—and that's befitting considering the event for which the kit was made.

CHANNELING BONHAM

Thanks to Jeff Ocheltree's *Trust Your Ears* DVD, anyone can discover how John Bonham tuned his drums. But the mystique surrounding Bonzo's sound goes well beyond tuning. It's a unity of his touch, his tuning, and the drums themselves. I'm further grateful to YouTube for allowing me the chance to hear snippets of the reunion show where I could check out how Jason tuned *his* kit. From what I

could gather from the cell-phone audio of those videos, he stayed pretty true to his father's tuning method: toms, floor, and kick tuned higher on the resonant heads than you'd expect, with the batter heads slightly lower to maximize attack, fullness, and projection.

Realizing this might be the only chance I'd ever have to come close to achieving "the Bonham sound," I followed suit, and what an amazing feeling it was. So rarely can you play along to some of your favorite songs and have your drums sound *exactly* like the record.

The 14x26 kick, with no port in the graphic head and just one felt strip on the clear Ludwig Weather Master Silver Dot batter head for added focus, yielded a huge sound with tons of attack and a gut-rumbling punch. Experimenting with different foot placements on the kick pedal, I found I could control an array of sounds and dynamics. This is something you just can't experience when you stuff a kick drum full of pillows.

I kept the toms and floors wide open and thoroughly enjoyed the ample attack that was emphasized by the clear Silver Dot batter heads. For big drums, these were very responsive, which gave me the freedom to express and control a full range of rich tones. Throughout my testing, I found that I was playing significantly lighter than usual but getting twice the volume. Sound burst off the batter heads, especially with the kick. When I played the drums with full force, they still offered as much tone as they did attack. But you don't need to bash them to get a big reaction. In a live setting, this helped me conserve energy.

The 6 1/2x14 Supra-Phonic snare was simply amazing. With all due respect to the various other snares I've reviewed, my heart will always belong to the Supra-Phonic. I tuned the snare side very high and made sure to keep the snares from choking so they remained sensitive and responsive enough to articulate every ghost note. The batter head was also fairly taut without feeling choked, and the result was the perfect amount of

depth and an incredible warmth—a timeless sound.

Outfitting the snare with black hardware gives the kit a nice uniform look, and considering only a hundred kits will be made, this snare is sure to be a rare standout among other Supra-Phonics.

WHOLE LOTTA LOUD

Hands down, this is the loudest kit I've ever played. To support this statement, I offer the following information. My practice studio is fairly soundproof, stand fifteen feet outside it, and a drumset sounds about as loud as the volume of a TV from two rooms away. Before any neighbors, my wife and daughter are the closest victims in proximity, and in the three years I've had this studio, not once have I been told that my drums—or even a 2 A.M. band rehearsal—have awoken either my wife or child. Not only did this kit shake my daughter awake, but my wife could tell what Zeppelin song I was jamming to. And she was on the opposite side of the house, about a hundred feet from the studio in my detached garage.

Grasping the sheer power of the kit, I found I could bring it to only one gig, where my band was in a large room with a massive PA system. That night, the kit stole the show. Miked up, the drums just enveloped the room and drew nothing but compliments from the band, the soundman, and friends in the audience. I spent a lot of time between sets talking to people about the kit, and there was a common theme: awesome look, awesome sound. Throughout the night, after every third song or so, I couldn't help but tear into one of Bonham's famed grooves. Perhaps not the most professional move on my part, but hey, *carpe diem*, right?

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

John Bonham and the Ludwig name are synonymous. Together they achieved a sound that is still both coveted and elusive. Jason Bonham made this kit his own without messing with the mojo of his father's famed Vistalites, bringing the Bonham-Ludwig legacy into a new era. His personal aesthetic details make for one phenomenal-looking kit that brings the classic Zeppelin sound into a modern age. To make each of these kits even more collectible, the *Led Zeppelin* graphic heads will be signed by Jason personally. List price: \$5,348.

ludwig-drums.com



Ian Travis

KEEPING IT REAL

The sizes of Jason Bonham's Vistalites remain true to Ludwig's "Zep Set" configuration: a 14x26 kick, a 10x14 rack tom, 16x16 and 16x18 floor toms, and a 6 1/2x14 Supra-Phonic LM402 snare. The acrylic shells are the standard 1/4" thickness, with reinforced seams, and are outfitted with classic blue/olive badges.