



# Cherie Willoughby's Vintage & Custom Drums with a Woman's Touch REPERCUSSIONS.ORG

Most vintage & custom drum shops in the USA are owned and operated by men at the present time. There have been shops which were run by women in the past, but the only remaining example of this anomaly is Repercussions, the brainchild of Cherie Willoughby. Here's what Cherie has to say about her niche in this otherwise male dominated scene.

**NSMD:** How did you get into the vintage drumshop as a business?

**CW:** In the early 90's, I started collecting vintage drums, more because they were more affordable than anything else. The sheer volume of my purchases drove this from being a hobby into being a business.

**NSMD:** What convinced you to run your business from a website instead of a traditional store?

**CW:** I was working full time as a computer guru before most folks even knew what the internet was. I knew it was the perfect way to network with other individuals, and at that time it was a rather exclusive and small community of people who were interested in vintage drums. Starting the website allowed me to use my professional skills to jumpstart my drum business. Without a store to babysit, I had time to focus on building my inventory and soon had the largest vintage listings on the net which generated a steady stream of clients.

**NSMD:** What about potential customers who aren't web-savvy?

**CW:** I don't intentionally discriminate against non-web users, but since the very beginning, I have always had more business than I could handle through the internet. I live, eat, sleep and breathe Repercussions! I currently field 600-1000 emails a day with about 10% of these being ebay sellers asking "what's this thing worth" so I am finding even the flow of email to be impossible to keep up with at times. I have considered a subscription information service to help control the volume of requests for free information, or perhaps a live chat on my website once a week or maybe a book. As much as I want to help as many folks as I can, it's impossible to answer them all in a timely fashion.

**NSMD:** What motivated you to get into custom drum building?

**CW:** It was inevitable really, all the inventive and creatively built drums that I have owned and played over the years fueled my desire. In the past, much more so than today, many people were able to actualize their inventions and ideas. I want to build drums for people who appreciate the sincerity, beauty and humanity which goes hand in hand with true craftsmanship.

**NSMD:** You've made some substantial investments in casting your own lugs, along with producing some bronze and brass shells. That's a pretty big step.

**CW:** Not really, by producing my own lug designs and shells, my drums can represent more of me, my ambitions, my art and my craftsmanship. My ultimate goal is to produce drums that will have their place in history next to the builders who have inspired me. I want to come across a 50 year old drum of mine still in service someday.

**NSMD:** What type of sales comprise the bulk of your business?

**CW:** Original matched Vintage drum sets, singles, snares, vintage parts and hardware comprise the bulk of my business. I thoroughly enjoy the collector market as I have found the buyers for the most part to be informed or enthusiastically willing to learn. Granted it is much harder to obtain good drums to offer this market, but I manage to keep a varied inventory. Over the past 4 years, Willoughcraft drums have been getting a lot more exposure so my own drums are a growing sector of my sales.

**NSMD:** Do you mostly aim for the high end in vintage drums?

**CW:** The bulk of my vintage drum business is currently 40's to 70's drums from the better known companies such as Gretsch, Rogers, Camco, Slingerland, Ludwig and Leedy to some of the lesser known companies such as Walberg & Auge, Nokes & Nicolai and the like. I also offer some other great drums which are not necessarily vintage. Many are extremely well made and represent great values. Undoubtedly, they will become collectible vintage pieces as time passes. I also have quite a soft spot for cymbals and carry an assortment of hand picked Istanbul K. Zildjians, Paiste, early Sabians and my personal favorite, early American Zildjian K's. I also stock vibraphones, bells and marimbas. My inventory reflects my interests.

**NSMD:** What is your feeling about the growth (or shrinkage) of the vintage drum market in general?

**CW:** I don't honestly think the vintage drum market has shrunk at all. With the advent of the internet, a lot of educational and historical documentation

has become more readily available to collectors and players and interest and demand have gone through the roof. I still see a lot of growth to come. I have also noticed a lot of collectors are diversifying their collections and are completely rejuvenating the market by making a wider array of vintage drums more desirable and collectible.

**NSMD:** How has this impacted your perception of the values of vintage drums?

**CW:** It is great to see that in these cycles, the predictions put forth regarding investment valuations has been confirmed and even surpassed. It is a nice feeling to be able to sell someone an investment quality drum and see it continue to rise in value.



**NSMD:** What drums are most popular lately in terms of customer demand?

**CW:** Gretsch kits, from all original collector sets to the road weary kits that I've restored and brought back to life in my shop. I have been doing about 20 rebuilds a year and have expanded into doing restorations in my shop for clients who want their kits brought up to snuff. Nice Rogers and Ludwig sets are always in demand as well.

**NSMD:** What is your shop like?

**CW:** My custom shop is atypical to say the least and is more geared towards practical use in terms of building and restoring than in being a shop for customers to visit. It's not always the safest environment for the unwary. I do sometimes have people to my home or to the workshop, but neither are ideal presentation scenarios given the amount of stuff I have available. The bulk of my sales are online, so I am geared in that direction. I am planning to build a new facility here on my property to house production and a warehousing/display area for my vintage and Willoughcraft drum company pieces. I am also working on a few joint ventures, mostly consignments and direct sales, so I am keeping my options open and flexible for the near future.

**NSMD:** You enjoy a great reputation among your customers, although a certain amount of mystery surrounds you due to the email only contact policy. How would you comment on that?

**CW:** I actually enjoy the "mystique" that seems to surround me and my business. There are many people whom I have met or spoken with who enjoy that perception, and we get a good laugh at the crazy stories and tall tales that are out there about me! While I don't consider myself a socialite, if anyone is absolutely dying to meet or speak with me, I am certainly approachable (although very very busy). The fact that I am currently the only woman out there in the vintage market and the first woman to start a drum company adds to the mystique as well. But all in all, I am really just another avid collector and player of all things percussive and still get a lot of enjoyment out of getting to play, handle and see all the items that come through my shop.

