

Sunlite Studio Drumkit

A Nice Surprise From A "Budget Brand"

HITS

great sound

attractive appearance

sturdy, well-designed hardware

nice price

MISSES

bass drum beater seemed a little light

tension on snare
strainer slipped over time

by Martin Patmos

Sunlite is a Taiwanese-made brand that you see frequently in "mom & pop" music stores, but only rarely in the chain stores. As a result, the company is often regarded exclusively as a budget brand, as opposed to a major player within the drum industry. The fact is, for over fifteen years Sunlite has been offering quality instruments at affordable prices to players of all levels.

The Studio model is Sunlite's latest high-end addition to their catalog. And frankly, it's a gem. It offers sound, looks, functionality, and a price that's just right.

The Drums

Straightaway, this kit is an eye-catcher, with a smooth, transparent lacquer finish that allows the wood grain to show through. The well-built shells are made of a 7-mm, 9-ply, maple/basswood combination, with seams so clean I had to look twice to find them. Besides helping to bring the price down, the company feels that this wood combination is harmonically fuller, offering more complex overtones than an all-maple kit. The maple brings warmth and sustain, while the basswood adds clarity and projection. I found the drums warm and full, with a nice attack. Lugs and hardware are isolated from the shells throughout, eliminating any acoustic interference.

A standard five-piece configuration includes a matching wood snare drum and natural wood hoops on the bass drum. The lacquered shells (emphasizing the wood grain), small oval badges, and simple, teardrop-shaped chrome lugs create a great-looking kit.

Bass Drum

The 16x22 bass drum (outfitted with Remo heads) offered a deep, round, full, and warm sound. While it sounded good at different tensions, I especially liked the drum when I tuned it deep and loose, creating a booming punch. Drumkey-operated tension rods added to the drum's clean look, while sturdy, adjustable legs provided a solid stance.

Toms

The 10x12 and 11x13 rack toms featured suspension mounts. With their single-ply heads, they tuned easily. The maple/basswood shells produced a warm, full tone, with an attack that sounded especially nice when opening up at medium to loud volumes.

The central post coming up from the bass drum holds two small L-shaped tom arms, with the capacity to hold a third item such as a small cymbal boom. Positioning the toms was easy. Once set, the memory locks sat snugly against the hardware to create a smooth, seamless look.

The 16x16 floor tom continued the tonal range, sounding deep and warm. Thanks to its long legs I was able to position the drum exactly as I wanted.



Snare Drum

The 10-lug, 6½x14 snare drum is made from the same wood combination as is the rest of the set. Its tone blended nicely with the rest of the drums, sounding especially crisp and clean when cranked up towards the high end. It had body, but was dry enough not to be unbalanced or overpowering. Rimshots on it made for nice accents.

The snare featured Sunlite's S-05 Lateral Throw-Off, which dropped away from the drum smoothly, then easily locked back up in place. It functioned quite well, though I had to re-adjust the snare tension every few days. Other than that minor problem, the snare drum complemented the kit very well.

Hardware

The 1001 series hardware that was included with the kit proved sturdy, functional, and easy to handle. Practically every wingbolt fit naturally in my fingers, operating smoothly and comfortably. Double-braced legs with fat rubber feet offered solid support, while isolated tubing kept things quiet. Everything positioned very nicely, with the ball-and-socket snare basket an especially noteworthy feature. The oversized knob for adjusting the hi-hat pedal tension was also a nice touch.

The double chain-drive bass drum pedal was mounted on a heavy footplate for solidity, with a single spring tension adjustment and no-nonsense design. It struck quickly and accurately, producing a good punch in mid- to high-volume levels. Although fully functional and capable of producing a good sound, the beater was light for my taste. I'd have liked something with a little more mass and throw. But with the number of aftermarket beaters available today, most drummers personalize this aspect of their pedals anyway, so this is a minor consideration.

Looking For More?

The Sunlite Studio comes as a standard five-piece set in seven different transparent lacquer finishes. However, Sunlite takes special orders, and will produce drums in any color requested, as well as in specialized finishes like fades and sunbursts. And while they don't stock add-on toms, if you're looking for something beyond a five-piece kit, they'll custom-make any size drum requested. They suggest ordering such additional drums at the same time as the basic five-piece so that the finish comes from the same batch and all the drums match perfectly.

Conclusion

I can't imagine anyone being unhappy with this kit. From the boom of the bass, to the warm, round sound of the toms, to the crack of the snare, this is a great-sounding drumset. Add to that the solid construction, nice looks, and excellent hardware package, and you've got a complete pro-level kit ready to go. Considering all this quality, coupled with a really appealing price, Sunlite's Studio is a set of drums worthy of serious consideration.

<p>THE NUMBERS</p> <p>Configuration: 16x22 bass drum, 10x12 and 11x13 rack toms, 16x16 floor tom, and 6½x14 snare drum. All shells are 7-mm, 9-ply maple/basswood combination. Hardware package includes 1001 series cymbal stand, cymbal boom stand, snare stand, hi-hat stand, and bass drum pedal. Seven transparent lacquer colors standard; custom colors and finishes available at extra cost.</p> <p>List price \$1,375</p> <p>(626) 448-8018, www.sunlitedrum.com.</p>
