

Skip Spratt Review (www.saxshed.com)

Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces – The AMMA

Theo Wanne of MouthpieceHeaven.com (and now TheoWanne.com) has long been a gifted, talented and sought-after mouthpiece refacer. For about five years many of us have eagerly awaited the arrival of his production pieces. He has now unveiled his truly remarkable and equally unique new mouthpiece – The AMMA.

Over the past few years Theo has immersed himself in the process of developing and perfecting this world-class mouthpiece. Theo has now done just that. The AMMA is a meticulously crafted large chamber mouthpiece that surpasses the very capable Custom Links for which he is so well known. If you are a fan of vintage mouthpieces and Links in general, you will likely be a big fan of the AMMA.

The description of the AMMA goes as follows: “Reminiscent of the vintage mouthpieces of the 1940s and 50s, the AMMA brings the craftsmanship of the past together with the technology of the future to create the ultimate medium baffle, 'true' large chamber mouthpiece.” I couldn't have said it better. The AMMA is Theo's response to the booming vintage mouthpiece market and the need for a better mouthpiece. No stranger to the vintage mouthpiece trade, Theo operated Mouthpiece Heaven for several years where he catered to the needs of some of the most respected saxophonists of our time. The endless search for that vintage piece and the perfect reface may be a thing of the past for many. The job of thinning the rails, scooping out the sides, leaving just enough rollover and perfectly flattening the table – all done already by Theo on the AMMA. The result for me is an even-sounding mouthpiece from low Bb into the altissimo that retains the character of my individual sound.

If the above paragraphs have peaked your curiosity – read on and listen for the details. I will share my experiences with Theo, the mouthpieces themselves and the accessories. There are also audio clips below of me playing on the AMMA.

The Pieces – Theo originally sent me 2 AMMA 7* to try, one was gold plated and the other silver. I had them for about a month and used them live on stage and in the studios – both recording and teaching. Here was my initial reaction, shared with Theo about a month ago:

“The pieces are AWESOME!! I got home about a half hour ago and greeted the mailman with your package. I've been playing both of them and my custom Link back and forth. I intend on playing them a whole lot more in the next couple days.

Briefly what I've noticed:

1. There is almost no significant "feel" change in the way they blow compared to my custom Link. I like that.
1. The silver seems tamer and a bit darker than the gold, which seems a little more familiar to me.
2. Both the silver and the gold Amma play great from subtone Bb (always a bone of contention for me) up to the extreme altissimo. I play regularly up to G, a ninth off the horn. Some pieces choke off - not these.
3. The shrillness I sometimes experience on the custom Link (with a hefty wedge) is far reduced on the AMMA. I can get plenty of bite but the lower baffle keeps the sound more pleasing.
4. The overall sound of the AMMA is a bit fuller and seems to have a bit less noise in the sound than my custom Link. (I'll have to try a bunch of different reeds to really tell.)
5. Some mouthpieces will add more body to the sound or have a very even scale up and down, however they "gloss over" my natural sound. The AMMA adds a bit more body to the sound and still gives the natural resonance I produce as someone who plays on the brighter side.

Well congrats my friend!!! I look forward to playing these on the next two gigs this weekend, recording with them and writing a complete review for SaxShed.com.”

As I played the pieces over the next month my initial reaction proved to be very accurate. The silver was a bit tamer than the gold and the gold seemed to have a bit more color to it. (Descriptions can be tough I know) As I put these two pieces through the paces there were some adjustments I felt needed to be made to the final production pieces. One concern was alleviated with the addition of a plastic mouthpiece patch, which I use on all pieces, clarinet to baritone. Theo was very responsive to all of my observations and implemented some changes to address my early concerns. After trying the original two pieces for a month, I was sent an additional 5 nearly identical pieces with the new modifications. The first two were excellent pieces but the next 5 – off the charts! Theo sent 2 silver and 3 gold pieces that had slightly different characteristics. They all sounded great, one a bit

darker, another a bit brighter but all felt nearly identical in the way they blew. They all played and felt very much like that old Custom Link. The AMMA has edge and projection. I sounded equally comfortable on all of these 5 AMMAs – something I have not often experienced when trying out many of the same mouthpieces.

The Liberty Ligature – This was my first experience with a built in ligature on a mouthpiece. There have long been mouthpieces made with attached ligatures but I've never owned one until now. The AMMA ligature is truly unique. To look at it you can see inspiration from the original Otto Link ligatures and even the Francois Louis. There is one large screw and the option of interchangeable pressure plates. If you don't want to mess around with the positions or optional pressure plates, you can just use the ligature in the standard position when shipped with great success. The ligature is secured in place by beveled setscrews. There is a 5/64 tool supplied to facilitate the removal and replacement of the Liberty Ligature. Another tool is available for the removal of the pressure plate. The design is such that the ligature can be set higher and lower on the reed, causing a variation in the focus or spread of the sound. In my own experience I tried all the positions and ultimately set it back in the second holes, just as it came to me. Those who want options will have plenty.

The Reed Replacer Cap – Since the Liberty ligature stays on the mouthpiece, it is best to keep the reed on the piece while not being played. The removal of the reed from the mouthpiece while being stored could result in the metal ligature rubbing against the mouthpiece table – something you don't want. To alleviate this problem the AMMA is supplied with this cool little Reed Replacer Cap. It is a cap similar to the Francois Louis cap, however it has an extension for the table. The plastic extension replaces the reed under the Liberty ligature, keeping the table and ligature from making contact during storage. There is an available Francois Louis Smart Cap Theo has modified for use on the AMMA as well.

The Double Pouch Mouthpiece Holder – If you have played for any length of time, you likely have more than one mouthpiece. The Double Pouch Mouthpiece Holder gives you two additional storage pouches for your valued pieces. Although each AMMA comes with it's own individual leather pouch, this leather pouch has room for a couple mouthpieces, reed cases and all topped off with a belt loop! If you like all the bells and whistles – this is for you.

With the introduction of Theo Wanne's AMMA, the bar has been raised once more. The design, attention to detail and quality put into each and every Amma is a testament to his high standard. Kudos to Theo for creating this new jewel for the tip of your horn - the origin of your sound. - *Skip Spratt* (www.SaxShed.com)

Skip Spratt Biography



Skip has performed with Natalie Cole, Tony Bennett, Johnny Mathis, Aretha Franklin, Donna Summer, The Temptations, Jeffrey Osborne, Tommy Tune, Ben Vereen, Randy Brecker, Bill Watrous and many others.

Skip has recorded with Patti LaBelle, Teddy Pendergrass, and Bobby Rydell. He has done jingles for KYW Radio, WPVI Channel 6 and Bally's Park Place, and in 1990 he had the honor of performing for Barbara Bush in the Senate Caucus Room in Washington DC.

Skip has published twelve articles in the Saxophone journal, one of which included an informational CD showcasing various saxophone styles using the same saxophone set-up. Skip also runs and moderates the informational Saxophone website www.saxshed.com which has provided an outstanding service to saxophonists worldwide for many years now.

Skip holds a (BM) with honors in Jazz Saxophone and an (MAT) in Music Education from The University of the Arts. He also holds a Certificate from Berkley College of Music in Boston. He is the instrumental music teacher at Berlin Community School, Director of its award-winning Jazz Ensemble, and Past Secretary of the NJ-IAJE (International Association of Jazz Educators). In addition to public education, Skip has taught saxophone at Rowan University and Woodwind Methods at the University of the Arts.