

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Bopworks Drumsticks and Brushes

Faithful reproductions of classic models as well as contemporary designs with a vintage twist.

Bopworks is an Austin, Texas-based company that started in 2006 with an objective to provide accurate reproductions of the thin sticks used by top jazz drummers in the 1950s and '60s. There's the pencil-thin Birdland and more moderately sized West Coast and '40s Swing models, as well as signature Mel Lewis 7D and Art Blakey 8D sticks. The Bopworks catalog was expanded in 2017 to include two thicker models (Memphis R&B and Rhythm & Groovz) and a pair of vintage-style Spread-Lok wire brushes. We were sent a sample of each to review.

The Originals

The thinnest Bopworks stick is the .500"x15.3125" Birdland model. According to company owner Chris Bennett, this is an exact duplicate of a stick from the 1960s. It has a long taper and a small, elongated oval tip. This stick is meant for players who require a super-light stick that won't produce a ton of overtones on cymbals. Despite its diminutive dimensions, the Birdland felt balanced and had very nice rebound. It's incredibly articulate; I could use it on a thin 16" crash and achieve clean, clear ride patterns with minimal buildup. Drum hits, rimshots, and rimclicks sound a bit thinner than they do with more modern-sized sticks. But when it comes to dynamic control, I've not come across a stick that allows me to be more expressive at super-low levels.

The Mel Lewis 7D is a bit shorter than the Birdland (15.125") but is thicker (.540"). It's an exact recreation of the big band great's signature stick from the '60s. The taper is shorter than on the

Birdland, and the tip has a teardrop shape. This is another great option for situations where you need controlled cymbal wash, but it provides a bit more fullness from drums and crashes. The short length increases quickness without adversely affecting rebound and helps the stick produce more articulate cymbal tones.

The West Coast stick, which is inspired by models used by prominent jazz drummers on the California cool jazz scene during the 1950s, measures .520"x15.8125", so it's longer than the Birdland and Mel Lewis 7D but has a diameter that's between them. Featuring a long taper and an oval tip that's slightly integrated into the shoulder of the stick, the West Coast model had the most familiar sound, feel, and rebound when compared to a standard 7A. But the longer taper gave it quicker rebound and a lighter feel. Of all the models, this would be my go-to for small-group jazz or other quieter situations.

The '40s Swing Classic is the second thinnest in the catalog (.515") but has a standard 16" length. This stick, which features a triangular tip and an extra-long taper, is a recreation of one that was available in the 1940s, at the height of the big band era. The rebound is enhanced, but the stick has a bit more reach and forward throw. The larger tip produces bigger drum and cymbal sounds when struck flat, but the articulation increases to a pinpoint if you strike at more extreme angles.

The Art Blakey 8D mirrors the model that the hard-bop great used in the 1960s. It's .530"x16", which is similar to most contemporary 5A sticks, but it has an arrowhead tip and a longer taper. Blakey was known for having a big, earthy tone and an intense buzz roll, and



Birdland



Mel Lewis



West Coast



40's Swing



Art Blakey



Memphis R&B



Rhythm & Groovz

these sticks are designed to achieve those sounds. They produce a fairly wide cymbal sound but still have excellent articulation. The large arrowhead tip elicits full tom tones and snare buzzes. The long taper increases rebound for more effortless rolls.

Memphis R&B and Rhythm & Groovz Sticks, Spread-Lok Brushes

The new Memphis R&B model measures .570"x16", which is slightly thicker than a standard 5A. But the taper on this stick is longer than what's typically used, and the tip is thinner and more smoothly contoured from the shoulder. The result is a nimble stick that feels hefty in the hand but produces clean, balanced cymbal sounds and has great rebound. For 5A players who need an alternative that provides more bounce, clarity, and control, this is an excellent choice.

The Rhythm & Groovz drumstick has a 5B-style grip (.590") and extended length (16.25"), but the taper extends 7" and ends with a fairly small bullet-shaped tip. The result is a large-feeling stick that has exceptional rebound, response, and clarity. This would be the

ideal model for players who prefer big sticks but need to keep the cymbal wash and drum volume controlled.

Spread-Lok brushes have a textured-black handle and can be adjusted for a 2" or 4" spread depending on how far in the pull rod is extended. The wires are .012-gauge, which is the same size used on brushes in the '50s and '60s. These are very simple but sturdy brushes that have a light, wispy feel and produce a full, rich sound. The wires stay locked into place regardless of whether the pull rod is only partially pushed in for the 2" spread or all the way in for the 4" spread. The textured grip helps prevent the brushes from slipping out of the fulcrum, which made for a very comfortable, relaxed playing experience. The 2" spread was great for playing more articulate patterns, like samba or up-tempo swing, while the 4" spread produced lush sweeps. Every drummer needs a pair of versatile, dependable brushes, and the Spread-Loks fit the bill. The brushes are currently available via bopworks.net for \$23.99. The Blakey and Lewis signature sticks go for \$13.75, and the other models are \$11.99.

Michael Dawson

