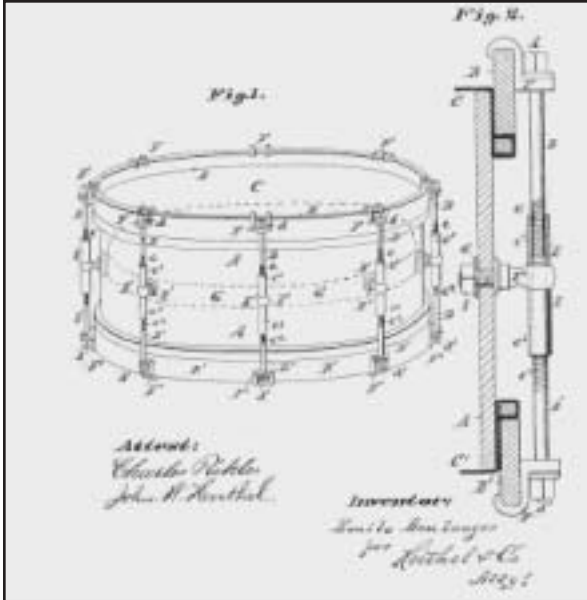




The Black Jewel

By Tim Cosimo



Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

In our vintage drum community beauty runs around three to seven inches deep and only comes in three brands; Ludwig, Leedy, & Slingerland right? Well almost, allow me to introduce to you the newest, or should I say quite possibly the oldest Black Beauty style drum of them all – It's of mysterious origin but most likely a Duplex and we will call it a "Black Jewel" as it is engraved on one of the drums and date it circa mid-late teens to early twenties.

If you've never seen or heard of this drum before, you're not alone as there are only four Black Jewels known to exist to date and these are, to my knowledge, the first pictures of them to be published. I only became aware of them myself when I emailed a picture to John Aldridge of an unusual drum I purchased. His reply, "Good news! You're only the third person I know to own a drum like this. It is extremely rare. I would bet my hat that's a Duplex Black Jewel". Suddenly I felt as though I was Indiana Jones and I just uncovered buried treasure. I was so intrigued by the fact that Duplex may have made a Black Beauty style drum, that I had to know more. I emailed drum historians, searched the internet, and researched drum patents and this is what I found out. Zip! The literature is more illusive than the Jewel itself and no one has written any books on the Duplex Drum Co. There are several impressive patents by this innovative Early American Drum Co but only the lugs can be traced to the Jewel. The lugs were patented by Emile Boulanger founder of the Duplex Drum Co. in 1883... one small step for drummers, one giant leap for drum builders.

The Black Jewels are unique in style and design, each with its own variation in hardware and engraving pattern. This one for example, has an engraving pattern that seems to resemble a gleaming jewel or diamond, which is different from the other three and the plating on its hardware is also different among all four. It has a copper shell, what looks to be like gold plated hard-

ware, eight single post double tension rods, no butt plate and a vent hole cleverly placed in the center of the engraving. The throw is stamped Pat. Pending and pivots away and towards the shell turning the snares off and on. All of the Jewels have engraved copper shells, duplex lugs, and the same Pat. Pending Strainer.

In my attempt to date these drums, I researched all the strainer patents and could not find a Duplex patent similar to it. I did, however, find a patent of a remarkably similar strainer issued to T. Wilson of Chicago, IL assignor to the Wilson-Jacobs Drum Manufacturing Company. The patent was originally applied for in Dec. 1913 but not issued until Jan 1918. I've also seen this strainer used on a Victor/Sherman & Clay Drum and a Wurlitzer Drum.

Given the fact that the strainers are all patent pending and going by the only documented evidence of this strainer dates these drums around circa 1913-18 which would make them the first American Black Beauty style drums, setting the stage for the others to follow. It wouldn't be until 1919 before Ludwig introduced it's 6 lug, Scroll pattern "Inspiration Model".

The idea that Duplex may have made the Black Jewel and a Spirit of St. Louis in a stipple gold finish, which I also own, both high end main stream fancy finishes makes you wonder what else might be out there? Only time will tell.



Above - Tim Cosimo's Black Jewel

From a collectors point of view I've always wanted a Black Beauty and a Stipple gold but I never dreamed they would have been made by Duplex! Or, for that matter made by someone other than Ludwig, Leedy or Slingerland. This has added a whole new dimension to my hobby.

From a players point of view, I doubt that this copper shell drum would sound as good as a two piece heavy brass shell beauty, but I will never know because I'm too afraid I might break something. I'm told, however, it's a great sounding drum.

While I look at a Black Beauty as a work of art, some drummers love them just for their sound, so in the vintage drum world, I guess, beauties are in the eyes and/or ears of their beholders.

I would like to thank Mike Curotto for the great pictures of his three Black Jewels and John Aldridge for his encyclopedia of drum knowledge and willingness to share it and Vintage Drummer Magazine for the opportunity to share it with you.

If someone has more information on this drum or other fancy finish Duplex drums and would like to share please email me at kconthelake@hotmail.com or call (315) 636-7216.

Below - Mike Curotto's Black Jewels

