

# Stagg Black Metal Bell Cymbals

>>Sonic Artistry

by Mike Haid

First, let's address one potential misconception. Stagg's unique Black Metal Bell cymbals, which are hand-crafted in northern China, are not designed specifically for the musical genre known as "black metal." In this case, the term describes the raw, dark, earthy finish on the top of each cymbal. This texture helps to create a dry, thick, focused sound. The underside of each cymbal has a smooth lathed finish that allows the heavy, hand-cast B20 bronze to resonate brightly, with a piercing brilliance that cuts like a knife.

## Seven Separate Sounds

Our review set of seven bell cymbals (which are sold individually) included 6" light and medium models, 6½" light and medium models, and 7" light, medium, and heavy models. Each cymbal features a large bell that levels off into a lip between ½" and 1" wide depending on the cymbal's diameter.

The 6" light and medium cymbals were very similar in pitch, with the light cymbal predictably producing a slightly thinner sound. Both were higher-pitched than the larger cymbals. The 6½" light and medium cymbals were also very similar in overall pitch and tonality, and were a little darker than the 6" models.

The 7" light, medium, and heavy cymbals had the widest range of pitch variation. They also made for a terrific pair of mini-hats, using the 7" light on top and the 7" heavy on bottom.

The most impressive aspect of these cymbals is that because they're hand-crafted and not perfectly shaped, you'll get a totally different tonality, color, and volume level from each one, depending on where, how hard, and with which part of the stick you strike it. This may hold true for many cymbals, but the variations on these plates are really drastic. As I experimented, I found several unique voices within the main voice of each cymbal.

## Out To Play

The obvious application for the Black Metal Bell cymbals is to use them individually as piercing "ice bell-style" effects. When I tried them in this role they performed beautifully, with lengthy sustain.

**KEY NOTES**

- Wide array of sonic colors from each cymbal
- Alternative sounds to enhance your current cymbal setup
- 7" models create a thick, piercing set of mini-hats

Despite their sinister appearance, Black Metal Bell cymbals are extremely musical, with plenty of individuality and character.

When inverted, piggyback-style, on top of a larger cymbal, the BMB cymbals add a full-bodied washy explosion when that larger cymbal is struck—a distinct voice built from the combined tonalities of both cymbals resonating off each other. This configuration also allows for separate splash and bell strikes from the same stack.

Placing a BMB cymbal right-side-up directly on top of a crash or splash creates a cool, trashy, staccato percussive effect. This sound works well in conjunction with accented bass drum fill or groove patterns. (Think Terry Bozzio.)

BMB cymbals can also be held in the hand and played as a percussion instrument, like a Brazilian triangle or agogo bells. Using different parts of the drumstick (tip, shoulder, shaft, butt) creates a spectrum of colors from the bell and lip of the cymbal.

As I mentioned earlier, these babies make killer mini-hats. Using a heavy 7" BMB cymbal as a bottom cymbal and a lighter one on top produced a bright, cutting, biting, and percussive "chick" when played with the foot.

Finally, you can lay one of these cymbals on a snare or tom and play the drum to achieve a tight, techno-industrial sound effect. Or play them individually with sticks, brushes, a bow, or by hand. It's easy to get creative with these funky little plates.

## Summing Up

"Fun" would be the best word to describe my adventures with these ultra-versatile—and affordably priced—bell cymbals. Pick up one or more, and let your imagination loose. Trust me, you'll find many cool ways to incorporate the Black Metal Bells into your kit.

## THE NUMBERS

6" Light	\$55
6" Medium	\$65
6½" Light	\$70
6½" Medium	\$75
7" Light	\$70
7" Medium	\$80
7" Heavy	\$90

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