



**TAMA**<sup>®</sup>

THE HISTORY OF TAMA DRUMS 1965-2020

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1965-2020

**TAMA**

# **A History of TAMA**

**The Story Behind the Strongest Name in Drums**

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Part

**1**

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**THE BEGINNINGS OF  
PERCUSSION PRODUCTION**

(1955-1973)

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## **A CHANCE ENCOUNTER: Why Hoshino Gakki (Gakki=Musical Instruments) Got into Drum Manufacturing**

After World War II, Hoshino Gakki began rebuilding not only its domestic business, but also looked to expand their business overseas. Gradually, there was a major shift from a domestic focus, to an export business targeting the greater world market. When it came to musical instruments, demand did not really spike until the 1960s, but something happened a few years earlier, in 1955, that changed Hoshino's future outlook. Quite suddenly, a company from Hong Kong reached out to Hoshino looking to purchase a number of jazz drum sets. At the time, Hoshino had very little knowledge of percussion, outside of traditional Japanese Taiko and snare drums for marching bands. Hoshino had to figure out how to source the right products for the Hong Kong-based company. So, Hoshino set out to find a suitable manufacturer.

Back then, drum heads were made of cow hides or goat skin through a process that involved placing water-soaked animal hides on hoops and letting them dry in the shade. However, this process made producing perfectly round drum heads difficult, since untanned drum heads have an uneven density. Years later, REMO® replaced animal hides with synthetic drum heads, revolutionizing drum manufacturing.

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## **OUTSOURCED DRUM PRODUCTION AND EXPORTING**

Entering the 1960s, the demand for musical instruments shifted, reflecting the changes in popular music of the time. There was a move away from swing, jazz, and Hawaiian music towards rock and roll. As the number of people playing music increased, there was a massive increase in the demand for drum sets. In the early 1960s, Hoshino tried dealing with this by outsourcing production, but ultimately struggled to maintain product quality due to the inconsistent standards of the builders. These challenges are what ultimately drove Hoshino to take the plunge into its own drum production.

## **FOUNDING OF TAMA SEISAKUSHO (FACTORY) AND THE BEGINNING OF IN-HOUSE DRUM MANUFACTURING**

In 1962, Hoshino founded TAMA Seisakusho, a company-owned manufacturing plant. At first, only electric guitars and amplifiers were produced there due to the electric guitar craze in Japan, caused by the success of a band called The Ventures. Eventually, the craze subsided and in 1966, the TAMA factory significantly reduced its guitar and amplifier production. This opened the door to focus primarily on full-scale percussion manufacturing. The company thoroughly read and



### **ORIGINS OF THE NAME, TAMA**

The name, "TAMA" comes from Tama Hoshino, the wife of the company's first president, Yoshitaro Hoshino. Tama Hoshino handled all of the accounting for Hoshino Gakki, and she played an important management role during the early, prewar days of the company. Because of her importance to the company, the new factory was named in her honor.

studied catalogs of American manufacturers, purchased samples, and tried to figure out how to produce high-quality drums equal to or better than the samples. This led to weeks and months of trial and error testing. This period is considered to be the beginning of the modern history of TAMA drums.

## THE BEGINNING OF MASS PRODUCTION

In the late 1960s, music was becoming a more essential part of people's lives, and demand for musical instruments increased sharply. Orders for new drum sets were increasing, but there was a major obstacle preventing TAMA from ramping up production, the bass drum hoops. Back then, bass drum hoops were all made from wood, and Hoshino's supplier was a small, family-owned carpentry shop. They simply didn't have the capacity to meet the needs of Hoshino's large-scale production plans. Out of this predicament, came the idea to try metal hoops instead. It was thought a company that produced bicycle rims should easily be able to adjust their manufacturing to produce metal bass drum hoops instead. The theory proved out and shortly thereafter, Hoshino's drum division applied for its very first patent on metal bass drum hoops. This innovation paved the way for full-fledged mass drum production at the TAMA Seisakusho factory.



Tama Seisakusho 1970

## GETTING INTO THE DRUM STICK BUSINESS

During this period, Japan became the center of the world for OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) musical instrument production. Requests of all kinds flooded into Hoshino from all over the United States, the largest consumer economy in the world. In 1961, PRO-MARK™ requested that Hoshino produce “Japanese oak” drum sticks. The company quickly turned to one of its subcontractors, Asano, a woodworking shop already producing xylophone mallets for Hoshino. Upon receiving the request from PRO-MARK™, Hoshino asked Asano about having them help with drum stick production. Asano was willing, but the most challenging issue was how to obtain enough oak to satisfy demand. A search ensued, and a suitable wholesaler was located in Ibaragi Prefecture. This led to Hoshino becoming the soul provider of PRO-MARK™’s very first oak series drum sticks. Soon after, Hoshino created its own line of Oak drum sticks and began exporting them under their “Star” brand. Asano’s hard work and dedication helped Hoshino through numerous challenges, and to this day, Asano remains a trusted and loyal partner in Hoshino’s stick business.



### MIDGET DRUMS

TAMA's very first mass-produced kit was called the “Midget Drum Set.” Initially, it was a prototype of a miniature drum set for children, produced for a toy wholesaler in the United States. However, after also marketing the drum set to musical instrument businesses, the Midget Drum Set became a huge hit in the United States. Shortly thereafter, Hoshino was overrun with new orders from a number of big catalog merchants, one being Montgomery Ward. This led to tens of thousands of kits being sold in the United States!

## THE FOUNDATION OF HOSHINO'S DRUM PRODUCTION (1965-1972)

1965 was an exciting time for the company. Hoshino experienced a huge momentum boost in technological developments and advances in the manufacturing of metal parts. Considered a “Golden Age” for Hoshino’s engineers, they developed one successful idea after another, which led to unprecedented improvements in product quality. The best example of this may be the invention of a patented lug design. The lug utilized a buffer material that was inserted in the spring to reduce unwanted vibration and noise. The process that led to this revolutionary product became the basis of Hoshino’s **“Create something original”** philosophy.

The engineers were encouraged to think outside the box and to advance and improve the design of the drums and hardware. The business flourished as a result.

It was also during this time the company began releasing products under the pre-war brand name “Star,” a name that’s still synonymous with Hoshino’s modern drum products. This is because even after the drum division was rebranded as TAMA, Hoshino chose to keep the “Star” in all of the branding and marketing. All of TAMA’s current drum series still feature “Star” in their name in some form.



### BONGOS/TAMBOURINES

The successful entry into bongo and tambourine production came at a very important time for the company. These products were highly authentic and utilized imported calf skin from Pakistan. Additionally, Masao Hoshino had perfected a new automated process which nailed the heads to the tambourines. It was a significant breakthrough that further increased Hoshino’s production capacity.

## SEEKING A PARTNER FOR METAL PARTS

For production to continue at the TAMA factory, valuable partnerships needed to be maintained with factories that produced critically important metal components. The TAMA factory was located in Owariasahi City, Aichi Prefecture, an area where many auto parts manufacturers operated. Ena Metal Industries was also located in this area and became one of Hoshino's most important business partners. As it turns out, metal drum components and auto parts manufacturing share some similarities. This partnership came at a critical time when Hoshino was preparing for the launch of their rebranded TAMA Drums.

The development of some incredibly successful die-cast parts (drum lugs, tom brackets and drum pedals) would not have been possible without Ena Metal Industries, who contributed greatly to TAMA's growth and success during this period.

## THE END OF THE "STAR" BRAND

Hoshino's drum business and the "Star" brand were introduced in 1965 and enjoyed steady growth and success in the years that followed. Star had become a recognized and respected brand, but



Star Drums 1960s

in the early 1970s, when the business was at its peak, something dramatic happened known as the 1971 “Nixon Shock.” The stable growth of the world’s economy had been ensured by the Bretton Woods system; however, then U.S. President Richard Nixon declared the end of the gold standard, and as a result, the international currency exchange rates switched from fixed to variable.

This had a major impact on how global business was conducted and by 1973, one US dollar, which had been fixed at a value of 360 yen, fell to a low of 280 yen. This meant Hoshino had to raise export prices 20% to 30% in order to maintain acceptable profit margins. Not surprisingly, the export business suffered greatly. Part of the appeal of “Star” overseas was that the drum sets were good quality, but also affordable. The stronger yen, coupled with soaring foreign market prices, led to a sharp decline in Hoshino’s sales in 1973.

Operations became extremely challenging and the company would be forced to make some difficult decisions regarding future manufacturing plans. It was clear that only companies with original products that offered great value would make it through this challenging period. Hoshino’s executives engaged in serious discussions that would have long lasting impacts on the future of Hoshino’s drum division.

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Part

**2**

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**Introduction of  
the TAMA Brand and  
Its Early Growth Period**

(1974-1984)

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## **TRANSITION FROM THE 60s TO THE 70s: CHANGING TIMES**

The 1960's brought a full-fledged period of post-World War II rejuvenation and renewal, while the 1970s were a period of innovation and change. The United States was now a global power, and people were enjoying new levels of wealth and prosperity, which ultimately led to a dramatic increase in global consumption. Behind the scenes, Japan, "the world's manufacturer," was exporting massive amounts of goods to the rest of the world. However, the Nixon Shock of 1971 turned the world economy upside down. Japan's manufacturers had to endure a major paradigm shift: "from quantity to quality," "from low prices to product value."

At this time, most of Hoshino's drum business was dependent on OEM production for U.S. wholesalers. The U.S. drum market dynamic consisted of high-quality, highly valued American brands and more affordable OEM instruments manufactured in Japan. However, due to the changes in exchange rates, the Japanese-made

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drums lost their price advantage and had trouble staying competitive. Meanwhile, music trends started to experience a dramatic shift. The jazz and swing styles of the 50's gave way to the rise of rock. From there, rock branched out into other sub-genres, which produced numerous stars in the music industry.

The difficult economic situation, combined with shifting trends in music, brought about drastic change at the TAMA factory. This led to the eventual creation of the “TAMA” brand as it's known today.

## **SHIFT FROM TAMA SEISAKUSHO INC. TO HOSHINO GAKKI MANUFACTURING CO., LTD.**

The TAMA Factory, founded in 1962, achieved remarkable growth beginning in 1966. Hoshino's sales increased steady until the Nixon Shock put the company in a very tenuous situation. This challenging environment ultimately led Hoshino to make a major course change, opting to discontinue numerous product lines, including Star Drums as well as their OEM production.

These changes happened in 1974 in preparation for the launch of the new “TAMA” brand. It was a major step Hoshino took as they were getting ready to enter an extremely competitive drum market. The following year, Hoshino also reshaped its executive board in order to



“TAMA” was originally used as the name of Hoshino's drum production facility, but after much discussion among company leadership, it was chosen for the name of the new drum brand. It was chosen because it was simple, but not common enough overseas that it would be difficult to register. Sure enough, the registration sailed through, and TAMA drums was set to make its world debut.

have the right people in place to execute the plans for this transitional period. The official company name was changed from TAMA Seisakusho to Hoshino Gakki Seizo (Hoshino Gakki Mfg. Co., Ltd.) By 1976, the company was experiencing major success with its innovative new TAMA drum stands. This helped spark a major turnaround and propelled Hoshino into the very prosperous 1980's.

## TITAN BOOM CYMBAL STANDS

The turn around and recovery of Hoshino's drum business was due in large part to the development of the TITAN series stands. The TITAN cymbal stands garnered attention for their "double-braced legs" and the first ever "boom arm" on a cymbal stand.

Today, double-braced legs are the industry standard, but they were a major breakthrough at the time. Some U.S. manufacturers were using them on their drum thrones, but no one had yet thought to include them on cymbal stands. The continued prevalence of rock music caused a serious spike in the demand for sturdier hardware that offered better stability. Recognizing this problem, TAMA responded promptly and released double-braced, tripod cymbal stands. They also featured another revolutionary innovation: the boom arm, the inspiration for which came during a trip to the United States.



TITAN Series Hardware

Company representatives were visiting a Sam Ash store in Long Island, New York and heard something interesting from one of the employees. They explained many people were buying boom arms from mic stands and duct taping them to cymbal stands in order to move their cymbals closer while playing. The information learned on this trip directly led to the development of the very first boom cymbal stands in the world, THE TITAN series!

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH KATO MANUFACTURING FOR TITAN PRODUCTION**

During the Star Drums era, Hoshino was dependent on third party manufacturers for hardware. So, it became essential to have trusted subcontractors like Ena Metal Industries. This experience demonstrated it was not only quality products that made for a great partnership, but also synergy and compatibility between the two organizations. It was extremely important for both businesses to share the same mentality and ideals in order to have the partnership flourish. TAMA would require the same kind of partnership that Star drums had for its hardware production. Ultimately, the perfect match was found in Kato Manufacturing – a small, family-owned factory specializing in the production of metal parts.

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Kato Manufacturing focused intensely on continually improving their manufacturing process, which enabled them to provide Hoshino with super high-quality stands, that were also cost effective.

The slogan, “The Strongest Name in Drums,” originated with the TITAN stands, whose production was greatly supported by Kato’s enthusiastic attitude towards manufacturing and their devotion to the partnership.

## **GAINING GROUND ON THE AMERICAN BRANDS**

From the 1950s to the beginning of 1970, the high-end drum market was dominated by America’s old renowned brands. However, with music trends shifting from jazz to rock, there was a major need for new, inventive drum products. Professional drummers now looked for stands and hardware that would endure this new, heavier playing style. The changing musical landscape created a prime opportunity for a new brand like TAMA.

While the American brands were taking time to adjust to these changes, TAMA immediately attacking the demand for heavy duty hardware. This was the beginning of TAMA’s “Hardware First” policy. TAMA’s primary reason for focusing on hardware first, was that it was easier to obtain patents, which afforded TAMA exclusive manufacturing rights to those designs.

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As the musical instrument industry went through a massive paradigm shift, and all the American brands were learning how to find their way in a new industrial landscape, TAMA took full advantage of this one-in-a-million opportunity. The words “what if...” generally don’t apply to history, but if TAMA had come along any later, there’s no doubt the brand’s early days would have been significantly different.

## HARDWARE FIRST

It would have been challenging to succeed on drum shell manufacturing alone, but drum hardware and drum accessories offered ample opportunity for growth. TAMA’s basic strategy was to focus on drum-related products. Capitalizing on the success of the boom cymbal stand, TAMA expanded their TITAN series. Sales continued to increase rapidly; however, complaints about broken parts and poor quality were continually coming in from retailers and consumers alike. Hoshino needed to respond immediately to avoid damaging their reputation, as well as to avoid losing the trust of consumers. Not only did they focus on promptly responding to concerns of customers and retailers, but management also focused on implementing manufacturing improvements to remedy the troublesome parts.

As the TAMA staff was travelling through the U.S. and Europe to



TAMA's sensational Parts Catalog with easy to understand illustrations and parts breakdown

address these complaints in person, they received an abundance of positive feedback on how promptly and thoroughly TAMA handled the situation. On top of their responsiveness, TAMA continually gave distributors and retailers detailed updates on efforts to correct the issues. TAMA's tireless efforts in addressing these product defects reaffirmed the trust of distributors and retailers in the brand. As a result, TAMA's reputation enjoyed a significant boost, fostering a reputation as one of the most well-respected brands in the industry.

## **A PARTS CATALOG: A DECISIVE FACTOR IN TAMA'S DRUM HARDWARE SUCCESS**

The business was evolving, products kept improving, new ideas were put into action, and sales were increasing dramatically. At the same time, company personnel felt it was important to educate consumers on the hardware line and establish a customer service system that could promptly address any issues. The hardware encompassed many components which made establishing a service for repairs and replacements even more imperative.

This led Hoshino to develop their "1978 Parts Catalog." The catalog showed a detailed breakdown of the stands and pedals, with illustrations and model numbers. Years later, catalogs like this were

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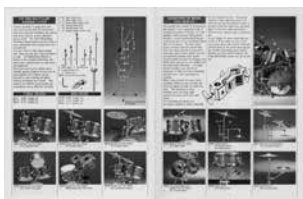


common place, but in 1978, the concept was quite forward-thinking. This consumer centered approach garnered massive approval from across the industry, and in a relatively short amount of time, the parts catalog played an integral role in successfully establishing TAMA as the industry leader in drum hardware.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE MULTI-CLAMP AND NYLON BUSHING**

Over time, consumers in the drum market began favoring larger kits with multiple drums and accessories. However, drummers were becoming increasingly frustrated with the limitations of existing stands that did not allow for expanding their setups. This need fueled TAMA's creation of the "Multi-Clamp System." This innovation dramatically expanded the player's ability to arrange a custom setup, which eventually altered drumming styles and sound. This served as a huge benefit to professional drummers who were pursuing their own unique and distinctive setups.

Hardware had been a source of constant frustration until the company began implementing elevated production standards. This led to high-quality hardware on which drummers could totally rely. Developing a mechanism for holding different diameter pipes together was not an easy task. Back then, a typical drum stand consisted of different sized tubes secured at the joints with metal tightening rings that were



TAMA catalog introducing how to use the multi-clamp

in direct contact with the tube surfaces. But TAMA kept receiving complaints about defective products, claims of loose-fitting pipes and scratches caused by the rough inner surface of the pipes. Needing to address this, TAMA developed the “Nylon Bushing Pipe Tightening System” - TAMA’s very first patented product.

The system did not just secure the pipe with the nylon bushing, but also tightened the entire inner plate using a bolt on the outside of the bracket. This allowed for a much tighter hold. Naohiro Yasuda, the inventor of this innovative system, offered this perspective, “So many assignments were stuck in my head, that I got into a habit of holding on to every piece of information and using all of it throughout the entire problem-solving process.” TAMA’s DNA, “pursuing originality” became firmly rooted in Hoshino Gakki Seizo. This first successful invention paved the way for the patent application rush that soon followed.

## **TSUTOMU YAMASHITA AND OCTOBANS**

TAMA signed an internationally known percussionist named Tsutomu Yamashita who had been working mostly in the United States. After signing, he told the company about a unique percussion instrument from Southeast Asia, made from bamboo tubes that had a one octave



TAMA's first patent; the Nylon Bushing! An industry standard for pipe tightening still to this today. It was an incredibly innovative breakthrough for TAMA back then.

range. Intrigued by this, TAMA designers set out to try and recreate the instrument from acrylic resin tubes. At the time, the company had already been producing acrylic resin drum shells. So, to make the narrower 6” drums, existing heads and hoops from bongos already being produced were simply applied to the new shells. Marimba resonator lengths were used as a reference point for pitch, since the engineers had never actually seen this instrument before. The culmination of all this research and design work eventually led to TAMA’s original “Octobans.” Years later, when asked by Stanford University how Hoshino decided on the lengths of the Octobans, company reps explained that there was a defined pitch in relation to the diameter and length of the pipe. The name “Octobans” is a combination of the prefix “Octo,” and “bans”, a word derived from “bam” in bamboo. The Octobans also played a critical role when it came to the signing of Billy Cobham to an endorsement deal. The Octobans are just one more example of how innovation led to increased recognition and growth for the brand.

## MEETING BILLY COBHAM

TAMA’s stands continued to sell extremely well in the U.S., but the company was eager to see their drum sets reach the same levels of success. Right around this time, TAMA ran into a bit of luck that



Octobans’ flyer soon after its release

would propel the brand to exciting new heights.

It was the Summer of 1977, and TAMA was exhibiting their products under the Elger Company name at the NAMM show in Houston, TX. Aside from the main booth, the company set up a small tent where a number of new products, including the Octobans, were being showcased. Billy Cobham was walking the show floor and came across the new product booth. Cobham was playing the drums for the Mahavishnu Orchestra at the time and was a prominent drummer in the worlds of Jazz and Rock. Cobham immediately took to the Octobans and showed great interest in TAMA's stands. Discussions began on the spot and in only a few months, he signed an endorsement deal with TAMA drums. This was a big signing which helped TAMA, an emerging brand, reach greater standing in the global drum market.

The following year, Cobham visited the TAMA factory where he and TAMA's staff discussed several new product ideas, one of which was the Gong Bass Drum. The Gong Bass Drum features a single oversized drum head on a large shell, with the aim being to generate a sound similar to that of timpani. For this particular design, given the size and manner in which the drum needed to be played, new angle adjustable lugs were developed to accommodate how the drum needed to be positioned. To make a stand that could hold the large drum, the company decided to develop a special roller stand.

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#### THE CYMBAL MATE

As TAMA was becoming more recognized, more professional drummers wanted to be involved with the brand. The new insights they offered were invaluable in helping TAMA continue to improve and develop new products; the Cymbal Mate was one example of this. The idea came from a sponsored drummer who suggested a few ways to improve cymbal sound and set up.

Incidentally, Cobham also used this new stand with his trademark, multi-piece drum kit that included twin bass drums and triple snares.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ELGER COMPANY (LATER RENAMED HOSHINO U.S.A.) AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

Beginning in 1972, Hoshino established the Elger Company, a joint venture with a trusted U.S. retailer in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and it was one of the most significant moves Hoshino had ever made in its long history. It was extremely important to have a location in the U.S. since it offered the ability to be more proactive with artist relations, and allowed for faster growth of TAMA in the United States.

Meanwhile, TAMA stands were selling so well that it proved challenging to keep up with the aftereffects of the sales. Naturally, the more products that were sold, the more customer service calls the company would receive. It was at this time, company leadership decided they needed to make every effort to stabilize supply and assure product quality. The decision was made to send Japanese staff from the TAMA factory to the Elger Company, in order to fully and appropriately address the situation. Their role was to inspect products before shipping to assure quality and to report back to the TAMA factory with updates on progress. This important step led to the Elger



TAMA 1997 Catalog  
with Billy Cobham  
on the cover



Gong Bass Drum  
developed with  
Billy Cobham

Company, (Hoshino U.S.A.), becoming a critical part of the success of the TAMA brand abroad. The Elger Company's role had both proactive and responsive functions: to strengthen TAMA's sales and appeal to artists, as well as respond quickly to customer service situations.

## **SECURING AN ENDORSEMENT CONTRACT WITH SIMON PHILLIPS AND EXPANDING TAMA'S GLOBAL REACH**

In late 70s, many popular American and British bands were touring Japan. This gave TAMA a wealth of opportunities to negotiate endorsement deals with internationally known artists from Japan.

TAMA first met with Simon Phillips on November 25th, 1978 in Nagoya City, the location of TAMA's headquarters. Though he had yet to break through with the general public, Simon was touring with Jeff Beck and Stanley Clarke, and TAMA was highly interested in him as a potential endorser.

According to Toshitsugu Tanaka, who remembers the events well, Clarke and Phillips were free one evening before their concert and agreed to meet with the TAMA staff over dinner. At the show four days later, in a bold move, the young Hoshino staffers enthusiastically approached Phillips with a TAMA drum set in tow. Impressed with the kit, and the company's enthusiasm, Phillips said he was interested



Elger Company  
in Pennsylvania,  
USA 1972



Simon Phillips and  
TAMA's AR rep in  
Japan circa 1978

and would definitely consider an endorsement deal. Not long afterward, he returned to England and something potentially history altering happened. He received an endorsement offer from Ludwig! Because Phillips had been a longtime Ludwig player, he did consider it. However, it turned out that his playing was heavily influenced by Billy Cobham, and TAMA's relationship with Cobham ended up playing a role in the final decision. Ultimately, Phillips decided to follow through on his interest in TAMA, and in April 1978, he signed an endorsement contract with the company. Looking back on the process, Phillips maintains, "I knew that was the right decision!" He would go on to become TAMA's preeminent endorser throughout all phases of its business for 40 years, and he remains a TAMA Artist today.

## **THE DRUMS THAT SYMBOLIZE THE EARLY TAMA BRAND**

IMPERIALSTAR was released in 1974 as one of TAMA's primary drum series. The series was the company's showcase product and had its own distinctive specifications: Reinforced Philippine Mahogany shells, whole surface adhesion PVC coverings, plus Zola-coating on the inside of the shells. The concept behind the whole surface adhesion PVC system was to allow the wood shell and the covering to become "a single vibrating unit" that wouldn't be dampened by the

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Imperialstar drum set 1974

PVC sheet. In addition, a major selling point of IMPERIALSTAR was humidity protection supplied by the outer PVC layer and the internal Zola-coating.

IMPERIALSTAR's best-known artist and advocate was Stewart Copeland of The Police. While working as a music critic before joining the Police, he was assigned to review the IMPERIALSTAR. During his research he connected with the kit and decided he wanted one of his own. To this day, Copeland remains one of TAMA's longest standing and most loyal endorsers.

ROYALSTAR was the line just below IMPERIALSTAR, but it also featured the whole surface adhesive system and inner Zola-coating. Both IMPERIALSTAR and ROYALSTAR were TAMA's most popular series prior to the advent of SUPERSTAR.

In TAMA's 1977 catalog there was a series known as FIBERSTAR. As the name would suggest, the shells were made of fiberglass, which made them highly durable. Their production involved placing a glass sheet onto a molding machine, then pouring liquid fiber resin over it and quickly spinning the machine and the centrifugal force then formed the shell. Because these fiberglass shells produced such a powerful sound, many thought this series might become the new standard in drum shell design. However, controlling the overtones proved too difficult, and the series was quickly discontinued.



Royalstar flyer 1977



Fiberstar on 1977 overseas catalog



## DR. YASUDA

Naohiro Yasuda, nicknamed “Dr. Yasuda,” among TAMA and its employees, came to Hoshino Gakki Seizo (Hoshino Gakki Mfg. Co., Ltd.) in 1974 and began working for the company as a “machinery specialist.” Yasuda had an exceptionally flexible imagination and demonstrated amazing ingenuity. His imagination, creativity, and extraordinary talents contributed greatly to TAMA’s success. He was constantly brimming with curiosity about new fields and was TAMA’s first true engineer. Soon after he joined the company, he began re-evaluating the production systems and worked on improving the equipment. It was time-consuming but extremely important work. Dr. Yasuda was incredibly proactive; he evaluated the production line management, brought in better machinery, and examined the jigs (a device that holds a piece of work and guides the tools operating on it) for efficiency. He also was the main source of many new product ideas. One of his first successful designs was the pipe joint

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Naohiro Yasuda a.k.a.  
“Dr. Yasuda,” circa 1970s

mechanism from the nylon bushing system.

TAMA's early success was in innovative new hardware, but these modern improvements had yet to make their way into drum production. However, Yasuda and TAMA were about to take the company's drum design to an entirely new level!

## THE BEGINNINGS OF SUPERSTAR

After a series of successes in hardware development, TAMA was ready to re-focus efforts on drum production. This renewed focus ultimately paved the way for SUPERSTAR, which debuted in TAMA's catalog in 1976. It was rather a quiet debut since SUPERSTAR was not heavily promoted until the release of the 1980 catalog. The reason for this being there were still a few issues with the line that needed to be worked out: the selection and procurement of quality shell materials, how to improve the tom holder, and how to improve lacquering technology so it could be used in mass production.

It was 1979 and Maple was the preferred shell material of the day. However, it was too costly to import with the yen being so much weaker than the dollar. After a great deal of research, it was determined that Japanese Birch had similar characteristics to Maple in terms of durability, density, and tone. This, coupled with the



Superstar just after its first release. (No omni ball had been developed yet)

company's existing relationship with Birch suppliers, led to TAMA's decision to use it for a new line of drums.

The tom holder also needed improvements since Birch shells created a new problem. Birch is a heavier wood, and the existing tom holder simply was not strong enough to support the Birch shells. The eventual solution came in the form of the "Omni-Sphere" tom holder. The system featured a nylon ball-rod system and while there were other systems like this at the time, they didn't offer a secure hold. To solve this, TAMA engineered a brand-new bracket design that held the ball far more firmly. This provided a stable platform that would stand up to even the hardest playing. This ball tom holder system became one of TAMA's most notable features and was adopted by many other brands throughout the industry.

TAMA found a way to improve their lacquering technology in a somewhat unexpected way. In 1971, TAMA started producing its own brand of acoustic guitars: "TAMA Guitars." The goal was to eventually be able to compete with American acoustic guitar manufacturers. Unfortunately, this goal was never realized as the line was discontinued in 1980. However, it was thanks to this venture that TAMA already had trained craftsmen in-house with valuable painting skills. Their experience became invaluable in the production of SUPERSTAR. They were instrumental in helping TAMA scale up



The ball rod holder system had already existed in the market, but it wasn't well received due to an inherent lack of stability. A special ball rod holder, developed by TAMA, helped to remedy this problem. TAMA's new tom holder was and remains a revolutionary design that offers both the most desirable tom placement adjustment (no geared tilter) and the most secure hold.

their finishing processes. The 1980s marked the beginning of a new era for TAMA, and SUPERSTAR quickly established itself in the market as the brand's flagship model.

## **SUPERSTAR - SHELLS WITH GREAT RESONANCE**

SUPERSTAR's birch shells were very durable and generated excellent tone with plenty of punch. However, even with all of these advantages, Birch presented a serious challenge. Due to its density, TAMA's existing molding technology could not manufacture these shells.

Typically, drum shells are made by cutting a wood sheet into trapezoidal shape, inserting the sheet into the mold where it's pressed firmly along the inner surface. Then, another small sheet is pushed in to fill the gap. The process is done by hand but the method is simple, quick, and allows for efficient mass production. However, the density of Birch would not allow for this method, putting any hopes of using Birch in serious question.

Solving this problem would mean going back-to-basics and reviewing the molding techniques in order to make "a perfectly round shell." This point was absolutely essential to achieve the best possible resonance. This modernizing of the molding technology was what would shape TAMA's reputation as a company that produced

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incredibly strong drum shells.

The first step in that process was switching from a conventional machine, where the outside could be opened, to the new “one-piece” molding machine. The conventional machine made it easy to remove the finished shell, which was ideal for efficient production. The downside was the machine would often cause irregularities in the shape, making it difficult to get a perfectly round shell. The one-piece machine solved this problem and produced shells completely free of distortions. Next, it was necessary to reconstruct the machine’s inner press that shaped the wood sheets. With the old machine, the press would exert force evenly on all surfaces of the mold. In an effort to obtain more even glue joints, extra pressure was added to specific points where the wood proved harder to bond together. This change was highly effective and resulted in more uniformity in the joints. These improvements to the molding process led to perfectly round, super strong shells that produced excellent resonance, the core of the TAMA sound.

## **PUT NOTHING INSIDE THE SHELL FOR THE MAXIMUM RESONANCE**

In order to obtain maximum shell resonance, TAMA stuck to a guiding

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principal, “Nothing Inside the Shell; Nothing Through the Shell.” Conventional tom mounting systems of the day required a small pipe to be inserted through the shell in order to secure it to the mount. However, TAMA’s “Omni-Sphere” system offered an incredibly stable tom mount, without having to compromise the integrity of the shell. Since the development of Omni-Sphere tom holder, the company has always held to its philosophy of “Nothing Inside the Shell.”

## **A COLLABORATION WITH LENNY WHITE & SUPERSTAR MAKES AN INDELIBLE IMPRESSION**

“Lenny White in a black hat and a light blue T-shirt, with a beautiful Aqua Marine SUPERSTAR 8-piece kit in front of him.” It’s an indelible image burned into the memory of many drummers. It was also this image that exponentially raised the profile of SUPERSTAR. Back then, most drum manufacturers typically only offered natural or brown finishes, since trends at the time were more traditional. The image of White and the SUPERSTAR kit showed off drum sets in an entirely new way, and TAMA used this image extensively in catalogs, ads, and other promotions. The campaign was a huge success and the company enjoyed significant growth as a result. It was a bold marketing approach, but it paid off in droves.



The promotional photo of Lenny White (discussed in the text)

## **NEIL PEART'S CUSTOM SUPERSTAR KIT**

In 1982 while in Fort Wayne, IN, Kimihide Hoshino met Neil Peart, the drummer from Rush. The owner of the Percussion Center in Fort Wayne, Neil Graham, made the introduction. At the time, Peart was comparing drum companies so TAMA leapt at this opportunity, offering him a SUPERSTAR kit, which he loved! After the meeting, TAMA made him a massive kit which was customized by Neil Graham with a Candy Apple Red finish and gold-plated metal parts. This monster kit was used in promotional materials for TAMA and Peart used it while recording Rush's album, "Grace Under Pressure," released in 1983. Thanks to Peart's incredible popularity, TAMA sold a massive number of kits in the same color and style.

## **MEETING LARS ULRICH**

Within a year of the Peart meeting, Hoshino U.S.A. received a phone call from a drummer in San Francisco requesting a set of TAMA drums. It was Lars Ulrich, and he said he played for a band named Metallica. Formed in October 1981, Metallica wouldn't achieve mainstream success and recognition for another four or five years. TAMA provided Ulrich with a set and their relationship has continued ever since. Lars'

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case was truly an unusual one in how he was signed as an endorser.

## **HOSHINO'S JAPANESE STAFF AND THEIR LIMITATIONS WITH ARTIST RELATIONS**

TAMA was truly lucky to have established and built the relationship they did with Ulrich, but his particular case made Hoshino realize they were limited in their ability to connect with Artists around the world. The early 1980s experienced another explosion in rock music which spilled over into other genres. It was at this time TAMA reached its limit as far as the Japanese staff being able to sign new artists. They needed help in making new connections. Finally, in 1984, Hoshino USA, hired an American named Joe Hibbs as an Artist Relations Specialist for the drum division. Hibbs quickly became a successful liaison between Lars Ulrich and TAMA: he was in touch with Lars on a daily basis. This new hire laid the foundation for signing a variety of new Artists in the years that followed.

## **GETTING INTO MIC STANDS**

Jumping back to 1980s – the beginning of Research and Development  
The shut-down of TAMA's acoustic guitar production contributed

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TAMA's mic stands of those days



greatly to the overall success of SUPERSTAR. Another product line that benefitted was microphone stands. Microphone stand production began in order to fill the surplus production capacity left by the discontinuation of TAMA guitars. The mic stands proved to be quite different from drum stands in many ways, not only in regards to production but also sales and distribution. It ultimately proved quite a difficult market to break into. The mic stand business didn't take off like other more successful ventures but remained a smaller part of the business.

However, the company believed that if quality products continued to be produced, the mic stand business would eventually achieve greater success. Ultimately, Hoshino began providing OEM supplies to a major PA company, which finally opened the door to the Japanese market.

## **X-TRAS – DEEP SHELL CRAZE**

With the continued expansion and growth of rock music in the 1980's, many changes were taking place. Many hard rock and heavy metal drummers began using deeper tom toms. Having already developed the Omni-Sphere Tom Holder and upgraded to state-of-the-art molding machines, the company decided it was ready to move into super-deep shell production. Many companies were struggling with this new trend, but Hoshino felt like the timing was



X-Tras were extra deep shells with dimensions that made them almost as long as they were wide. For example, the tom sizes would be 10"x9", 12"x11." However, with the influence of jazz, shallow shells were still most widely used back then.

right and decided to move forward. It was this decision that led to TAMA's 1981 - 1983 drum catalog featuring the "X-TRAS" logo on the cover and a focus on deep drum shells.

## **INTRODUCTION OF ARTSTAR**

As heavy metal gained popularity, along with MTV, musical instruments became more visible to the general public and the appearance of instruments was becoming extremely important to musicians. With that in mind, TAMA released ARTSTAR. TAMA opted to use Birch for the core plies and Cordia wood as a decorative ply on the interior and exterior of the shell for its unique and intense grain pattern. In addition, high-tension lugs were developed to accommodate ARTSTAR's extra-deep shells. There was a concern that the long tension lugs would cover up too much shell surface and would negatively impact resonance, but this wasn't so. ARTSTAR proved to be a great success; the impactful presence of ARTSTAR attracted countless new professional drummers to TAMA.

## **CHALLENGE TO SNARE DRUMS**

After the Omni-Sphere Tom Holder was developed, TAMA began

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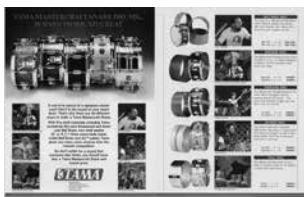


Artstar drums featured decorative plies of Cordia wood on the interior and exterior of the shells. Artstar's appearance created an immediate demand for more sets that featured figured woods.

working on another major project while also heavily promoting SUPERSTAR. The focus of the project was to develop snare drums for professional players. TAMA released the Mastercraft Series in 1980, which provided a variety of snare sounds using different shell materials. As it turned out, a byproduct of the Mastercraft Series was the “Roller Bed Strainer.” This was invented as an upgraded version of the “Parallel Action Strainer,” and solved the problems associated with the previous version. The Roller Bed Strainer was another example of TAMA’s philosophy of – “Nothing inside the shell.”

Among all the Mastercraft snare drums, the bell brass snare garnered the most attention. TAMA’s R&D team had their eye on bell brass but knew it would be challenging due to the high cost. Therefore, they produced a limited number and targeted professional players. In spite of their higher cost, these snare drums received a tremendous amount of acclaim and were very successful. Even today, TAMA is still recognized for its Bell Brass snare drum and its popularity sparked a limited reproduced version, released in 2014.

TAMA’s Rosewood shell snare drum is also very-well known. On this particular snare, Rosewood was used not only for the outer layer, but for the entire shell. The creation of an all Rosewood snare drum was a groundbreaking achievement. Additionally, another unique model



The catalog of the Mastercraft Series which became synonymous with TAMA. Its lineup included the famous Bell-brass and Rosewood models.

was the Artwood Series, which featured inlays on birch shells. These new snare drums demonstrated the full extent of TAMA's innovative spirit.

## **PURCHASE OF THE CAMCO BRAND**

Back in 1978, TAMA received some unexpected news.

Around this time, experienced drum makers, especially small-scale businesses, were struggling, and one company in particular, CAMCO was sold to a competitor. TAMA had a long-term relationship with the purchaser of CAMCO, Tom Beckman, and he offered to sell the brand to TAMA.

CAMCO was purchased to combine the two brands in order to produce higher-end products. CAMCO's existing manufacturing equipment was sent to Elgar to begin production. Masao Hoshino, then president of Hoshino Gakki Seizo, went to Hoshino U.S.A. to work on how to improve production. Ed Acko, who was appointed CAMCO's production manager, reflected on this, "First, I did all the assembly from the beginning to the end as another staff member watched me. Then, the staff member would do the next assembly by his or herself as I watched them. It was very meticulous training." Two kits were completed this way, and one of the kits was given to



Elvin Jones playing CAMCO drums  
(Masao Hoshino, then president of  
Hosihno Gakki Seizo, looks on)

Ed as a gift. The bass drum of the kit had #EX-002-10-'78 printed on the reinforcement rings, the date the prototype was completed (October 1978). From that point on, CAMCO's production line remained busy and sales number increased steadily but did eventually level off.

At that time, everyone was looking for something new and were quick to cast old products aside. It was difficult to shake the image of CAMCO as an older company, so rejuvenating the brand ultimately proved impossible. Hoshino attempted to grow the CAMCO business in Europe, but just as in the U.S., TAMA had already established itself as a preferred brand, so retailers weren't interested in pursuing CAMCO drums. So, the production and sales of CAMCO drums finally ceased in 1983.

However, there was one major positive that came from the CAMCO experiment: the signing of Elvin Jones. After CAMCO was discontinued, Jones started playing TAMA drums and became the brands most valuable jazz endorser of that era.

Although Hoshino did not succeed in selling the co-branded CAMCO Drums, the acquisition did lead to one hit product: the CAMCO Pedal. CAMCO's original #5000 pedal received critical acclaim, but it originally used a leather belt drive, which caused problems as the belt would eventually stretch out or break. The obvious solution



Masao Hoshino, doing maintenance check in CAMCO production line.

was a chain drive system. Two people, including the owner of Professional Percussion Center, owned the patent on the chain drive system. Hoshino Gakki made the decision to purchase the patent and then modified it with several design improvements. This led to the creation of the now famous #6735 Original Chain-Drive Drum Pedal. Incidentally, Hoshino decided not to keep the original footboard shape but created a new one designed after a soda bottle shape. This Pedal was the most successful in the TAMA's lineup until the introduction of the IRON COBRA in 1994.

## NEW HARDWARE PRODUCTS AND TWIN PEDAL R&D

The early 80s was an exciting time that saw rapid diversification in music culture. MTV had just launched, which required music to have more visual appeal on top of the music itself. Naturally, drummers became more conscious of their drumming style, setups, and looks, which led to more variety in the drum scene.

In response to this change, TAMA invented its first edition multi clamp in 1977. For advertising and shop display purposes, the clamp was attached to a "Multi-Clamp Tree." This was essentially a cymbal stand with several multi-clamp designs attached to it. Another innovative product, the "X-Hat", was invented in 1982 to address a



The CAMCO pedal's innovative chain drive mechanism impressed and completely changed the drum market. It is considered by many a major stepping stone in drum pedal design.

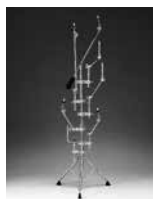
need facing drummers who played double bass. It served as a perfect example of an effective use of the multi-clamp.

Throughout the 80's, many drummers started using double bass setups, but they were facing a major challenge, their setups were too large for some stages. Also, when multiple drummers were sharing the same drum set, an extra bass drum was not always available. To solve these problems, the twin pedal was invented.

When TAMA's endorser Kiyoshi Hasegawa was hired by Dan Ikeda and New Breed to play on a popular Japanese music show, "Evening Hit Studio," he discussed this problem with TAMA. Fortunately, the R&D team was putting the finishing touches on the new twin pedal. Another company launched a twin pedal a bit earlier, but experienced major problems since the beaters were not properly balanced. TAMA put the two beaters inside one frame, connecting them with two universal joints, a first for any twin pedal. This mechanism became a standard feature in twin pedals and remains so today.

## TAMA ORIGINAL OAK DRUM STICKS

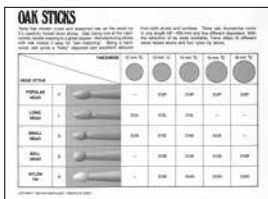
When it came to drum sticks – every manufacturer used the same model numbers (5B, 7A, etc.). The number indicates the size of the stick and the letter shows the type of the tip, and TAMA was no



The "Multi-Clamp Tree" was used for in-store display to show of its ability to clamp several accessories to just one cymbal stand.

exception. As a way to stand out, TAMA made the bold decision to ditch the old, conventional structure and invented a brand-new numbering system. Even though it still detailed the same features, the new system was quite innovative. It was a big risk implementing it, but it's still in place 30 years later.

Incidentally, TAMA's stick rack store display, which was designed to promote the new numbering system, became very popular in its own right for its unique modular connecting design and greatly aided in the introduction of the new drum sticks to stores.



TAMA sticks with the original model number system that offered drummers easy understanding.



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Part  
**3**

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**PARADIGM SHIFTS AND  
A REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD  
IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

**(1984-1988)**

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## MIDI/THE WAVE OF DIGITALIZATION

In response to the expansion of music genres in early 80s, there was a rapid wave of digitalization in the music industry. As the MIDI rose in popularity, FM synthesis and samplers became available, allowing musicians to utilize countless sounds. Keyboards and even digital versions of typical analog instruments like guitars and drums were created and became quite popular. As far as percussion was concerned, in the late 1970's, POLLARD had already released a line of electronic drums called Syndrum in the U.S., but it was SIMMONS that swept over the music industry with its innovative new pad design. Electronic drums were heavily tied to techno music, one of the 1980's most popular musical trends. To remain competitive, TAMA began R&D on TECHSTAR in 1982.

## CREATION OF ELECTRONIC DRUMS TECHSTAR

Hoshino Gakki Seizo (Hoshino Gakki Mfg. Co., Ltd.) had no experience when it came to electronics. However, Hoshino Gakki (Hoshino's headquarters) had an electronics partner who worked on R&D and manufacturing of Ibanez electronics. Hoshino Gakki Seizo was ultimately assigned to develop the drum pads,



The first edition of TECHSTAR  
with pentagon shape

so they worked with this same subcontractor to source the sound components. Together, they formed the team for the TECHSTAR project. The critical question for the design team was, what could a well-established acoustic drum manufacturer bring to the world of electronic drums in order to truly make an impact? The team decided that the best course of action was to pursue an electronic drum pad that felt as close to an acoustic drum head as possible. The first TECHSTAR design achieved this and utilized a hexagonal drum pad design. The second iteration of the kit preserved the acoustic drum feel, but the pad was changed to a square shape. This kit became known as TECHSTAR II and it was released in 1985.

TECHSTAR debuted in 1984 and sales took off quickly. Naturally, one electronic project followed another as the demand increased. However, concern grew internally as to whether TAMA could effectively pursue electronic drum development having already established a clear identity as an acoustic drum maker. It eventually became contradictory pursuing both goals. Ultimately, it was decided that TAMA should focus on mastering acoustic drum manufacturing and withdrew from the electronic drum market in 1986. As TAMA refocused its attention on acoustic drums, TECHSTAR ended its short run having been one of the most talked about electronic drum kits in the industry.

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## POWER TOWER SYSTEM

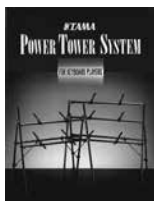
Entering the 80's, techno music ignited an explosive demand for synthesizers and keyboards. Accordingly, the demand for the keyboard stands increased as well. Closely observing trends in keyboard stands, TAMA developed the drum rack, "Power Tower System," (P.T.S.) using steel pipes that were originally developed to match TECHSTAR's looks and features. Even though it was originally designed for TECHSTAR, PTS led TAMA to an idea of expanding the traditional drum set. The most impactful product of PTS was "The CAGE," a very large drum rack system that allowed players to use an assortment of different drums and cymbals. The impressive visuals of this system caused major excitement across the drumming landscape.

TAMA expanded its PTS business into keyboard stands and guitar displays. These displays always received positive feedback but soon much cheaper Taiwanese-made stands flooded the market, marking the end of TAMA's guitar stand business.

## PTS AND OEM SUPPLIES

A major corporation reached out to Hoshino with an offer from

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P.T.S. Catalog that offered drum racks and keyboard stands

their PA division in 1985. Hoshino's PTS display at the NAMM Show caught their attention, and they asked if Hoshino could supply OEM products for their PA speaker stands. As a result, other major companies started to approach Hoshino for OEM supplies, as well as microphone stands. For Hoshino Gakki Seizo, struggling due to the yen crisis, generating more businesses through this new product category was vitally important to the success of the company in the mid 80's.

This experience of dealing with major corporations outside of the musical products industry offered incredibly valuable knowledge, and it helped TAMA form a greater sense of business values. As a result, Hoshino Gakki Seizo chose to emulate the persistence these major corporations showed towards production consistency, and TAMA was able to achieve much higher levels of quality control.

## **A SIGN OF THE SECOND EXCHANGE UPEHAVAL**

Going into 1980s, Japan-U.S. trade frictions escalated. Japan was closing in on the U.S. as an economic superpower, and accordingly, the yen continued to strengthen. This put immense pressure on Japan's export industry. Most products could not survive this surge in prices, and sales decreased significantly. It was in early 1985 the



"The CAGE" drum set. The name came from its appearance of the drummer being surrounded by multiple drums and cymbals as if s/he was in a cage.

TAMA was forced to find cheaper ways to manufacture products in order to survive the price increase.

## **ARTSTAR II, CRESTAR AND GRANSTAR**

In the midst of these challenging times, TAMA developed a new drum series using an unprecedented approach. The company brought all of the existing TAMA drum series to a few designers not familiar with the products and asked them for their feedback: TAMA needed an unbiased opinion.

Several designers pointed out the inconsistency in the design of the lugs and other metal components. That discussion became the starting point for the ARTSTAR II, CRESTAR, and GRANSTAR projects. The tom holder, brackets, bass drum spur brackets, and other metal parts for all three of these series had matching designs. In order to do this, a sizable investment was put into the new metal molds. It was also important that the new models offer the perfect balance of features, quality, and price to cope with the weaker dollar.

However, with a stronger yen, the company had to carefully manage costs to arrive at acceptable retail prices. In spite of this huge hurdle, TAMA managed to release the new models at Winter NAMM in 1986. The sales strategy for the GRANSTAR series was based in



ARTSTAR II, TAMA's first drums made of maple wood.

large part on its pastel color scheme. The refreshing new look drew plenty of attention from consumers, but sadly GRANSTAR was short-lived due to high production costs.

## **ARTSTAR II: TAMA'S FIRST MAPLE SHELL DRUM SET**

1986 releases included the ARTSTAR II, which featured Maple shells instead of Cordia/Birch. Then, in 1988, a new 9500 series featuring Birds Eye Maple shells was added to the ARTSTAR II line, with its beautiful wood grain and 3D appearance fueling its popularity. High-tension lugs served as another distinguishing feature to help differentiate ARTSTAR II from the CRESTAR and GRANSTAR lines. The release and success of ARTSTAR II paved the way for TAMA to pursue a number of other kits featuring Maple shells.

## **SALES CAMPAIGNS IN THE U.S.**

Sales of Japanese products in the U.S. market were struggling, so Hoshino U.S.A. experimented with drum clinics for major retailers. The hope was that the events would showcase TAMA products and help bolster sales. Joe Hibbs recommended this approach, and Dom Famularo, a drum instructor at Long Island Drum Center, ran the

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clinics. Joe made all of the arrangements and Dom's exceptional instructional ability, speeches, and incredible drumming techniques made the clinics a huge success. The retailers were very happy with the content and quality of the clinics, and they proved to be a major success for the company.



Early 1980s TITAN Series hardware



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Part

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**RELOCATION OF  
PRODUCTION AND  
THE CIRCUMSTANCES  
FACING MANUFACTURING  
IN JAPAN**

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## **A PERMANENTLY STRONGER YEN**

After the Plaza Accord of September 1985, TAMA was hit hard by the rapid increase in the value of the yen. What began as an exchange rate of \$1 to ¥200 quickly became ¥150 yen within a year, and even reached ¥120 after two years. This was no longer a temporary phenomenon; this was the beginning of the permanently stronger yen, which is still in effect today.

Compared to the rise of the yen from the Nixon Shock, this event was much more intense and was too big an obstacle to overcome, and new product development suffered as a result. Additionally, music trends of the day began to shift away from hard rock and heavy metal. Unsurprisingly, these genres becoming less popular did not help sales. The economic environment of the day seemed to pose constant challenges to TAMA's business, so the only hope for continued success was to move manufacturing to a new location.

Since Japan was no longer a viable production base for export, a

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considerable number of businesses transferred their production from Japan to newly industrializing economies (NIES) such as Korea and Taiwan. The industry became dependent on NIES for either sourcing parts, or their entire production operations. For the percussion industry in particular, Taiwan was becoming the world's largest manufacturer, and TAMA was no exception. The company began importing parts from Taiwan and rushed to arrange OEM production via a Taiwanese manufacturer.

## **BEGINNING OF OPERATIONS IN TAIWAN**

Several Hoshino representatives were sent to Taiwan in October 1987 to scout out plans for future operations. The production of drum sets entails a complex supply chain, very similar to that of the auto industry: wood, metal, plastic, rubber, etc. While TAMA staff went to observe several manufacturers, they also visited the Taipei Trade Center to find suitable suppliers for various components that were needed. They sought out the different parts manufacturers by going directly to those companies, which proved to be a productive and efficient research approach.

The initial target items for Taiwanese operations were drum heads and hoops. It was easy to find a good manufacturer for heads, but

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the drum hoops were a different story. Thanks to past experience, the Hoshino reps visited several bicycle rim makers. After a few visits, they quickly found the right manufacturer. Searching for the right partner in a foreign country was quite a challenge. As a result, Mr. Zhen Yi Lin, a Taiwanese national, fluent in Japanese, played a major role in the company's search for the right local partners.

## **MR. ZHEN YI LIN**

Hoshino Gakki first worked with Mr. Lin in 1975. When Hoshino became interested in setting up manufacturing in Taiwan, the President of a firm, who was making drum heads for TAMA at the time, introduced Mr. Lin to Hoshino.

Mr. Lin and the President of this company had fought alongside each other during World War II, and after the war, Mr. Lin worked in the department of agriculture and forestry for the Taiwanese government. He was a wood specialist who had spent time in the Ivory Coast and Madagascar. He was a man of great integrity with a legendary work ethic and was renowned for his willingness to take on new projects. The company owes him a huge debt of gratitude for the smooth transition into Taiwan.

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## **A SMALL FACTORY IN TAIPEI**

The story of how the company formed its relationship with a die-cast maker is an interesting and important one. Aside from the shell itself, die-cast parts are the most important element in drum manufacturing. TAMA needed to form a strong and successful partnership with a manufacturer that could supply the highest quality die-cast parts possible.

In a rather chance encounter, when Japanese TAMA staff members were browsing the Taipei Trade Center, a die-cast toy train caught their attention. The quality of this particular toy stood out, so much so that they called the toy train maker and requested a visit. The head of the workshop was a highly experienced craftsman and immediately impressed the TAMA staff. Not only was he an expert at his craft, but he was clearly up on the current technology in his field. The TAMA staff excitedly relayed this news back to Japan. At this point, TAMA's technicians learned as much as they could about die-cast manufacturing before flying to Taipei to visit the small factory.

From the very first meeting, TAMA's technicians were highly impressed with the factory's extensive knowledge of die-cast production, and they sensed they could form a strong partnership with this factory. From this point forward, everything moved quickly and

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TAMA began outsourcing production of ROCKSTAR lugs and tom holders to the factory in Taipei.

## THE INTRODUCTION OF ROCKSTAR AND ITS RISE TO SUCCESS

No other products symbolized the shift from Japan to Taiwan more than the ROCKSTAR series.

ROCKSTAR was originally released in 1988 as TAMA's made-in-Japan drum set. Its lugs had a similar design to the straight lines of the new ARTSTAR II, CRESTAR and GRANSTAR series. As TAMA began to develop a following in hard rock and heavy metal, the name "ROCKSTAR" was chosen to enhance the brand's association with the genres. Taking advantage of this shift to rock music, the company focused on more thorough advertising and branding. In the U.S., this was evident with attention-grabbing slogans like "BALLS TO THE WALL," to promote the series.

Some of the Hoshino USA staff had reservations about this slogan, believing it was too brash and borderline inappropriate, but the marketing department felt strongly that the slogan would connect with the target market, so it was kept. The slogan did receive some complaints, there was even one retailer who insisted he would "not



The catalog exclusively featuring ROCKSTAR

sell the ROCKSTAR to young kids if the company continued with this slogan.” However, the company believed the bold slogan and marketing strategy were needed in order to attract the right audience. Also, ROCKSTAR was the engine driving TAMA’s factory in Japan, so it was imperative that it succeed. In the end, this aggressive branding campaign did reach the right players and sales of the kits increased.

Another reason for this aggressive marketing strategy is the stronger yen continually forced the company to develop new ways to generate sales and lower costs to maintain profit margins. However, the currency situation made that nearly impossible. One effort to minimize costs included importing shell hardware from Taiwan to Japan, which did allow Japanese-made ROCKSTAR kits to maintain a competitive price for a certain period of time.

However, in spite of all the company’s best efforts, production of the lower-end ROCKSTAR series was eventually taken over by the Taiwanese facility. The only ROCKSTAR models that would continue to be produced in Japan were the higher-end PVC models, mid-priced models, and painted models.

ROCKSTAR continued to be produced as a mix of Japanese and

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Taiwanese kits until 1994, at which time the painted ROCKSTAR kits were discontinued, and the production of the remaining ROCKSTAR line was in the final stages of being moved to the Taiwan factory. This left the ARTSTAR ES series as the only TAMA series still being built in Japan.

By this point, Taiwanese production was on track and TAMA staff were ready to move on to the next step. A few technicians plus TAMA executive, Michio Nakamoto, began living in Taiwan in order to transfer equipment, as well as the painting, lacquering, and buffing techniques to the local staff.

Finally, in 1997 the entire ROCKSTAR series, including the models with painted shell, was being produced in Taiwan. Featuring an updated lug design, this version of ROCKSTAR was produced all the way up until 2004. It even received an upgrade to the Star-Cast Mounting System in 1998. During its long production run, the ROCKSTAR series saw many different models and variations and was produced continually from 1988 until 2004, second in longevity only to Starclassic.

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## **COLLABORATION WITH EVANS® DRUM HEADS**

Within ROCKSTAR's price range, a long price war took place. It was an intense fight between all of the drum manufacturers for market share within the same class and price points.

In the late 1980s, all of the companies had their standard lines equipped with REMO® pinstripe heads. TAMA, on the other hand, was drawn to EVANS® because its Dry series had such a great reputation. In an effort to stand out from the rest of the manufacturers, Hoshino asked Evans for an OEM supply of drum heads printed with TAMA logos. In 1989, a meeting was held at Musikmesse, Europe's largest music industry trade show, with Bob Beals, one of the co-owners of EVANS®. This is where the collaboration was agreed to. Since REMO® was the preeminent drum head of the day, there were some concerns that TAMA would not be using them, even so, TAMA forged ahead and in 1991, the first "TAMA by EVANS®" drum heads were released on select ROCKSTAR kits, and eventually, all TAMA drum heads were switched from REMO® to EVANS®.

This venture caused EVANS® drum heads to greatly increase in popularity, so much so, that they were eventually purchased by D'Addario. At that point, EVANS® developed an even greater following thanks to the marketing power of their new parent

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company. EVANS® is now one of the two top drum head brands in the industry. The collaboration also helped raise the profile and reputation of TAMA as well.

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Chapter 2 | CONTINUED EFFORTS  
BY TAMA'S FACTORY IN JAPAN

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## **DIRECTION OF OPERATIONS AT THE JAPANESE FACTORY**

TAMA Seisakusho (factory), founded in 1962, continued to expand and in 1988, it was relocated to its current location in Seto City, Aichi Pref. Ironically, that was the same year TAMA started their OEM production at the Taiwanese factory. As such, the following strategies emerged for the new factory in Japan:

- 1) A renewed focus on developing new high-quality stand and pedals that could obtain patents
- 2) Design and build new premium level drums
- 3) Diversify the snare drum offerings

From this point forward, these would be the areas of focus for

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The building of Hoshino Gakki Seizo (Hoshino Gakki Mfg. Co., Ltd.) after moving to Seto City, Aichi Pref. in 1988.

TAMA's factory in Japan.

## STILT AND LEVER GLIDE

Toward the end of the 80's, musical instrument companies were running low on ideas for ground-breaking products. TAMA knew it was essential to continue developing new products in order to maintain sales growth in such a tough and competitive market. Therefore, Hoshino Gakki Seizo was under intense scrutiny and pressure to produce.

One idea to come from this period was STILT. The idea behind STILT was to create cymbal stands that could reach the drummer's hands without relying on traditional boom arms. The STILT's appearance was quite unique. It looked like a tilted version of a conventional cymbal stand and really added great visuals when set up in front of a kit. Although these stands offered multiple benefits, they never fully caught on and were ultimately discontinued.

"Lever Glide", on the other hand, was released at the same time as STILT, but did very well in comparison. This product was developed as a collaboration between the new college graduates within the sales and R&D departments who heard drummers commenting, "We want a hi-hat stand that enables a much lighter pedal action." One



STILT Stands with their innovative tilt mechanism – a breakthrough in the drum market at the time.

of TAMA's newly hired technicians was assigned to this project. He wasn't a drummer but was an engineer and noticed that the application of leverage should be able to lighten the hi-hat pedal action. He was searching for a way to connect the tip of the pedal board to a spring using leverage mechanics. He cut out metal plates for stands in order to make a prototype and his co-worker, who was a drummer, tested the design. He continued to modify the pedal until he had developed a successful prototype. Lever Glide was a perfect example of a new product developed through "market orientation", a process by which a business prioritizes identifying the needs and desires of consumers and creates products to satisfy them. This approach helped Lever Glide become the defining feature of TAMA's hi-hat pedal. TAMA continued to improve the design over time and the product still remains highly regarded today.

## **ADVENT OF THE IRON COBRA**

The partnership between CAMCO and TAMA eventually led to a major competition between TAMA and a competitor for dominance in the chain drive pedal market, a competition that continues today. The competitor also developed a CAMCO-style design and began to specialize in pedals from that point forward. In the 90's, the



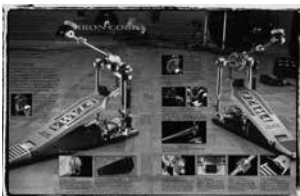
The Lever Glide System offered exceptionally lightweight footwork and was a ground-breaking system that raised the standard for hi-hat stands industry wide.

other company pulled far ahead of TAMA in drum pedals, enjoying tremendous growth and becoming the dominant power in the field.

This setback motivated TAMA to forge ahead with the creation of the IRON COBRA. While struggling to come up with innovative ideas, TAMA chose a philosophy under which to develop this new pedal. “Reduction of Energy Loss” served as the primary guiding principal for the Iron Cobra’s development. From there, re-evaluation began of all parts that may be causing any preventable friction.

At the same time, an accompanying marketing strategy was devised for the IRON COBRA. Each new mechanism would be given a unique name to make it easy to understand the component’s function. Examples of this are the Speedo-Ring, Vari-Pitch Beater Holder, IRON COBRA Beater, Spring Tight, Para Clamp, Power Glide Cam, and Rolling Glide Cam. Because major changes could not be made to the footboard design, it was felt this marketing strategy was critical to the pedal’s success. An original logo was also created to accompany the IRON COBRA’s release.

While the IRON COBRA’s success can be attributed the unprecedented and diverse adjustment mechanisms, just as much credit must be given to the creative advertising strategy that propelled the product forward. For example, naming a pedal something like “IRON COBRA” was not common practice back then, but TAMA’s advertising department



The first edition of IRON COBRA drum pedal with multiple adjusting features was a true innovation of the drum pedal.

came up with the idea, as well as the branding featuring the cobra motif. This was a new, innovative marketing approach that delivered quite successfully for the company, helping establish the IRON COBRA as an icon of the industry. This experience reinforced the idea that factors such as advertising and promotion could prove to be just as important as the tangible features of the product itself.

## **EVOLUTION OF ARTSTAR: FROM ARTSTAR II TO ARTSTAR ES**

In spite of the great fanfare that accompanied its debut, the GRANSTAR and CRESTAR series were quickly discontinued due to the sudden exchange-rate fluctuations between the time of their planning and eventual release. The company also realized that expanding high-end product lines would be essential to improve the image of the brand and attract artists willing to sign endorsement deals. As a result, ARTSTAR was revitalized as ARTSTAR II, with ARTSTAR Custom being added later and featuring a new look.

During this time, the pricing of the drum industry was set according to Taiwanese-made products. In order to keep the Japanese factory running, the company felt it was vital to improve the image of the brand, and to be very creative in producing high-quality products at super-competitive prices. Therefore, it became necessary to add a

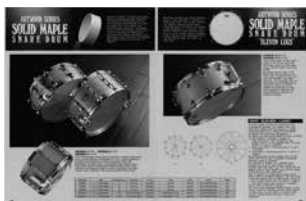
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more affordable ARTSTAR series, which is how ARTSTAR ES came to be. ES was derived from the French word, esprit (meaning ‘spirit’), the concept being this series maintained the essence of ARTSTAR II, but at a lower cost. One new development designed specifically for this model was a bass drum hoop made of Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic or FRP, called the “Accu-Tune Hoop.” These hoops offered drummers a more flexible touch and easier tuning than wood hoops. The hoops were also very strong and offered excellent stability. However, not everyone loved this design since they were used to wood and metal hoops, but there was consistent support from retailers thanks to the high cost benefit and unique features of the kits. Over time, the Accu-Tune Hoops were even featured on the Starclassic Performer series in 1994, and they are still offered in TAMA’s current lineup!

## **SOLVING THE SNARE DRUM ISSUE/PAT.30 AND 11 LUGS**

“We must increase our sales no matter what!! We need something new!” was the mission and part of the motivation that led to two new unique ideas: One was a snare drum featuring the PAT. 30 lugs (One-way lug), and the other was a snare drum with 11 lugs.

PAT. 30 Lug – TAMA staff learned about this product from a retailer



1989 TAMA snare drum catalog with the PAT. 30 Lugs snare and 11-Lug Snare Drum.

in the U.S. Since these lugs allowed tuning the bottom head from the batter side, they were perfect for professional drummers needing to tune quickly between songs. This product obtained a patent in 1930 but had expired, so the lug was brought back to Japan to be examined in an attempt to incorporate it into a new design. It was a complicated mechanism and required highly-skilled metal working to produce. A manufacturer of Ibanez guitar parts helped refine the device to use it in a new snare drum. The snare drum with one-way lugs drew tremendous attention, but unfortunately, because of its complicated structure, it could not tolerate hard drumming, and there were numerous issues which resulted in it being discontinued before too long.

At around the same time, the 11-LUG Snare Drum was released. The idea came from a Japanese jazz drum enthusiast, who was also a huge Elvin Jones fan. However, in spite of initial buzz, this product was also discontinued shortly after its inception due to lagging sales.

## **THE ROAD TO STARCLASSIC**

As mentioned before, the price standard in the drum industry was set according to Taiwanese-made products, so in order to maintain drum production in Japan, it was vital to improve the image of the

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brand through increased value. It was the Golden Age of heavy metal and TAMA was pursuing high-end looks to make a dramatic impression. This design philosophy was highly evident in three models: ARTSTAR II, ARTSTAR ES, and ROCKSTAR. All three featured high-tension lugs and deep shells. The company seized the opportunity and TAMA's brand image improved greatly. To this day, many players still associate TAMA with heavy metal and hard rock. Not long afterward, new genres like grunge were surpassing metal in popularity, which impacted TAMA's sales at an alarming rate. Fast action was needed and the company realized any product targeting just two genres would always be vulnerable. TAMA staff worked tirelessly on many new ideas, designs, and creative concepts but many days passed without any concrete solutions.

Then, in 1987, TAMA tried a unique experiment. At a musical instrument fair in Japan, the company exhibited an unconventional drum set. The aim was to maximize the resonance of the drum shells by floating the entire drum set in the air. Unfortunately, this model was never made it to production, but the concept helped TAMA re-recognize that “sound” was the essence of drums. This centered the focus on the basic question: **How to achieve the best possible drum sound?** This “Back to the Basics” approach led to the development



A Starclassic prototype drum set was displayed at the 1987 Musical Instruments Fair in Japan. You can see the “Starclassic” badges on the kit since TAMA had already been working on the project at that time.

of the drum series that would forever change the history of TAMA, Starclassic. It would serve as TAMA's flagship line and the industry standard for more than 25 years.

## DEVELOPMENT OF STARCLASSIC

TAMA's objective has ALWAYS been to produce drum sets with the best possible resonance, and Starclassic is no different. First, Maple and Birch were selected for the drum shells. It was then decided to make the shells as thin as possible using TAMA's unique molding techniques for high vibration efficiency, while at the same time, enhancing the strength of the shells through specialized manufacturing processes. The progress was exciting, but there was still a big hurdle: "How to improve the tom mounting system?" The R.I.M.S.<sup>®</sup> mounting system was popular but patented. TAMA's R&D team was working on a mount system that would not be attached to the tuning bolts. They experimented with adding extra holes to the die-cast hoop, but to do that there would need to be new molds made for every tom size, which would amount to a sizable investment. TAMA reached out to the Taiwanese die-cast manufacturer and asked them to produce the various sized hoops. This process proved challenging, but the results were exceptional, and the Starclassic with the Star-



TAMA was finally ready to release Starclassic in 1994. This is a catalog that exclusively featured Starclassic.

Cast Mounting System performed far beyond anyone's expectations.

## **JOURNEY OF STARCLASSIC PERFORMER**

The Starclassic series was released at the same time as the lower-priced Starclassic Performer series. Starclassic Performer initially featured either a simple paint scheme or a PVC cover finish. This series also included the same Accu-Tune Hoops found on the ARTSTAR ES series. It was originally intended to be a series focused on cost effectiveness, but it didn't sell as well as expected so some changes were made. These series modifications essentially turned it into practically-priced professional kit. The changes included switching from Accu-Tune Hoops to wood hoops and making the shells all birch with a buffed lacquer finish. The changes were well received and sales greatly improved.

Then, in 2006, ten years after the initial release of Starclassic Performer, TAMA began experimenting with Birch/Bubinga hybrid shells. This marked the introduction of the Starclassic Performer B/B series. Sales of the new kit soared, and its reputation for outstanding tone led to the signing of numerous new endorsement deals. This also eventually led to "Bubinga/Birch" becoming an independent series

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within the Starclassic Performer line.

## DISCOVERY OF BUBINGA

The discovery and use of Bubinga created an entirely new dynamic for TAMA. Originally, Bubinga was thought to be a good option for the limited-edition “Starclassic Exotix” project in 2002. This project entailed covering Starclassic Maple shells with a decorative outer layer. Initially, TAMA obtained high-quality Hawaiian Koa for the decorative outer layer. However, the staff member in charge of the project had strong reservations about mixing the deep amber-colored Hawaiian Koa with white Maple. He reached out to the wood supplier, explained his position, and they suggested Bubinga as an alternative. The company produced a sample using the Hawaiian Koa and Bubinga, and it generated an incredible sound that simply could not be obtained from Maple. This combination was continually featured on the Starclassic Exotix series which officially joined TAMA’s lineup in 2006. It also led to other hit products like the Starclassic Bubinga and Starclassic Performer B/B series.



Starclassic Exotix featured with Hawaiian Koa for the outer ply. It received worldwide acclaim and inspired similar designs for years to come.

## **A RECORD HIGH YEN RATE**

As previously mentioned, the Plaza Accord of 1986 greatly accelerated the appreciation of the yen against the dollar, which eventually reached a rate of ¥120 to \$1. Then, in the mid 90's, the yen resettled to around ¥160 to the dollar, but finally reached a record high of ¥83 to \$1 by mid-1995. At this point, production and export from Japan was completely out of the question. Fortunately, by 1988, TAMA was already developing its second production location in Taiwan. The quality of the Taiwanese metal products improved greatly, and by 1993, they were on par with those made in Japan. This was thanks to the advanced techniques of the aforementioned small workshop in Taipei. These combined factors allowed most of the production to be moved from Japan to Taiwan.

## DEVELOPMENT OF 1<sup>ST</sup> CHAIR DRUM THRONE SYSTEMS

A good drum throne is critically important for serious drummers. Beginners are typically far less concerned with this, but as a drummer's skill level increases, so too will their need for a solid and supportive throne. Up until 1986, TAMA had mainly been selling common drum thrones. At the time, most drum thrones looked essentially the same, so TAMA decided to create something unmistakably different. The HDT85 drum throne was released in 1986, and unlike any prior throne, the HDT85 featured a saddle-shaped seat. The new throne became a major hit and inspired TAMA's R&D team to more deeply explore new places in drum throne design. They started developing more professional-oriented thrones, and in 1995, TAMA released their "1st Chair Drum Throne Systems." The designs were the result of thorough research and analysis to determine the most comfortable seating possible for drumming. Drummers could choose from various seat shapes, sizes, and materials. The stand (legs) also featured several new patented components to provide quick height adjustment and stable seat support. These thrones quickly gained popularity and have continued to receive many design improvements in their more than 20 years in production.



1st Chair Drum Throne Systems  
flyer when first released.

## SECOND GENERATION IRON COBRA AND THE MOVE TO TAIWAN

IRON COBRA was first released in 1993, and even with a strong yen, was produced in Japan. This product was extremely important to TAMA's contract manufacturer. For that reason, production could not simply leave Japan for Taiwan. In this case Hoshino's policy, "Our contract manufacturers are important partners," took precedence over any cost cutting measures.

However, the die-casting molds at the Japanese factory eventually wore out. It had been four years since the release of IRON COBRA, and the molds were no longer viable. This created a dilemma of whether or not to make a new set of molds in Japan. After reviewing the projected costs involved, and knowing there was already a capable partner in Taiwan, the conclusion was reached it was financially impossible to continue production in Japan.

Without hesitation, every element of the IRON COBRA was reevaluated. Numerous parts were redesigned and the new "made-in-Taiwan" IRON COBRA made its debut in 1998. The pedal many improvements that led to a far smoother pedal action. One such improvement was incorporating a "ball-bearing" system for the heel plate shaft bracket. However, this choice ended up causing an



The dramatically improved second edition of IRON COBRA but with the legacy of the first edition.

unexpected controversy.

## **DISPUTE WITH A COMPETITOR AND A RESOLUTION NAMED OILES®**

TAMA's primary pedal competitor at the time was well ahead in market share, but the release of the IRON COBRA represented the greatest challenge so far to the competitor's market dominance.

The competitor held a patent on the ball-bearing system used in the heel plate shaft bracket of their pedal, but after some research, TAMA realized that they could still use a ball-bearing system without infringing on the patent. However, the competitor disagreed and took legal action to prevent the use of ball-bearings in the IRON COBRA.

After a lengthy legal dispute, the ruling eventually came down in TAMA's favor, and the company was free to use the ball bearing system, but the company executives made a surprising decision. In keeping with TAMA's tradition of originality and innovation, they wanted to develop something that outperformed a traditional ball-bearing. So, teams began researching alternative systems, but nothing seemed to surpass the performance of the ball-bearings.

In the midst of R&D team's struggle, Dr. Yasuda, then Director of

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R&D, recalled a special shaft bracket called the “Oiles® Bearing”, made by Oiles Corporation. The product offered extremely smooth operation and maintained consistent performance, regardless of the environment. It was also extremely durable and could stand up to the constant stresses drum pedals had to endure. If this bearing could be effectively incorporated into the IRON COBRA’s shaft bracket, the pedal would have a smoother action and be an even more effective tool for drummers.

He wasted no time in reaching out to Oiles®, and luckily, they had a perfect sized bearing. TAMA was able to successfully integrate the bearing into the new IRON COBRA, and because they stuck to their philosophy of “pursuing original ideas,” they created a much higher-quality product.

## **TECHNICAL GUIDANCE FOR THE TAIWAN FACTORY**

Around 1994, the company transitioned its stand and pedal production from Japan to Taiwan. The beginning of IRON COBRA production in Taiwan magnified the importance of OEM drum factories. Originally, TAMA began outsourcing production to the Taichung factory in 1989 and by 1996, ROCKSTAR production had been fully implemented there.

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What made this transition possible was the technical guidance provided by employees from Japan. This, in a sense, allowed the Taiwan factory to function as an extension of the TAMA factory in Japan.

This arrangement lasted until 2000, when costs increases in Taiwan made it too difficult to maintain an economical production situation. It was also during this time China was establishing itself as the world's primary manufacturer and exporter.

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Part

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**FROM TAIWAN TO CHINA,  
AND  
PRESENT DAY OPERATIONS**

(2004-2020)

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## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOSHINO FACTORY IN GUANGZHOU, CHINA**

Toward the end of the 20th century, thanks to its low production costs, the world saw China gaining ground in becoming “the factory of the world.” Seeing this, along with the rising costs in Taiwan, TAMA had little choice but to shift its attention to China for production. Unlike the transfer from Japan to Taiwan, this time, the company considered building its own factory, beginning the process around 2000. The biggest challenge was deciding where exactly in China the factory should be built, but the fact that Hoshino’s die cast partner had already relocated to Guangzhou, greatly simplified the decision. In addition, the Guangdong Provincial Government was very proactive in welcoming foreign firms. When Hoshino Gakki showed interest in establishing operations there, a renowned auto manufacturer followed suit. Hoshino was actually one of the first Japanese companies to set up operations in this newly burgeoning production hub.



The building of Guangzhou Hoshino Gakki Seizo (Mfg.) Co., Ltd., established in 2003. The second story was added later for expansion of the plant.

By the end of 2001, the decision had officially been made to build a Hoshino-owned factory in Guangzhou. After the acquisition of the land, the new venture was named “Guangzhou Hoshino Gakki Seizo (Mfg.) Co., Ltd.” in July, 2002. Michio Nakamoto, the long-time plant manager of the TAMA factory, and Toru Kawamoto, TAMA’s expert on the Taiwan project, were dispatched to China to begin recruiting local candidates for executive positions. After choosing the personnel, the new staff was sent to the factory to be trained. Nakamoto and Kawamoto were then tasked with recruiting factory and administrative workers, who were then trained by the support staff from Japan. Unlike the situation in Taiwan, it was necessary to hire staff that already had knowledge of the industry to successfully establish Hoshino-owned operations in China. In order to train personnel to coordinate with Hoshino’s headquarters in Japan, more Japanese staff were temporarily sent to China to educate the local employees in these practices. This was how Hoshino prepared the Guangzhou factory for production, and the first Chinese-made ROCKSTAR kits began shipping in April of 2002.

## **APPLICATION OF DIE-CAST HOOPS**

As a result of the small die cast shop from Taipei moving to a new

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production facility in China, a large group of companies affiliated with that shop, began working relationships with TAMA, helping ensure a smooth transition to China. Just as the Taiwan die-cast hoops contributed to the development and success of Starclassic, the die-cast hoops also played a huge role in launching TAMA's first made-in-China drum set. The combination of this group's great ambition to expand business and the fact that Hoshino Gakki was searching for ways to add more value to their made-in-China drum sets, made it possible to produce die-cast hoops in China.

The ability to obtain high-quality, locally-sourced components helped to challenge the perceptions that "Made-in-China means low quality." Through its new operations in China, TAMA aimed to offer high-quality drum sets at a reasonable price.

## **STARTING WITH MID-PRICED MADE-IN-CHINA DRUMS**

Manufacturing ROCKSTAR in Hoshino Guangzhou with the same specs as the Taiwanese model was a temporary plan, and eventually, production of the new "Superstar kit" began. For many products, the move to Chinese production is typically equated with lower costs and much larger profit margins, but TAMA embraced a different strategy. A mid-level drum set with die-cast hoops was released in order to



Superstar – its production started in 2005.

reduce customers concern about lower-quality products. Although this drum set offered exceptional value and was released with high expectations, sales struggles, especially in the U.S.

## **STRUGGLES IN THE US MARKET**

Retailers and drummers in the United States tend to stay loyal to products based on history and tradition; Superstar received mixed reviews in that department. The use of the high-tension lugs also proved to be a point of controversy. Drummers viewed them as old-fashioned since the trend at the time favored smaller lugs. TAMA hoped the high-tension lugs would stand out visually compared to other popular styles, but it proved to be counterproductive, ultimately hurting sales of the new Superstar line.

The die-cast hoops also fell short, which was ironic since they were chosen with the intention of increasing the value and quality of the kit, but in the end, consumers just didn't view them as mid-level drum sets. Also, in a surprising turn of events, requests came in to replace the die cast hoops with regular hoops. Although this was a bit disappointing, it was a valuable lesson for the company, and TAMA implemented various changes in an attempt to rework the new line.

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## SUPERSTAR HYPER-DRIVE

In early 2006, TAMA's resident drum specialist, along with other staff members from Japan's factory, conducted a research tour of Europe. The new Superstar was steadily gaining sales and there was an intense battle brewing with competing brands. While visiting a large retail store in England, the staff looked at all of the different drum sets and noticed it was like a "small trade show." What really stood out was how strikingly similar all of the sets were from the various manufacturers. Seeing this, they realized that if nothing changed, the whole market would just boil down to a price war, something TAMA seriously wanted to avoid.

Around the same time, gospel drummers started experimenting with shallower toms, increasing their popularity. It brought about the idea that shallow toms would be a way to truly set TAMA apart in the market. Black Nickel shell hardware was also added in hopes of selling this model at a slightly higher price point than the standard Superstar. Initially, it was released as a limited edition, but sales were strong and the Superstar Hyper-Drive joined the regular lineup in 2008, establishing a new benchmark for mid-priced kits.

With its unique design, the Superstar Hyper-Drive was well-received in Europe, but did not do as well the United States where consumers

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Superstar Hyper-Drive Series  
featuring super shallow toms.  
A huge hit in Europe!



were more price-sensitive. The Superstar Hyper-Drive became one of the most popular sets in Europe but remained couldn't gain a foothold in the U.S.

This was a prime example of the differences between the two markets, and it emphasized the need to be in tune with the consumer trends in each market. This realization presented a new set of challenges and complications when it came to product planning.

## **IMPERIALSTAR'S COMEBACK**

The Taiwanese parts manufacturer, now operating in China, supplied metal parts to two major customers: Hoshino, and an American housing parts company. They expanded their factory thanks in large part to another American company's new project. Unfortunately, the project fell through and they approached Hoshino asking if TAMA would be able to utilize some additional factory space. This series of events led to the beginning of the IMPERIALSTAR project.

TAMA's Made-in-Taiwan Swingstar series was a line that held a lot of promise, but unfortunately it fell victim to Taiwan's increasing operating costs. Production was eventually halted, but this left a large void in the TAMA product line. The availability of this new Chinese factory space already producing die-cast parts, presented the perfect



New Imperialstar released in 2006. After multiple spec changes it has received critical acclaim for the entry model today.

opportunity. Japanese staff members from Guangzhou Hoshino Gakki Seizo were sent to the new factory so training for this new venture could begin. IMPERIALSTAR was reborn!

One important factor that led to Imperialstar's ultimate success, was an offer received from TAMA's European distributor, MEINL, for cymbal kits. The company had just expanded their production capacity and was looking to provide more cymbal kits. The timing was perfect and it was a welcome offer since most entry-level drum sets included cymbals. The MEINL offer allowed TAMA to meet their target market price.

However, the series experienced its share of challenges; one was a sharp rise in labor and material costs and the other was pricing battles with competitors. However, IMPERIALSTAR maintained its place as the best-in-class drum set in the U.S. and remains so today.

## **THE MARKET CULTURE REVEALED BY SILVERSTAR'S RELEASE**

In contrast to the success of Imperialstar, Superstar struggled to establish a foothold in the U.S. and Hyper-Drive didn't have the impact for which everyone had hoped. The hybrid Birch and Basswood shell also proved to be a problem. Most consumers favored the all Birch or all Maple shells the competition was producing.



Silverstar, featured with TAMA's traditional all birch shells.

The Hyper-Drive model was also slightly more expensive, which appeared to be contributing to its poor sales. The die cast hoops and high-tension lugs were other factors consumers were also not thrilled with, but the mid-tier pricing turned out to be the greatest barrier to success with these models.

In 2010, the decision was made to make some changes based on market demand. First, the shells were changed to all Birch and the lugs were switched to the often requested, smaller design, finally, the die-cast hoops were swapped out for regular flanged hoops. All of these changes lowered the cost significantly, and the new, more affordable Silverstar was very well received in the U.S. The impact was significant and helped TAMA gain ground in this important market. Many of the large retail chains, previously unwilling to carry Superstar Hyper-Drive, welcomed Silverstar to their product offerings.

This new series once again demonstrated the differences between the two markets as Silverstar's release in Europe did not go over nearly as well. The changes made for the U.S. market received multiple complaints in Europe, so additional modifications were made to the Europe-bound sets. These changes eventually led both markets to embrace Silverstar, which ultimately became a solid performer for the company.

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Proving nothing is permanent, even as Silverstar's popularity grew in Europe, it began to wane in the U.S. Maple shells became the new craze, and Silverstar was losing out to kits with Maple shells in the same price range. To remain competitive, TAMA released the Superstar Classic line at the 2015 NAMM Show. It featured many of the same specs as Silverstar, but was equipped with the in-demand Maple shells. This model was exclusive to the U.S and represented the greatest contrast between kits for two different markets in TAMA's long history.

## **REFLECTING ARTISTS' PERSONALITIES: EVOLUTION OF THE SIGNATURE PALETTE SERIES**

"Signature Palette" was a snare drum series designed in collaboration with professional drummers. The musicians helped shape the look and design of the instruments to fit their specific style and personality. One of TAMA's most popular drums from that series is the one that was designed specifically for Lars Ulrich. At Ulrich's request, his snare drum actually required bending diamond plate metal. The artists had very specific requests, all of which were adhered to as closely as possible.

These were not just marketing pieces, but instruments the artists

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Signature Palette Series, beginning with three artists now is up to nine at present day

actually used during their performances. There was also a sticker inside each shell bearing the artist's actual signature as a sign of their close involvement in developing the snare and their pride in the end result.

This series was first released in 1999 and initially featured three drummers: Kenny Aronoff, Bill Bruford, and Simon Phillips – Two models were designed for each artist for a total of six snares. Subsequently, three more models were added in 2001: Stewart Copeland, Mike Portnoy, and Lars Ulrich. Although some of these have since been discontinued, TAMA continues to produce signature models, reflecting the unique personality and style of each artist.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF NEW SNARE DRUMS IN TAMA'S FACTORY IN JAPAN**

After the exchange rate of the yen against the dollar peaked in 1995, it stabilized until around 2008, when the Yen's value spiked once again. This had a devastating impact on new orders of the Japanese-made products. Therefore, a decision was made to expand the production of snare drums, and the Warlord Collection became the central focus. This innovative series featured lugs and badges inlaid with Swarovski Crystal. It also featured the popular silver accessory design. The Spartan model, equipped with a steel shell and TAMA's



The snare drum catalog featuring Warlord Collection (2007)

original R. S. E. (Resonant Sound Edge), which was reminiscent of a 1920's era vintage metal snare drum. It generated a dry, punchy sound, that perfectly complemented its unrivaled looks. Additionally, each model was named for a historical fighting force or mythological figures: Athenian, Praetorian, Spartan, Masai, and Valkyrie, to highlight their unique characteristics.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF STARPHONIC

To cope with the unfavorable exchange rate, Hoshino determined it needed to find business opportunities in new fields, therefore, it was decided TAMA would enter the marching and concert percussion market. This market had actually been on the company's radar as far back as the 1970s, but details and product planning had to first be worked on in Japan. Although Japan's marching band market is small, it provided valuable information on marching snare drums. The research revealed something important: it was discovered that rather than one or two products, a full-scale marching snare drum line would be needed.

A noise reduction system with on-and-off operation was developed and named the Linear-Drive Strainer. The company also developed light-weight snappy snares that were inspired by vintage designs. Grooved



STARPHONIC Snare Drums utilizing new mechanisms (Grooved Hoops and Linear-Drive Strainer). This series helped TAMA break into the concert drum market.

Hoop and Freedom Lugs also came about after countless rounds of prototyping. This new hoop support system was a trailblazing new feature and unique to the STARPHONIC Snare Drum series.

## TWO WATCHES

Between 1992 and 1994 one of TAMA's Japanese endorsers had developed a hand-built Tension Watch which he later presented to the company. Immediately seeing the promise in such a device, TAMA wasted no time working to put it into commercial production. This innovative tool enabled drummers to tune their drums to exactly the same tension every time. This was the first tool of its kind where you could visually check the tuning of a drum head. Initially, players struggled with how to use it, and the company was overrun with inquiries.

In an effort to help teach consumers how best to utilize the Tension Watch, the actual settings of several Artists were presented as a way to create a sort of benchmark for users. Very soon after that, drummers better understood how the device worked, and it ended up becoming one of TAMA's most popular accessory items to date.

Another very successful accessory was the Rhythm Watch. The unique design is credited to one of TAMA's domestic sales reps, who



Instruction manual  
for Tension Watch

also happened to be a drummer. He thought it would make more sense to include a dial rather than traditional up and down buttons for the tempo control. Per his suggestion, a dial system was utilized.

It was also important that the sounds emitted by the watch be uniform. This allowed for better stick control since the player would not be distracted by clicking sounds, especially when practicing more complex techniques like irregular metering or accent switching on a 16th note.

The final touches included a memory function of up to 20 different tempo patterns. It should also be noted that the Electronics Department of Ibanez (Hoshino's guitar brand), offered valuable assistance working out the details of this product. Upon its completion, the Rhythm Watch was received extremely well and garnered industry-wide acclaim. Over the years, slight improvements and upgrades have been made, but the Rhythm Watch remains one of TAMA's longest-standing and most successful accessories.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPEED COBRA

Since its inception in 1994, the Iron Cobra has been a massive success. However, even with its excellent track-record and strong reputation, some felt the pedal was slightly too heavy. The weight



Rhythm Watch – an ultimate metronome. The mechanisms and structure designed especially for drummers received worldwide acceptance and is still one of TAMA's best sellers today.



was very much by design since it also adds stability and durability. The TAMA design team also believed that if the pedal was made it too light, it would no longer be the IRON COBRA, so the design was kept the same.

However, demand necessitated the development of a new pedal with different features to serve a different segment of the market. In 2009, after Hoshino Gakki Seizo merged with Hoshino Gakki Headquarters, the company established two separate divisions: drums and hardware, and it was the hardware division charged with the development of this new pedal.

Longboard drum pedals had become an increasingly popular trend, so the development team pondered questions like “Why a longboard?” and “How long should the board be exactly?” The first big decision to be made was the actual length of the footboard. After this was determined, a die-cast mold was made according to the selected length. At this point, the pedal still needed a name, and not all of the details surrounding the footboard had been worked out yet.

After completing the mold, a prototype board was produced along with the rest of the pedal’s parts. Through a process of trial and error, something unexpected was discovered. When the footboard was set further back, closer to the drummer, it produced lighter and easier footwork -- an exciting revelation. After some final design tweaks, the



The flyer made at the time of Speed Cobra release. In contrast to IRON COBRA's black image, silver was chosen for the image color for Speed Cobra, which represents sharpness and speed.

project was finally complete and Speed Cobra debuted in 2013. The company was thrilled to now be able offer two quality pedal options: the IRON COBRA for those who favored a heavier, more powerful feel or the Speed Cobra, for those who wanted a lighter pedal action.

## **S.L.P. : A NEW EVOLUTION**

TAMA had released countless snare drum over the years, all sharing similar appearances with the main variations being shell size and material. This method of new product development always led to a similar pattern. Upon releasing a new product, sales were good for a short time but usually fell off not long after.

Hoshino decided to focus on finding a solution to break this cycle. They looked to develop a new snare drum series by employing a completely new approach. There was some preliminary researched done as to what styles of music should be targeted and what sounds made the most sense to pursue. Tireless experimentation went into testing various combinations of shell materials, hoops, snare wires, shell sizes, and lug designs, in order to zero in on the right tones.

It was an arduous, time-consuming process, but ultimately fulfilled the final goal: to determine the best material combinations for different genres. From top to bottom, the sound, shape, materials



Magazine ad for S.L.P.  
Snare Drums' release

used, and even the names were meticulously studied and planned down to the finest detail.

Eventually, the specs of eight different snare drums, with uniquely different characteristics, were chosen. The series name, S. L. P. (Sound Lab Project), embodied the process that took place in order to produce these snares, and the line was eventually released in 2013. This new series enjoyed fast popularity and sales took off instantly. Since then, TAMA has continued to refine and tweak the lineup, with this highly-regarded series eventually expanding to include complete drum kits designed under the same philosophy.

## **“COCKTAIL-JAM” KIT – BEHIND THE SCENES**

Since 2016, there has been a sharp increase in demand for drum sets in China. It has long been thought that small drum sets would be ideal for beginners as well as youth drum education, since they take up less space. Although it ended up fulfilling a completely different purpose, this was the theory behind the development of the “Cocktail-JAM” Kit. TAMA wasn’t interested in producing a small toy kit; the goal was to create a high quality, compact drum set.

With ease of transportation and storage being the major considerations, the standup cocktail drum kit was used as a starting point. A



TAMA “Cocktail-JAM” Kit allows drumming sitting on a throne in small spaces. This is a magazine ad announcing its release.

conventional cocktail set has a deep drum that functions as both a floor tom and a bass drum.

Instead, this kit would be designed with two separate, shallow drums for the floor tom and bass drum. Additionally, the snare drum would fit inside the bass drum, and the rack tom inside the floor tom for convenient storage. This innovative concept led TAMA to the development of the “Cocktail-JAM” Kit, which allows drummers to play sitting, just like a typical drum set, without giving up compact size and portability.

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## Chapter 2 | EXPLORING NEW MARKETS

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### **ENTERING THE MARCHING MARKET**

From the 1960’s to the early 1970’s, a large portion of Hoshino Gakki’s overseas sales came from the United States. During that time, the company knew there was a high demand for marching drums in the U.S., but it proved a difficult market to enter. One reason being



TAMA Marching Drums were released following many years of research and development. The picture shows tenor drums that can generate various musical scales by grouping together drums with specific diameters.

the increasing demand for musical instruments in overseas markets, especially Europe. The growth of new music genres always created a spike in demand for instruments, so TAMA remained focused on developing new products to satisfy demand. This dynamic prevented the company from fully pursuing the marching percussion market, but Yoshihiro Hoshino restored the focus on this goal. He saw a successful venture into the marching market as critical to the company's continued growth and future success. So, in 2002, he assigned Kimihide Hoshino to oversee the project.

The timing could not have been better, since sales of TAMA's existing products had begun to plateau. Acoustic drums were facing challenges from electric kits and sales had stagnated as a result. The marching market is unique in that it is not as reactive to quick changes and market trends, so new products do not necessarily need to be developed regularly. However, that also means the market is dominated by long established and trusted brands, so entering the market would be no small task.

Kimihide Hoshino reached out to his friend Neil Graham in Fort Wayne, IN, who connected him with an individual named Tom Float. Float was, and remains a well-respected figure in the marching industry, gaining notoriety with the renowned "Blue-Devils" marching band. Float's resume included performances at Disneyland,



TAMA's marching drums feature countless unique new innovations such as the Buzz Killer Mute (A muffler that adjusts/controls the guts) (guts = the snare wires for regular snare drums).

all while holding a position as a high school marching band instructor. He had previously received offers from other companies to assist in product development, but he declined. However, he accepted TAMA's offer and was brought on for the production and market entry project. Prior to Tom signing with TAMA, Kimihide Hoshino was looking to collaborate with him on a snare drum prototype. Tom initially felt some hesitation since he had seen how other companies mishandled product complaints, but he connected with TAMA's earnest and sincere approach, "I felt confident that my ideas may be reflected in their products." Tom's signing with Hoshino Gakki marked the beginning of TAMA's full-scale development of its marching product line.

## **TAMA'S PURSUIT OF ORIGINALITY**

For the most part, marching drum designs had been long-established by the time TAMA entered the field. Unlike other genres, where new styles produced new demands for different designs, there didn't appear to be much if any advancements taking place in marching percussion, with the same unchanged drums having been used for decades. In their attempt to impact the market, TAMA was determined to develop completely new and innovative features. Tom explained the situation to Kimihide and inspired by his enthusiasm, Kimihide

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was motivated to start developing marching drums from the ground up. He invited Tom to Japan where they, along with the TAMA R&D staff, thoroughly analyzed every aspect of the competitors' products. Discussion initially focused on finding solutions to all the problems Tom had experienced with existing products. Through this process, new components like TAMA's patented "Detachable Gut Frame" and "Buzz Killer Mutes" were developed.

TAMA's primary objective was to evaluate the components and features of the drums and have the carriers supplied by a third-party manufacturer. TAMA had been negotiating with the third-party supplier, and things were going well, but an agreement could not be reached on price, so TAMA was unable to secure an OEM contract for the carriers. From here, it was decided that TAMA would refocus their attention and develop the carriers in-house.

Carriers are an extremely important part of marching performance, but they're not exactly complex structures. Their designs have mostly been perfected and really don't have much room for improvement. So, it was determined that releasing a conventional carrier would be sufficient.

The first thing TAMA's R&D team researched was patents for which other brands had applied. During the course of this research, a few questions came up, such as, "Is this the only way to make this

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product work?” and “Are there any other methods that could yield better results?” As the research continued, weeks went by without any major breakthroughs. Then, in mid-2005, a few designs were showing some major promise, and one year later, the first prototype was finished. From there, the company began to conduct marketing research with Tom Float. At the time, the internal R&D team was not experienced in marching percussion, and problems arose that were time consuming to correct. At the same time, the R&D team also had to test and troubleshoot other new assignments for the primary TAMA drum lineup. With the heavy workload, the carrier project was put on hold. However, the carriers were eventually worked out and in February 2009, the final production plan was complete.

The United States is by far the world’s largest marching market. Performances occur mainly outdoors and in various weather conditions, so the instruments have to be durable. Therefore, any new products were tested for this right out of the gate, ensuring they could withstand all possible weather conditions. To this end, TAMA approached several marching bands to see if they would agree to field test the final product line when it was released in 2010.

In February 2010, eight years after the plan was set in motion, TAMA showcased their new marching products at TMEA (Texas Music Educators Association). Then, in April of the same year, the company



TAMA's marching carriers with full of various original mechanisms.



participated in the exhibition at WGI (Winter Guard International). It was November 9th when the company received its very first order for marching drums from Fairfield High School. TAMA took full advantage of the trade show circuit, exhibiting the new marching products at PASIC (Percussion Arts Society International Convention), and from that point on, business was rolling!

The marching drums were featured in an American music industry publication called, “Music Trades” in the February 2012 issue. Early on, it was thought it would be almost impossible to succeed in the marching business offering only drums, but TAMA’s new marching products delivered a bevy of useful and innovative features that made an immediate and lasting impact.

The marching products were doing well, but there was still a noticeable demand for brass and mallet percussion instruments. The demand became so great, that in 2013, TAMA elected to collaborate with a California-based brass instrument maker and American stick maker as third-party suppliers. A couple years later, the decision was made to collaborate with a long-standing and respected French manufacturer to release TAMA-branded mallet percussion instruments in 2015.

In spite of an already well-established market, TAMA was able to successfully enter the marching percussion market. It was by applying

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the same philosophies used in the development of TAMA' drum kits, that the company was able to innovate and bring something new to the marching drum space, an approach and spirit TAMA maintains today.

## THE ULTIMATE HARDWARE

Beginning with the release of the first edition of IRON COBRA in 1993, TAMA developed many innovative products such as 1st Chair Drum Thrones, the IRON COBRA Hi-Hat Stand, and Speed Cobra Pedal. However, the company's Roadpro and Stage Master cymbal and snare stands had yet to garner the acclaim or market share of TAMA's other products.

In an effort to re-energize their hardware offerings, TAMA engineered and released two new lines designed to deliver the quality and function for which drummers were asking. STAR HARDWARE is a line of top-quality stands that offers unmatched stability and incredible operational flexibility. The company's engineers drew on every bit of their experience to design this super high-end, professional equipment, made to perform to the exacting standards of exacting professionals. THE CLASSIC series, on the other hand, is modernized, vintage-style hardware designed to offer players a lightweight alternative with



STAR HARDWARE – High-end hardware series with TAMA's unlimited features. This is a magazine ad just after its release.

a smaller footprint and places the emphasis on simplicity. TAMA has relentlessly pursued hardware improvements as the backbone of the brand under the slogan, “Hardware First,” which the company still employs today.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE STAR DRUMS PROJECT

In the summer of 2010, several staff members at TAMA’s Akatsuki factory in Japan who oversaw general product planning, were assigned to a special project. They were tasked with developing a new high-end line of drums, to boost the factory’s orders. The Akatsuki factory was still producing TAMA’s highest grade series at the time, Starclassic Bubinga ELITE. This was even after production of the regular Starclassic was transferred to China. Once Starclassic production was up and running in China, and sales were good, it was hard to justify the large price difference between the two lines simply because one was made in Japan. It was especially difficult since both carried the “Starclassic” name.

However, the made-in-China Starclassic lacked something critical that the high-end market demanded; it lacked prestige. So, the goal was to develop a flagship model that could surpass the status and



Magazine ad of the Classic Hardware series that offers the simplest operation and most lightweight hardware.

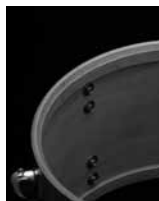
prominence of Starclassic. Other companies would typically offer “made to order” finishes or special alternate shell materials when defining a kit as “high-end”, but TAMA wanted something more. They wanted to create something special, a kit with a sound that truly deserved to be called TAMA’s flagship model.

## THE SEARCH FOR DRUMS WITH SUPERIOR RESONANCE

“What do you want and expect from your drum sound?” That’s a tough question to answer, but it’s one that had to be addressed. To begin, essential elements such as shell material and construction methods were heavily scrutinized. The ideal scenario was to use as few plies as possible, ideally one. So, TAMA tried attempted to use only three thin plies, but it quickly became apparent that that was not going to work. Ultimately, the design consisted of a core of 2mm thick Maple sandwiched between 2 plies of 1.5 mm Maple, with 5mm thick Sound Focus Rings added to the interior of the shell. TAMA, well known for its Bubinga kits, decided to include one as part of this new flagship line. Early attempts were successful in crafting a 4.5mm super thin shell, with 9mm Sound Focus Rings for additional presence. These shells were intentionally built differently than those of the Starclassic line in order to set them apart. Beyond



STAR Bubinga shells featured with 4.5mm super thin shells with Sound Focus Rings.



STAR Maple shells featured with a 2mm solid maple wood for the core material.

the changes in the shell construction, the bearing edges were reshaped and the peak positions were changed. With all of the research and adjustments, it was thought the new shells would produce the desired sound...but somehow, they weren't resonating as expected: Something was still missing.

## **GREAT TONE DOESN'T COME FROM DRUM SHELLS ALONE**

Rack toms are mounted on a tom holder, while floor toms and bass drums rely on legs for support. No matter how amazing a particular set of shells are, they all require suitable shell and mounting hardware to function. Knowing this, TAMA began examining the role of the tom mounting system, to see if they could develop something that would afford the kit superior resonance and tone. The shells were fitted with various mounting systems to determine which yielded the best results, and a similar process was used to select the ideal hardware for the bass drum and floor tom. This trial and error process ensued over the course of many days.

## **CREATING A BRAND NEW TOM MOUNT SYSTEM**

During the development of the Starclassic's Star-Cast Mounting

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Super Resonant Mounting System. It provides the maximum natural resonance by suspending the shell at two points on the batter hoop and supporting it at another point on the bottom hoop as shown in the diagram on the left.

System, TAMA learned that rubber insulation works extremely well in stopping a tom's vibration from transferring to the tom holder. Both theoretically and in practice, toms resonate best when they're cradled. The natural vibrations are unencumbered and the resonance of the drum experiences minimal dampening. In practice, there are several ways to accomplish this. The existing Star-Cast Mounting System held the tom at three points along the batter hoop. Working off of that design, it was thought that if the third contact point was moved to the bottom, and functioned as more of a rest, it would benefit the resonance of the tom. This concept was explained to TAMA's R&D engineer and he was asked to design the new mount. These were the beginning stages of the "Super Resonant Mounting System."

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE INNOVATIVE BRACKET**

Along with the development of the new mounting system, the search for the perfect bracket was also underway. The question still lingered as to what was the best way to connect the toms to the tom-holder. TAMA had found the best system in theory, but further testing revealed additional improvements were still needed. The main focus was trying to determine the best vibration isolation system for the L-rod component of the tom holder. Rubber wraps on the

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TAMA's groundbreaking Quick-Lock Tom Bracket system that offers both great shell resonance and easy setup/teardown.

L-rod would be effective in isolating vibration, but that would lack stability and not be durable long term. The R&D team then refocused their attention to TAMA's memory locks. Memory locks are used in conjunction with L-rods, generally for the purpose of saving a drummer's preferred adjustment setting. Closer examination revealed that the rubber insulation could be placed between the memory lock and the tom bracket, without sacrificing any stability or strength. The memory lock holds the L-rod, and the tom bracket holds the memory lock via the vibration insulation rubber lining. It was a big moment! This new innovation would become TAMA's groundbreaking Quick-Lock Tom Bracket System.

There was, however, one issue with placing rubber insulation between the memory lock and the bracket. When the rubber parts are in contact with each other for long periods of time, they can become difficult to separate. This was definitely a concern, but fortunately there was a workaround. Fluorine resin, typically used as a coating in non-stick frying pans, has a very low friction coefficient and was the ideal solution. The fluorine resin was mixed with the insulation rubber, which allowed the toms to be mounted and removed very easily.

The next objective was to obtain the same level of resonance from the floor tom and bass drum. To start, the same tom brackets were used on the floor toms and to preserve even more resonance, the team

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developed, two-piece, rubber feet with an air pocket at the bottom. This innovation also inspired a total reevaluation and improvement of the bass drum spurs.

## **STAR DRUMS – TAMA'S TRUE VALUE**

The initial research took an entire year, and another year and a half was spent planning the details of the kits themselves, but STAR Drums finally made their debut at the 2013 Winter NAMM Show. Since their release, TAMA has introduced a variety of new additions to the series, including an assortment of professional-quality kits and snare drums.

This extremely challenging project could not have been completed without the teamwork and dedication of TAMA's staff, to whom this project was assigned. The company is extremely proud of their enthusiasm, drive, and the fantastic drums they created. TAMA STAR Drums are truly a new benchmark for the company and drum manufacturing in general. As one reflects on the modern history of TAMA, it seems appropriate to close the story with STAR Drums, a line encompassing the pinnacle of artisan craftsmanship, premium materials, and outstanding tone. They are the finest instruments

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After STAR Drums released, STAR Reserve snare drums have been added to the lineup.



TAMA has to offer and crafted with the same spirit of innovation and design that has propelled the brand from its beginnings, to its prominent place in the market today.



# A History of TAMA

The Story Behind the Strongest Name in Drums

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