

# Priceless Pulp



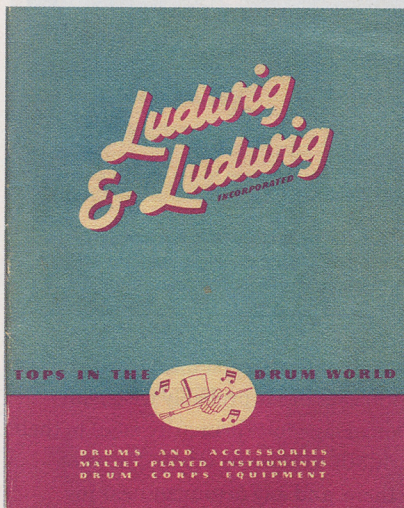
BY ROB COOK

IN THE RAREFIED REALM OF **VINTAGE PAPER COLLECTING**, SORTING THE TREASURES FROM THE TRASH TAKES A KEEN EYE, EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE, AND NO SMALL AMOUNT OF LUCK.

**M**ake no mistake: A valuable piece of vintage paper does not have to be an elaborate, nicely bound catalog with hundreds of beautiful photos. Those in the vintage drum community

use the term “vintage paper” to describe everything from drum catalogs to leaflets, photographs, warranty cards, posters, banners, receipts, and personal letters. So if there’s one main point to walk away with from this article it’s this: Don’t throw *anything* away when you are sorting through drum-related archives! Even if the paper in question does not have value of its own, it can enhance the value of other documents or equipment. Most collectors would gladly pay extra dollars for a kit if it comes with documents such as a photo of the original owner with the kit, a receipt for the kit’s original purchase, and/or any other documentation. (Just think what somebody could get for a photo of Ringo standing beside his newly acquired brown Premier Beatle kit, or the sales receipt for that kit with the name “Richard Starkey” on it!)

That said, the main focus of this article is on vintage drum catalogs. The value for vintage catalogs is fueled by demand based on nostalgia and reference. Plus, they’re just cool to look at.



**LUDWIG & LUDWIG, #40C:** Circa 1940, this is a very rare catalog, the only one to include the “Top Hat & Cane” finish. This catalog recently sold for \$750.



**WFL #55:** 1954, sold for \$67.

## NOSTALGIA

Since the earliest days of the 1900s, drum catalogs have been the “wish books” of young drummers. I have in my personal archives some catalogs from that era that



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were formerly the personal property of George Way. Way would one day become an important figure in the percussion world, but in 1902, when he acquired some of his first catalogs and instruction books, he was only 11 years old. Today, the value of many of those publications is enhanced simply by Way having owned them — this is called celebrity attachment and works not only for instruments, but for any of the celebrity's personal possessions.

There can be little doubt that young George Way spent many hours studying the pages of those catalogs he gathered

as a child. His familiarity with those pages endeared them to him in ways we can only speculate on, and transformed them to keepsakes that ultimately survived him. We are fortunate that nearly all of Way's personal papers, letters, catalogs, and business records were kept intact when he died; not just because they are valuable today, but because they play an important role in the reference arena. It is common practice to simply trash that kind of stuff when the owner passes away. Two notable examples come to mind:

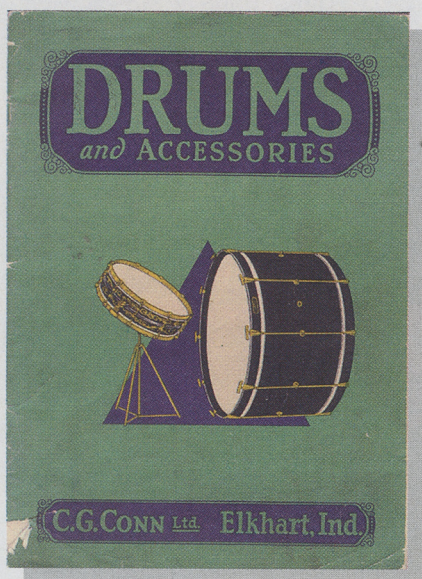
1) Joe Thompson was the inventor extraordinaire who pretty much built up the Rogers name as we know it today. He developed the Dyna-Sonic drum (there is one engraved on his tombstone) and the Swiv-o-matic hardware. Shortly after he passed away in 1968 his family burned all his photos, drawings, and other personal papers in a huge bonfire when they cleaned out his house.

2) A few years ago I received a packet of papers from a buddy who worked at Zildjian. The papers were full of drawings and notes related to an early version of the hi-hat pedal. The papers built a case for the fact that the drawings' owner had developed the first working prototype of the hi-hat pedal, converted from the "low-boy" novelty cymbal pedal. He neglected to send a cover letter with the packet indicating why he sent all this information to Zildjian. The folks at Zildjian were not quite sure what the guy wanted — confirmation of his achievement? royalties? The stack of papers spent months at Zildjian getting shuffled from desk to desk as the buck was passed. Finally my buddy sent them to me with a cover letter explaining that they just plain didn't know what else to do with them. The guy's phone number was there, so after reviewing the documents enough to confirm that he was indeed right in the running for the claim to this innovation, I dialed the number. His widow answered the phone. He had died between the time he sent the packet to Zildjian and the date of the phone call, and his widow had already thrown all of his archives, models, prototypes, and old instruments out in the trash.

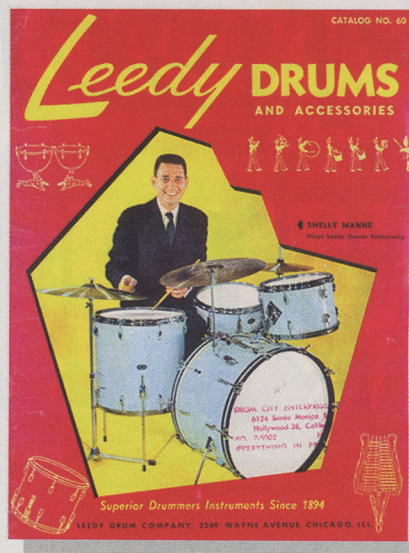
Those are rather extreme examples. Let's jump to the mainstream. I'd have



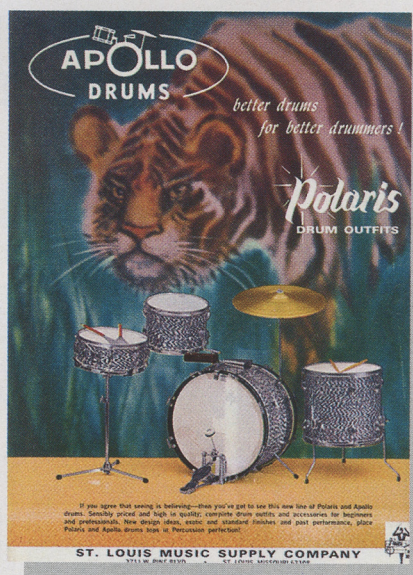
SLINGERLAND #51, 1949: Sold for \$70.



C.G. CONN, 1920s: Limited but serious demand for this rare catalog, sold for about \$300.



LEEDY #60, 1959: (Note that the catalog number does not always exactly match the copyright date.) This is from the era when Slingerland produced Leedy drums; sold for \$66. The most valuable Leedy catalogs are those from the Indianapolis era, routinely sell for over \$200.



APOLLO, 1960s: Although this was a budget imported brand and the catalog is more like a leaflet than a catalog, it still sold for about \$20.

to say that the biggest market for vintage drum catalogs is probably with baby-boomers; people (primarily men) in their early 50s to late 60s. At 59, I'm right in there, and any drummer near my age who I talk to spent hours as a child studying the pages of the catalogs from Ludwig, Rogers, and Slingerland. While this was no new phenomenon, its scale certainly was unprecedented.



Few events in music history are as well documented as the effect that the Ed Sullivan Beatles appearance had on popular culture. Drum sales of all brands, and the interest in their catalogs, skyrocketed. Although the print runs of the late '60s catalogs increased tremendously, they have retained their value amazingly well.

## REFERENCE

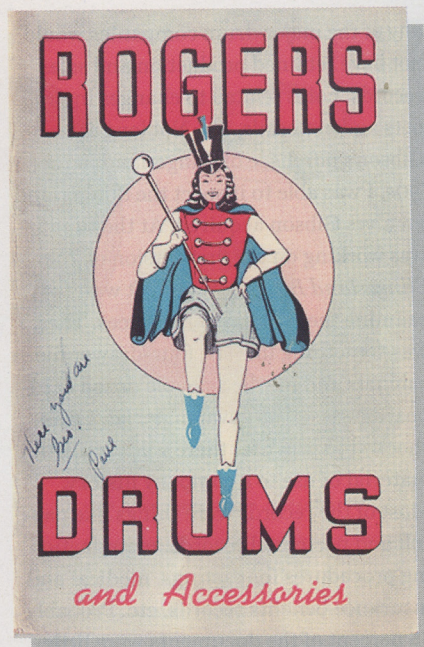
Interest in vintage paper as reference material spans a wide demographic, including casual collectors, serious collectors, academics, curators, and historians. Very few drum companies of the last 100 years kept substantial business archives. Historians have a very difficult time locating primary sources, even from the big players of the 1970s. Every one of the major American drum companies changed hands in the 1980s, and the transitions were not archive-friendly. Even if the archives had survived, they would not contain much of the information today's enthusiasts are looking for.

The best example of this situation is serial numbers. I receive phone calls every week from people who want to give me the serial numbers of an old drum kit they just acquired so I can tell them all about their drums. It's just common sense; serial

numbers identify an object, right? Unfortunately, it is nothing like having the VIN number of a vehicle. The fact of the matter is that all the serial numbers generally tell us is that the drums were made in an era when the company used serial numbers. That can be somewhat helpful on occasion, as there were many years when none of the companies were using any serial numbers at all.

I have heard a couple different stories about why the drum companies started to use serial numbers. One is that insurance companies were insisting on serial numbers if they were going to be expected to provide insurance on these instruments. William F. Ludwig II told me that the reason Ludwig began to use serial numbers was because the military was insisting on it so they could more accurately track inventories. I have never heard of any drum company prior to 1980 using serial numbers as part of any kind of production record.

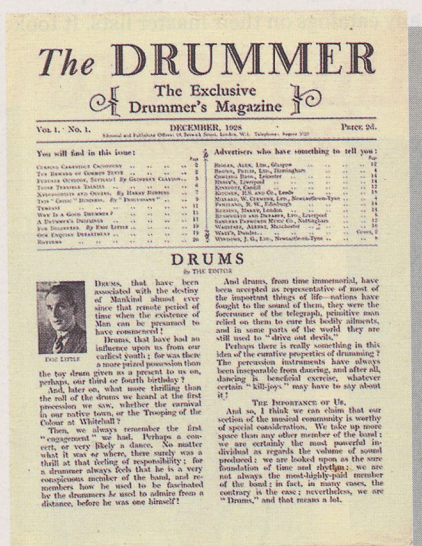
A few folks have conducted their own serial number surveys and compiled charts for a couple of the companies that are somewhat helpful, but the fact remains that numbers were seldom used sequentially. During the assembly stage, the worker would reach into a big box of badges and use whatever he pulled out. The drum being assembled might be for a



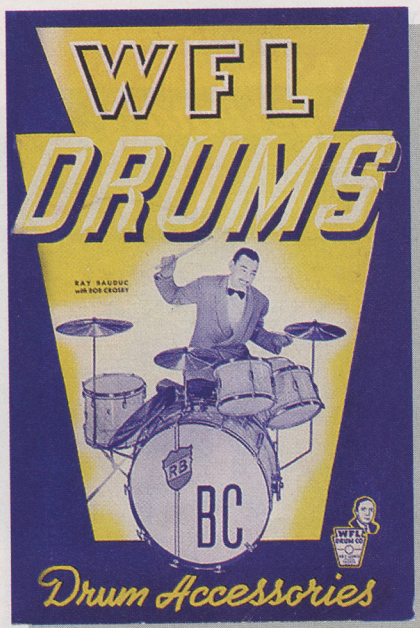
**ROGERS, 1938:** One of the very few Rogers drum catalogs that predate the acquisition of Rogers by Grossman in the early 1950s; sold for about \$200.

particular order, or it might be for stock. The shell with badge might sit on a shelf for months. When the drum finally did ship, there was no paper trail for the serial number.

To drum collectors intent on knowing all the details related to particular instruments, it seems impossible that



**THE VERY FIRST ISSUE OF PREMIER'S THE DRUMMER, 1928:** A promotional paper very similar to the Leedy Drum Topics and Ludwig Drummer. Sold for about \$150.



**WFL, 1941:** Sold for \$90.



**KENT, 1960s:** There are a handful of Kent catalogs, printed on low-quality paper with limited color, if any. Still, they are fairly rare; this one sold for about \$75.



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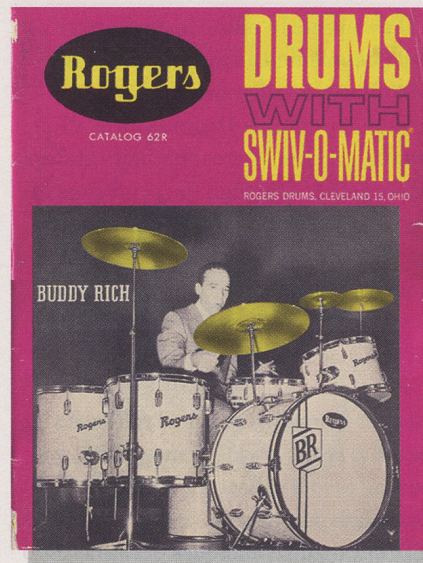
any of the major drum companies would not have retained production and sales records, notes related to changes in products and materials, etc. Not long after Gibson's purchase of Slingerland in the '90s, I was able to inspect the Slingerland archives Gibson acquired. At the time I was working on the first version of *The Slingerland Book* and couldn't wait to examine these primary resources. There was something like six, four-drawer file cabinets and maybe a couple dozen cardboard boxes of archival material. I was shocked to find that there was very little material of use to a company history. Most of the records were things like payroll and personnel records, manufacturing procedures for castings, medical and insurance benefits records, etc. Probably 85 percent of the documents were little more than a decade old. The patents, old catalogs, and endorser files could have all easily fit in one drawer of one file cabinet.

Catalogs are an important reference tool for dating drums. Most of the major American drum companies published new catalogs at least every two years through the '20s, '30s, '50s, '60s, and '70s. In many cases they used old photographs, so catalog dating of a drum cannot be considered completely fool-proof. Generally, however, the catalogs did call attention to new innovations and products the companies felt were important. For that reason, the dating guide

sections of my books on Rogers, Ludwig, and Slingerland (to be joined by Gretsch and Leedy) are largely based on catalog dating of features such as the strainer, muffler, color, etc.

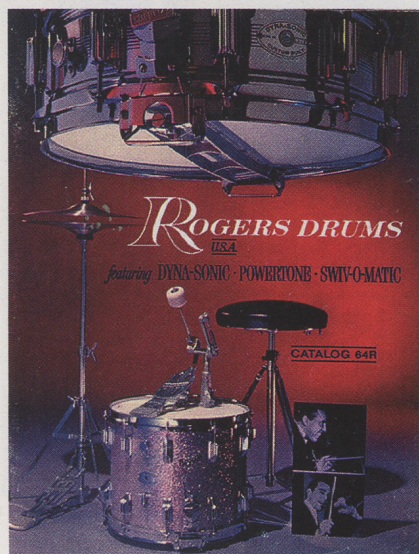
Another historical reference that is dependant on catalog archives is endorser information. In addition to simply documenting an individual's status as an endorser in particular years, it is often possible to chart the importance of a particular artist with their catalog prominence. Gene Krupa, Slingerland's single most important endorser of all time, was on the cover of every Slingerland catalog from 1936 to 1967. Shortly after the Gibson purchase of Slingerland in 1994, I contacted Gibson-Slingerland officials to ask whether their endorser roster would remain the same, or if they would be starting over. I was asked to send them a list of the current endorsers, as they did not receive that information as part of the purchase.

In the early 1990s when I began serious scholarship of drum history, one of my first priorities was to build a catalog archive. Even then some of the catalogs were starting to get a little pricey, but I discovered that the fledgling vintage drum community was being somewhat organized through the efforts of John Aldridge's *NotSoModernDrummer* publication. Although NSMD in those days was nothing more than several mimeo-

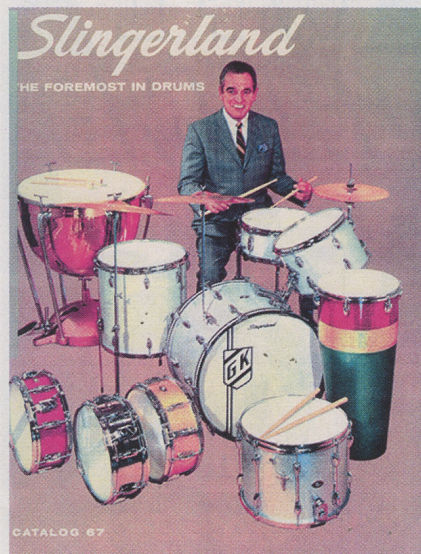


ROGERS, 62R: Sold for \$60.

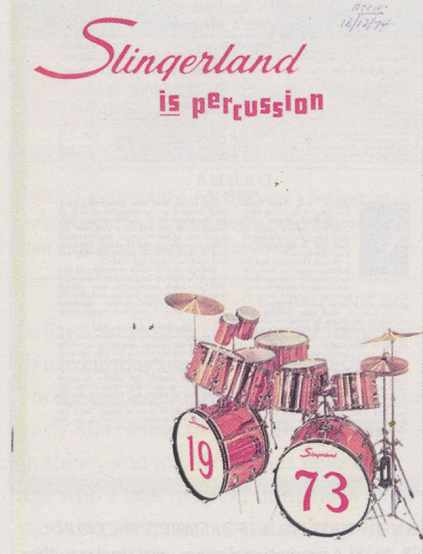
graphed pages stapled together, it was jammed with useful contact info. Every subscriber was listed annually with contact information. I was able to network my way to a fairly complete collection of catalog archives by buying and trading catalog photocopies. I remember at least two collectors who refused to sell originals or photocopies, but would trade page for page if I could supply photocopied catalog pages they did not yet have. If I came up with a 100-page catalog they did not yet have and sent them a copy, then I could request up to 100-page copies of any catalogs on their master lists. It took



ROGERS, 64R: Sold for \$70.



SLINGERLAND #67, 1965: Sold for \$50.



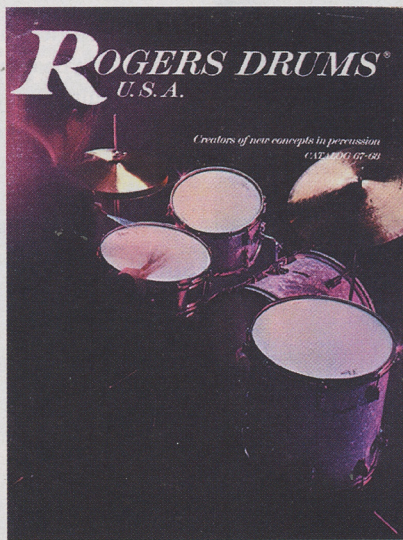
SLINGERLAND, 1973: Sold for \$130.



nearly two years to build my catalog base. Most catalog collectors I am aware of are a bit more focused on particular brands.

It seemed to me as I watched the development of scanning technology that we were approaching the peaking of catalog values and that original catalogs would soon start to depreciate. I was wrong. There are a number of reasons why scanned catalogs have not decimated the value of originals. Impossible as it may be for some to believe, not all people interested in vintage catalogs have computers. Even for those who do, it is sometimes easier to simply open a drawer and grab a file than to retrieve a particular disc, boot it up, etc. Personally, I have come to regard paper print archives and Mylar-tape-recorded archives as more permanent than digitally archived data. I have lost data that I thought was safely archived on hard drives, floppies, zip discs, and optical discs. While there are certainly a lot of folks out there for whom a digital catalog collection is an acceptable reference archive, the fact remains that a finite number of original paper versions exist. It could even be argued that the digital versions serve to call attention to, and thus enhance the value of, original paper catalogs.

It seems to me that there is a bit of a trend by today's drum companies back



ROGERS, 1967: Sold for \$50.

to producing a substantial "wish book" type of catalog after a decade or so of a marketplace largely devoid of them. Two cases in point are Gretsch and Ludwig, who have both begun to again produce very substantial paper catalogs. (I advise readers to tuck away copies of these and any other hard-copy drum catalogs as an investment in the future.)

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

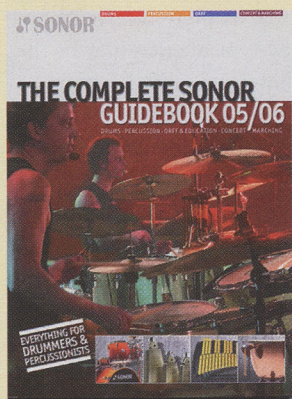
Where do you get catalogs and catalog



LUDWIG #60, 1959: Sold for \$37.

reproductions? Pretty much the same places you find the drums: eBay, estate sales, garage sales, classifieds in *NotSo-ModernDrummer* and *Classic Drummer*, and at vintage drum shows. If you are looking for something specific and do not see it anywhere, go ahead and take out an ad asking for it. A few catalogs are available as reprints, while others are available as scans on CD-ROM. (A great collection of authorized high-quality Ludwig catalog scans is available from Clay Greene at [ludwigdrummer.com](http://ludwigdrummer.com).)

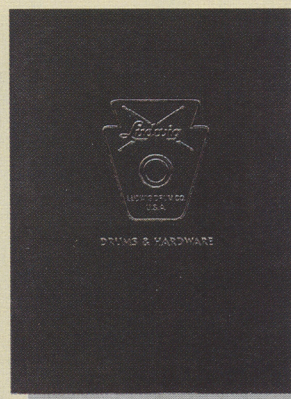
## FUTURE COLLECTABLES?



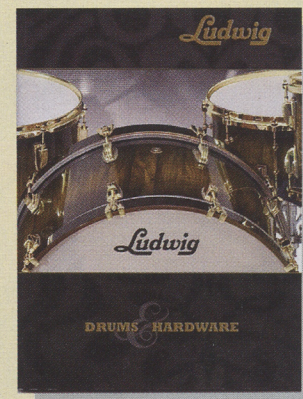
**PROBABLY THE LARGEST** and most complete drum catalog ever published, the Sonor 2005 catalog is 350 pages and includes orchestral, marching, and Orff instruments.



**GRETSCH, 2010:** At first glance, this appears to be a newsletter, but it is basically a catalog with limited-edition models and the whole product range.



**LUDWIG, 2008:** First "wish book" type drum catalog from Ludwig in about 20 years.

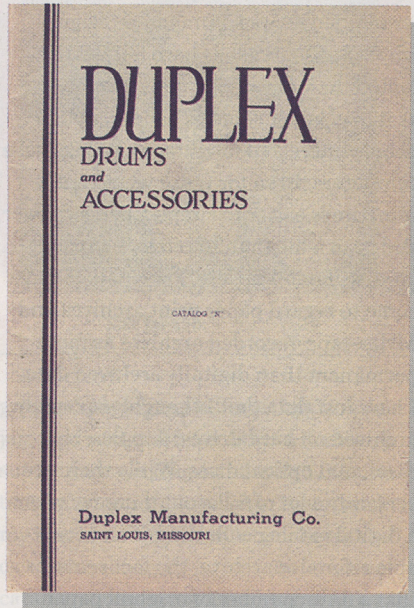


**LUDWIG, 2010:** Not only is this catalog just the second since Ludwig again began publishing a "wish book" type of large glossy catalog, but this edition includes many limited-edition and new models.



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When it comes to buying and selling vintage paper, the first challenge is identification. It amazes me how difficult this can sometimes be. Many do not have any catalog number or date of any kind. Leedy used letter designations for a few years and number designations for a few years, neither of which established enough of a pattern to make assumptions in terms of “missing” catalogs. I personally try to depend on copyright dates more than anything else, but many catalogs have no copyright dates. I have attempted to list all known printed catalogs in sequential order in the dating guide sections of my books, but also must maintain “errata” files for information that has come to light since publication.



**DUPLEX, 1930s:** A rather drab catalog with no color, but rare; sold for about \$150.

Judging fair market value can be a bit of a challenge. EBay helps greatly in this regard. I have found that serious collectors of any particular brand watch eBay quite closely. One tactic to determine the value of a catalog you have would be to list it on eBay with a very high reserve and see how close the bidding comes. Bidding tends to go higher on no-reserve auctions, so placing a reserve can “jade” such a tactic. In the end, an item is worth no more than someone is willing to pay for it, so an eBay-type auction may be the best way to determine value. I have sold quite a few catalogs at auction recently, both on consignment and from my personal collection, so I am including notes on these recent sales to offer some price guidelines.

In my opinion, vintage catalogs are an excellent investment. They don’t take up as much room as drums, and I’m confident they will continue to appreciate. My parting advice is don’t fail to recognize opportunities by restricting your collecting to rare old catalogs. In 2024, a 2004 catalog will be 20 years old and you may regret having passed up the opportunity to grab that free catalog at the NAMM show or drum shop! ■

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