

KALI by Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces

A Review by Skip Spratt of SaxShed.com

Renowned mouthpiece maker Theo Wanne recently launched Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces at TheoWanne.com. This new Wanne endeavor, run by Theo and brother Tom, replaced MouthpieceHeaven.com one year ago. The original website and shop was a haven for vintage mouthpiece connoisseurs and players seeking quality refacing on pieces of any kind. I was also a customer when Theo's shop was located in Philadelphia. It is worth noting that the majority of the pieces I play on today all have had Theo's touch applied to them.

The following review is on the new line of KALI mouthpieces however I will add some comments on the PARVATI I tried as well. For those looking for honesty and an unbiased review, I will try to be both. We are all undoubtedly looking for honesty here. My admiration and respect for Theo's work is documented here as well as in the previous review of his AMMA mouthpieces.

Last week I received 4 KALI and one PARVATI via FedEx. These were loaned to me for the purpose of my opinion and review. The four pieces were a Rhodium 7*, Rhodium 8, Gold 7* and Gold 8. I am pleased to tell you that the KALI of my choice passed every test with flying colors!

In terms of overall sound, the gold KALI was a better match for me and my 1969 Mark VI. The playability of all four pieces was superb. After extensive play-testing with the same reed as well as many different reeds I came to a conclusion that the 7* and 8 in gold both had their unique charm. The 7* was the most comfortable piece for me when used with my standard choice of Java 3 reeds. The sub-toned low Bb all the way into the extreme altissimo was all easy to achieve. Additionally, the resistance vs. free blowing nature of the piece seemed to be in keeping with the modified Links, Dukoffs and Guardalas I have played over the years. The KALI 8 on the other hand was just a SCREAMER! It took more air and I favored a softer Java 3 to compensate. The end result was a fat, warm, robust tenor sound with a similar ease of playing as the 7*.

When compared to my Theo Wanne Custom Links, which is the only direct comparison I made, the KALI sounded more spread and was clearer with less noise in the sound. This was particularly noticeable at lower volumes. The 7* had the sound and feel closest to my modified NY Link. The 8 had a sound with plenty of projection and just as big as a house! Recorded on a cheap tape deck, laptop computer and studio micing – the gold KALI both sounded like me – just a warmer, more focused me. Although the sound of the KALI is very warm, there is an abundance of edge available when pushed.

In addition to play-testing these pieces on my own I had the pleasure of enlisting two colleagues along the way. When the pieces first arrived my friend Kaj Hansen gave a listen to all four KALI. He immediately preferred my sound on gold over rhodium and found it difficult to choose 7* or 8 as being better. When pushed to make a choice, he preferred the bolder, more robust sound of the 8.

One day later, Carl Cox, who is a wonderful player in his own right gave a listen to me and tried the KALI for himself. Oddly enough, he sounded better on the rhodium and best on the PARVATI! Morphology obvious plays a large part in what pieces each individual prefers. When Carl listened to me he was torn between the 7* and 8. We concluded the 7* was a better well-rounded piece for many situations and the 8 was a great screamer which still could be controlled when necessary.

Each KALI, as well as Theo's original AMMA comes with the the ingenious Liberty Ligature, Reed Replace Cap and interchangeable bite pad (mouthpiece patch). The ligature is integrated into the mouthpiece by two removable setscrews. There are available interchangeable pressure plates and five placement options for the ligature. I chose to use the Liberty Ligature in its default (2nd hole) position.

Removing the Liberty Ligature and opting for a traditional ligature also provided me with two conveniences. The first convenience was being able to use a regular mouthpiece cap instead of the reed replacer cap. The second was being able to access the table for flattening the tip of a warped reed. This old trick of placing the tip of the reed under your thumb and against the table has become habit for me. I spoke with Theo at length regarding my experiences with the Liberty Ligature and Reed Replacer Cap. As usual, Theo was responsive and eager to assimilate my findings into future designs.

Lastly, a note on the PARVATI: I can tell you with all honesty that my buddy Carl Cox sounded best on this PARVATI 7*. It played extremely well for me but a PARVATI just isn't the right piece for someone who has been a fan of Dukoff's and Guardala's. As I told Theo in an earlier conversation, "Too much Joe Lovano in my sound on the PARVATI." Players looking for a darker, rounder more traditional piece will gravitate toward the PARVATI.

All this said, I have not even approached the topic of craftsmanship yet. Theo's attention to detail is surpassed by none. The pieces are all a work of art. You can talk about chamber sizes, tips, and rails, roll over baffles, curved inner sidewalls all you want. The bottom line is either a piece works for you or it doesn't. These KALI work GREAT for me. They give me the core to the sound with plenty of brightness and edge when pushed.

Over the years I have played on Dukoff's, modified Links and an original hand-made Guardala MBI exclusively for 14 years. Following the 14 years on the Guardala MBI, I felt the need for change. That is when Theo customized a new, NY Link for me. That Link gave me more fullness of sound, yet with better control and than the original MBI. This KALI allows me to recapture some of what I had in that original Guardala, while it maintains the bonuses associated with the large chamber. Now I just have to get a KALI to keep!

You can judge for yourself with the clip below.

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