

# REVIEW

De Gregorio Chanela Cajon

Can sitting on a box be fun? The De Gregorio Cajon answers many musical questions

# De Gregorio Chanela Cajon

words: Ian Croft images: Eckie

Now, normally I'd not write a review of a percussion instrument as my depth of knowledge coupled with my limited abilities to play such instruments is legendary in the *Drummer* office. So, after eliciting no response from our wayward ace percussion reviewer I had to settle for quickly getting onto this box as the deadline loomed ever closer!

So, awaiting a late evening so that I didn't have to share my inadequacies with my fellow workmates I began to examine and nervously attempt to play beats on the De Gregorio Cajon. Actually, I lied about that bit - well, not the late night part - as the first thing I did was watch the accompanying DVD - *The Ways of the Cajon* that De Gregorio kindly includes and, what a great help that was. Charting the history and development of this instrument from its beginnings in Peru, we

journey to Cuba and then across to Spain in a beautifully shot, hugely captivating and highly interesting 65 minutes that also benefits from high quality audio and is inspiring enough to have your mum and all your neighbours banging out beats in next to no time on anything that resembles a box! I should mention that this rather splendid DVD is available separately, so should any of you decide to investigate this instrument then this DVD is a great place to start.

## It's A Big World

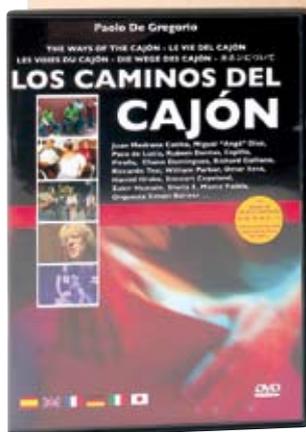
What is fascinating about the Cajon is that it has been adapted into so many musical genres, or more importantly is able to be integrated into many genres due to the instrument's abundance of sounds available at just your finger tips. The DVD bears witness to performances of flamenco, hip-hop, drum and bass, a variety of Latin scenarios, funk and even a string quartet and at no time ever does the instrument impinge itself upon the music,

instead it significantly adds to the overall soundscape. And, to fully round out the package there is a maintenance manual that contains many examples on how to produce a variety of sounds, notated rhythms including Peruvian, Cuban, Afro, pop-rock, hard rock (yes, even hard rock) and a bunch of other inspiring beats to lavish upon your box are included.

## Construction

When it comes to manufacturing Cajons it seems that wood availability is naturally a key factor and as the De Gregorio Cajon is manufactured in Italy, European woods are going to feature. Fortunately, birch is not only easily available but is sonically suited to the production of a Cajon as the birch plywood used provides all the correct frequencies and tones.

The body of this, the Chanela model Cajon is manufactured from 0.5" thick nine-ply Baltic birch, whilst the rear of the instrument is reduced to 0.25" thick five-ply woods. The highly distinctive front



## Heads Up

PRICE: £119 (inc VAT)

### UPBEATS:

- ▲ Well manufactured
- ▲ Wealth of sounds
- ▲ Fun, fun, fun

### DOWNBEATS:

No way Jose!

### CONTACT:

Soar Valley Music  
Tel: 0116 230 4926  
www.cajondg.com

soundboard is also five-ply, but only 2.5mm thick.

What makes the Chanela model a little unique is that De Gregorio strived to produce a Cajon that offered an extremely sensitivity snare sound. By utilising electric guitar strings in double the normal quantity placed behind the front playing panel, the Chanela Cajon provides additional levels of 'buzz', sustain and allows for maximum control. This snare system is also easily removed by means of a few screws should you desire not to use it, or if at a later date you need to replace or adjust any of the strings. All the component parts are assembled with propriety glues except for the upper part of the front and the internal pine reinforcement post that is screwed into position. The exterior finish is produced by use of an eco-friendly water-based paint that is applied by compressor, ensuring an even finish. The Chanela Cajon stands 49cm high, is 29cm deep and similarly 29cm wide, giving you more than enough room to get comfortable upon. Our review model carries a stain black front panel that still retains large elements of the birch graining. This 'drum' is available in six sumptuous colours apart from our stain black model with natural, red, green, blue and brown available to you.

#### In Use

Okay, now I'm really getting into this beautiful box and sitting astride the top it is easy to strike the front face or panel. This panel is screwed into place and as the internal strings run in a 'V' shape



from top to bottom, there is more 'snare' sound available by playing nearer the top of the instrument than the bottom, as down there sustain as such is dramatically reduced. Playing into the centre of the front face you retrieve more low-end and consequently draw bass tones from the drum's body. Mixing the two areas creates an interesting cocktail of 'kick and snare' sounds. As previously stated the snares can be removed if so desired. However, I'm all for having them in place as it sounds so much more authentic in terms of reproducing a sweet snare 'slap'. You can get really adventurous and utilise some of the drum's sides, but naturally, the resonance and volume are not the same as performing upon the front face, but nonetheless, there are plenty of areas that offer up a host of sounds from this small and

portable instrument.

Producing the basic two sounds is actually quite easy. With a little guidance from the booklet it showed and described how to emit a good sharp tone by playing out near the top corners and using all the fingers, right up to the palm, using a whip-like motion to draw a healthy 'crack'. More delicate use of the fingers produces the 'ghost notes', and hammering into the centre produces a wealth of low-end thump that mixes in a completely balanced manner with the attacking snare sounds. It really did not take me too long at all to get into playing the Cajon and to discover the many and varied sounds that it is capable of producing. I found the whole experience really quite Zen-like and calming. After only a short while, I had the box buzzing with drum sounds and rhythms. **D**



## Conclusion

Well, after devoting almost all my playing years to sitting behind the drum set, I'm now quite keen to sit upon a Cajon and emulate the sounds and rhythms with just a single box. Sure, I'm not going to forsake my kit, but I must admit to being seduced by the fun and ease of performing upon such a cool little box. The Cajon is such a highly portable instrument that anyone, and I mean anyone, can have fun with it. I also think that playing the Cajon should become part of the school curriculum, if only to show kids how much fun you can have by sitting upon a wooden box and discovering the joy of making rhythms. It would definitely keep them smiling that's for sure. With summer on its way [honest... Ed] now is the time to invest in a percussion product that will return your investment in joy. All the players on *The Way of the Cajon* can't be wrong!



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