

DURGA by Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces

A Review by Skip Spratt of SaxShed.com

Theo Wanne recently released his newest mouthpiece DURGA from Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces. According to theowanne.com, "The DURGA is the culmination of many years of research and testing...No longer do we, as saxophonists, have to suffer with a thin and nasal sound in order to get huge power and projection. The DURGA is at once, powerful and hugely projecting and fat, warm, and huge! The combination is just downright sexy!"

This new Wanne endeavor, run by Theo and brother Tom, replaced MouthpieceHeaven.com a couple years 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.

No less than five mouthpieces complete the current line of Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces. AMMA was the flagship model released some two years ago. PARVATI and KALI followed last year and now AMBIKA and DURGA have been "unleashed."

My personal experience with Theo's mouthpieces has been very gratifying. Each model I have tried has demonstrated the highest level of craftsmanship and attention to detail. The large chamber mouthpieces all feature an incredible ease of playing and alluring sound. They are clear, full-bodied and frankly make the player's job easier.

Although the AMMA and KALI suited my playing styles very well, the best sounding of mouthpiece on my horn is the DURGA! What can I say? Something about that longer, higher baffle agrees with my morphology. In addition to the DURGA sounding better on my setup, there is a slight and favorable resistance found in the DURGA 8 I currently play on. The entire range of the horn is consistent and the altissimo friendly and forgiving. I had a similar reaction to playing a KALI 8 vs. the KALI 7*. The 8 just had a bigger, fatter sound. However the use of more air goes hand in hand with that fact. I am curious how a DURGA 7* would work for me but they are only produced in an 8 at present. This likely is for very sound acoustic reasoning on Wanne's part. It will be interesting to see if DURGA remains only an 8 opening or if other sizes become available in the future.

When I first tried the DURGA my eye immediately noticed the textured gold finish on the exterior and silver detail inside the mouthpiece. Slight, symmetrical lines on the baffle lead down the chamber likely by design— just gorgeous. Secondly, I noticed what appeared to be a smaller chamber between the baffle and shank. A little investigation revealed this to be a "Power Ring." According to the website, "DURGA...incorporates a Power Ring. The Power Ring is a ring set at the back of the chamber that radically tapers the chamber down. This allows the mouthpiece to get all the benefits of our True Large Chamber AND the power inherent in small chamber mouthpieces." BINGO! That's likely the "slight and favorable resistance" mentioned earlier. As a player of small and medium chamber mouthpieces years ago, there is something very appealing in the sound of the DURGA. Over the years I have bought into the benefits of a large chamber. Now the DURGA offers players like me the best of both worlds.

One note of caution may be helpful here. I'll explain. This mouthpiece can scream and is designed to do so. It also is very controllable to a point. The majority of my playing is in "commercial music." This means I may play Clarence Clemons style Rock and Roll one minute, Straight Ahead Jazz another and then sit down next to a student to play duets. The DURGA sounds FANTASTIC but I do need to tread lightly in more sensitive environments. Again, this is not a flaw but the nature of the beast. This piece is meant to scream and it will. The most noticeable adjustment necessary on my part was in the attack of notes. When playing lighter styles of music such as duo jazz with a piano player or duet with a student, the mouthpiece can bark. This is a deliberate, strong, gutsy attack. It's great for R&B but not as subtle for Klose in the teaching studio. To compensate, I merely needed to pay more attention to legato attacks in those situations. The same attention to control would be helpful for saxophone section playing as well. This is truly a small price to pay for a versatile mouthpiece that screams when you need it to.

Obviously, I am very excited to have the DURGA in my arsenal of great mouthpieces. What a sound! I am equally excited to learn that Theo Wanne continues to apply his ever-increasing knowledge and wisdom to his newest creations. What will be next? Alto mouthpieces? I can't wait to find out!

Please visit TheoWanne.com to hear clips of the complete line of Theo Wanne Classic Mouthpieces.

Skip Spratt