



# Crash Test #3

YAMAHA DTK5L ELECTRONIC  
LATIN PERCUSSION SYSTEM

by Norman Weinberg

## High-Tech for Hand Drummers

YAMAHA'S NEW DTK5L IS A COMBINATION OF devices that are packaged for the Latin percussionist who wants to expand his or her setup with electronic percussion instruments. It's designed for a player who is looking for a great deal of flexibility in a small amount of space, and is absolutely ideal for someone who plays hand percussion with one limb and stick-based percussion instruments with the other.

**What's in It?** The Latin Set includes the DTX version 2.0 brain, one TP80S (stereo drum pad), one TP80 (mono drum pad), one PCY80 (stereo cymbal pad), two BP80 pads (a tube-shaped pad with two playing surfaces), and three DT10 triggers (piezo transducers). The kit also comes with a rack stand that is designed to hold the pads so that they can be played standing up or seated. Last but not least, it comes with a floppy disk containing all the system-exclusive data custom designed for this set of pads.

**The Breakdown.** Yamaha's DTX brain has been around for a while, and the Version 2.0 software has added some additional power. If you haven't seen this brain before, here's the quick-and-dirty tour around its basic features: ten stereo trigger inputs, 64 drum kits (32 factory kits and 32 user kits), 16 chains with 32 steps available in each chain, 928 highly editable drum sounds, a complete general MIDI synthesizer with 32-voice polyphony, a

full-blown sequencer with 100 pre-recorded songs and room for 30 more of your own, 660 prerecorded patterns with room for 100 user patterns, "groove check" to help you with your rhythmic timing, a full-feature MIDI implementation and a killer LCD panel that clearly displays what you're doing at all times. The DTX has a pair of stereo outputs along with a pair of auxiliary outputs, an auxiliary input for mixing the sounds of a CD player or other sound source with the DTX and 12 different types of reverb effects.

This is Yamaha's most powerful drum brain, bringing together the flexibility and powerful MIDI and live performance features of their old DTS70, and the ease of use of their more recent TMX kits. It's got a little bit of everything: the trigger inputs have all the necessary controls, such as pad type, gain amount, level range, velocity range, velocity curve, self rejection, cross-talk rejection and specific rejection. Each trigger can specify note, gate time and MIDI channel. In addition, you can program one to five notes to stack, alternate or hold (great for chords and loops). You can even program a velocity cross-fade between five different sounds.

The manual for the DTX brain is clearly written. It contains a short "Getting Started" section that takes you through the basic operations of the unit, and a more detailed "Feature Reference" section that covers every one of the functions of the machine.

**The Drum Pads.** During Yamaha's history

of electronic percussion instruments, the feel and response of the company's pads have consistently improved with each new generation, and these are the best pads that Yamaha has produced to date. The TP80 and the TP80S are mono and stereo versions of the same pad. About 8 1/2" in diameter, they have a rubber playing surface and a slightly raised rim (in the stereo version of the pad, the rim can be programmed to produce a secondary sound). It has a polarity switch at the bottom of the

- 5 = Excellent
- 4 = Very Good
- 3 = Good
- 2 = Fair
- 1 = Poor

### RATINGS

#### Pads

Playability and Feel: 4.5  
Sensitivity: 5  
Construction: 4.5  
Instruction Manuals: 4.5  
Value: 4.5

#### Brain

Programmability: 5  
Sounds: 5  
Pre-programmed Latin Kits: 2.5  
Value: 4.5  
Instruction Manual: 5

Overall Rating: 4.5

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pad so that it can be used with a variety of trigger-to-MIDI interfaces and drum brains. Each pad also has an adjustable output level so that the pad's sensitivity can be fine-tuned to your playing style. This level-adjustment knob is recessed inside the pad's housing and can be turned with a small, slotted screwdriver. Once the pad is adjusted to your liking, you won't have to worry about the adjustment changing by accident. Concerning the "feel factor," the pad offers a lively rebound without being too much faster than a real drumhead. The surface gives a little bit on impact, so there is very little stick shock. The pad's feel is really quite close to an acoustic snare drum.

**The Cymbal Pad.** Yamaha's PCY80S pad is a thin, wedge-shaped pad that can perform some pretty cool tricks. Here's an example of how flexible this pad can be when used along with the DTX: Let's say you've got a ride sound assigned to the rim and a crash sound assigned to the pad's surface. In addition to just playing those two sounds, you can grab the rim with your hand to choke the crash cymbal, and fire a cowbell sound when you hold the rim while playing the pad. That's three sounds and a control function from a single pad!

**The BP80 Pads.** These are similar to pads that were first made by Latin Percussion, then made popular by KAT and now manufactured by Drum Tech. Yamaha calls them "wood block trigger pads." This stereo pad is 1 1/2" in diameter and 12" long. On the tube are two rubber playing surfaces that are 4" long. Not only are these two pads individual triggers, but the BP80 has two output adjustment screws, so that each of the pads can be adjusted separately for better playing feel and response. The BP80 feels great to play. The top of the playing surface is nicely rounded and stick rebound is fast and smooth. The unit comes with a short manual that fully explains how to adjust the sensitivity on the pad and the cross-talk adjustments on the DTX brain.

**The Triggers.** The DT10 triggers have been around for several years. These triggers are your basic, garden variety, piezo transducers in a sturdy, black plastic case. The thin cable coming from the trigger leads to a molded plastic phone jack. One of the nicer things about this trigger is the clip that is used to attach the jack to the drum's shell. Small, yet highly insulated against vibration,

**Model:** Yamaha DTK5L

**Latin Kit:** \$1,599 (w/3

**DT10 triggers:** \$1,649).

**SPECS**

**Components:** DTX 2.0 brain, one TP80S, one TP80, one PCY80, two BP80s, rack, floppy disk.

**Controller:** Ten stereo trigger inputs, 64 drum kits, 16 chains w/32 steps each, 928 editable drum sounds, MIDI synthesizer w/32-voice polyphony, sequencer w/100 pre-recorded songs + 30 more, 660 pre-recorded patterns + 100 user patterns, "groove check," MIDI implementation, LCD panel, two stereo outputs, two aux outputs, one aux input, 12 reverb effects. **Trigger input controls:** pad type, gain amount, level range, velocity range, velocity curve, self rejection, cross-talk rejection, and specific rejection. Each trigger can specify note, gate time, and MIDI channel.

they do a great job of keeping pressure off the cable. The DT10 triggers are designed to be placed directly on the drumhead, and in the Latin Set, the suggested application is intended to be on three conga drums. Of course, you could place them on any three objects (musical or otherwise) that vibrate when struck.

**The Stand.** The stand for the DTK5L is really pretty simple: two legs, two uprights, one cross piece, one arm for the cymbal pad, three arms for the drum pads and the BP80s and one arm for the DTX brain. While I really didn't have any trouble with it, a cross brace or some other way to offer more stability to the stand would have been nice. Although the unit is pretty compact and easy to move around, supplied memory clamps would have been a handy touch.

**The Floppy Disk.** The Latin Set that came in for review already had the special kits and sequence installed in the DTX brain. It's a good idea that Yamaha included a backup floppy. If you ever want to reinitialize the DTX, you'll need this disk to reload the data for the Latin Set. There are seven special kits designed for the Latin Set. They are described in the manual as: HandPerc (general Afro-Cuban use and traditional timbale setup); PlenaRig (sounds for traditional Plena patterns); Montune (Son-Montuno); MidEast (the sounds of Middle Eastern percussion); Brazillo (traditional batucada percussion section); Tumbao (tra-

ditional Afro-Cuban percussion section based around the basic tumbao); and LatinGMK (a setup designed for playing along with the demo "Latinq").

Of the kits, my favorite was the Montune and the MidEast. The Montune kit has some wonderful five-note alternates between high and low conga sounds on one of the bar pads. The MidEast kit has some cool udu and tabla sounds scattered around the pads. One nice thing about the PlenaRig kit is that it illustrates how the DTX brain can assign playing velocities to changing the pitch of the talking drum samples (cool).

**Yin and Yang.** As hip as this system is, there are some things that Yamaha could have done differently that may have made this kit a little more attractive. For my money, the more playing surfaces the better. One of the great things about electronic percussion is that you can have so many playing surfaces in a compact physical area. Since all of the inputs in the DTX can handle stereo pads, why include a PCY80 mono pad with the kit? By including another PCY80S, Yamaha could have offered another surface in as much space.

Also, Yamaha could have offered a little more variety in both the kits and sequences that were designed for the Latin Set. The "Latinq" sequence is certainly smokin', and playing along with it is a blast! But why only one new sequence? To be fair, the DTX brain has 14 other Latin-style sequences, but they were not designed specifically for this new Latin Set. When you call up any of these original sequences, the kit that is automatically loaded is designed for drum set players. You can reprogram the brain so that one of the new Latin kits are loaded with the sequence, but I feel that should have been done at the factory. The DTK5L has only seven kits that demonstrate the power and flexibility of the DTX brain. Having more kits that feature Afro-Cuban sounds would have made the unit a little more impressive right out of the box. To make a comparison, this is like buying a new keyboard synthesizer that only comes with ten factory presets.

Still, Yamaha has a winner in the DTK5L, and with it, may be able to attract a new audience — the Latin percussionist — toward electronic percussion. The unit is compact and plenty powerful. It offers a ton of flexibility in a small space, sounds great, and is easy to play. If you play Latin/Afro/Cuban percussion instruments, you certainly want to check this instrument out. ■