

FRETS

REVIEW



FINHOL KICK BOX & AUTO STOMP PLAYER

TESTED BY MICHAEL MOLENDRA

I STILL REMEMBER THE DAY—YEARS ago now—when a singer/songwriter carried a sheet of plywood into my recording studio before a session. While we discussed the best approach for miking his guitar and voice, he said, “And you need to put a microphone on my board, too.” I stared dumbly, so he laid the wooden slab on the floor of the isolation booth, put a stool on top of it, sat down with his guitar, and then strummed while stomping on the board with his Doc Martens to keep time. “See—that’s my drummer,” he said.

After that, it seemed as if an explosion of plywood sheets, old suitcases, and cardboard boxes were following singer/songwriters and Americana artists around, acting as timekeepers for down-home music. The challenge for studios and live stages was how to mic these devices effectively, and get the right sound without also inviting feedback, mic bleed, and other sonic anomalies.

KICK BOX

Which brings us today to the Finhol Kick Box (\$257 street)—a German-made, solid walnut box loaded with percussion samples. It’s a simple and ingenious improvement to wood boards. You just stomp on the pad, and the 1/4” output delivers your percussion sound to an amp or house sound

system. The Mark III unit I tested lets you plug your guitar into the device and blend the guitar signal with the percussion sample (using your guitar’s Volume knob). This feature can save the day if you have a single-input amp, or are faced with one available input on a café’s P.A. system. (The Mark I and II do not have a guitar input)

The onboard samples are realistic and organic sounding—perfect for acoustic-music styles. The Kick Box Mark III and Mark II offer a Bass Drum and a Cajon sample (sounds are selected with a switch), while the Mark I has only a Bass Drum sound. Operation is seamless. I never experienced any misfires, such as stomping down and not hearing my chosen percussion sound—even while playing fast patterns. In fact, the only difficulties stemmed from my attempts to come up with some interesting percussion figures while simultaneously playing guitar. It’s harder than it looks—at least to me—to stomp patterns other than a straight-ahead “bop-bop-bop-bop.” It might be humbling at first, but once you get into the swing, it’s fun, and it definitely adds a nice texture to solo-acoustic performances. I even used the Cajon sound while performing with a full-on electric band with a “real” drummer, and that also added some rhythmic interest. (Professional percussionists may hate this thing, but for simple gigs, I’d save the

side-musician fee, and tap along on the Kick Box myself.)

AUTO STOMP PLAYER

If you want even more of a one-person band option, the Auto Stomp Player (\$339 street) offers 12 drum programs with expanded samples, as well as tap tempo (via the Kick Box or a standard stompbox) for setting your groove when you let the samples loop and play on. The percussion samples include Bass Drum/Snare/Hihat, Low Cajon/High Cajon, Low Cajon/High Cajon/Shaker, Low Cajon/High Cajon/Tambourine, and other options. As with the Kick Box, the samples are realistic, and the tap-in-a-tempo-and-forget-about-it operation is simple and worry free.

KICK IT!

Whether you want to stomp along with your guitar playing like a busker in the subway, or take the stage with a digital “drummer” leading the groove, Finhol has provided two excellent options. Both appear to be tough enough for road abuse, are easy to set up, and sound wonderful. Gotta love German engineering! While the manuals aren’t exactly in clear English, and the pricing is a tad expensive, these are killer tools for every musician who likes to go it alone. bigbangdist.com