

Buying a Gong by Sheila Whittaker

To some extent, the gong you choose will depend on your budget. If money is no object, I would go for the highest quality gong you can afford in the largest size to suit your needs and space. That way you'll get a good range of tone – obviously the larger the gong, the wider the tone spectrum. If you're on a tight budget, and many are, then there are options which will cost less and still do a great job, as long as you choose carefully and buy from a reputable supplier, as quality can range from excellent to pretty ropey!

If you're choosing a gong to play for yourself or with the intention of using it for therapy at some point, you don't want something that's going to sound like a dustbin lid! And don't forget to factor in the cost of at least a couple of mallets (Paiste or Chalklin are recommended, in sizes right for your gong) and a suitable stand to hang the gong on. Gong stands is a subject I may cover in a further article as there's a lot of choice out there now.

So let's start at the lower cost end of the spectrum :

CHINESE GONGS are around half the price of their Western counterparts. Gongs have been made in China for aeons, and Chinese gong-making is still a thriving business in modern times. Nowadays most gongs are made in the Wuhan province in a few large factories. There are several types of Chinese gongs but the ones you'll want for therapy are of two different types : Chau gong - with rim, or Wind (Feng) gong – more or less flat.

Which you choose is down to personal preference – they are both suitable for this work. Chau and Wind gongs come in many sizes from 12” to 50”. The larger gongs are very impressive indeed, with a huge range of deep tones. As I mentioned above, they vary considerably in quality so don't buy one on Ebay! You'll need to go to a shop or warehouse to try them before choosing, or alternatively order it from one of our recommended reliable suppliers who source the highest quality Chinese gongs. In the UK

I recommend contacting either Sound Travels www.soundtravels.co.uk or Soulnote www.soulnote.co.uk Both stock the best gongs and will be very helpful with your choice. In the USA go to Gongs Unlimited www.gongs-unlimited.com Chinese gongs with the “Dream” logo are reputed to be the best quality Chinese gongs around at present.

If you have more money to spend, then you'll probably want to go for a German gong. Yes, the best gongs in the world, with a few exceptions, are made in northern Germany. There are several factories making wonderful gongs, and there are new variations of gongs coming out all the time. In the last few years there has been a big increase in the type and number of high quality gongs being made. Which means we now have **a lot** of choice, so hence this article to give you an idea of what you could get.

There are now several German factories making different gongs : Paiste, Meinl, Broder Oetken (who also makes Meinl gongs), Sona, Tone of Life. All these gongs

are made by hand by skilled craftsmen – they are handmade masterpieces. Let's have a look at the individual factories :-

PAISTE – arguably the best gongs in the world, Paiste have been making gongs since c1930. They have three ranges for therapy work : the Symphonics, the Planet gongs, and the Sound Creation gongs. Symphonic gongs have the biggest tonal range and come in sizes from 20” up to 80”. Highly recommended. There are seventeen Planet gongs ranging from 24” up to 38” with all major and minor planets being represented, plus two Moon gongs (new and full moon), and three Earth gongs.

You might find yourself drawn to a particular Planet gong – if so my advice would be to go with that intuition. The largest at 38” are Earth, Sun and Sedna – all very powerful gongs and highly recommended. The Sound Creation gongs are, in my opinion, not suitable for complete beginners – go with a Symphonic or a Planet gong to start with, then you could maybe add a Sound Creation gong later on down the line.

MEINL – Meinl introduced high quality gongs into their range of products several years ago when they discovered Broder Oetken – ex-Paiste gongmaker - who had left Paiste and was making his own gongs. They snapped him up and have not looked back! Symphonic gongs in five sizes are available – 24”, 28”, 32”, 36”, and 40”. These are superb quality instruments – highly recommended. Meinl also have their own range of Planet gongs in the same five sizes – all the major Planets are represented and there are fifteen available.

Highly recommended. Meinl also offer two special gongs - the Flower of Life (36” – very beautiful warm watery sound), and the Wu Xing which represent the Elements (24”, 28”, 32”, 36” and 40” – deep complex range of sounds). Both highly recommended. Meinl gongs are a little more expensive than Paiste.

BRODER OETKEN – Broder also makes his own range of gongs as well as the gongs for Meinl – these include a Heart gong, a Water gong, and a Thor's hammer gong. You'd need to look on his website www.oetken-gongs.de for what's currently available, as Broder is a master gongmaker (trained by gongmaster Walter Meyer) who likes to try out new ideas and experiment with producing different gongs. He also makes gongs for Oliver Hess.

Broder is also the maker of the Practitioner Gong, which we commissioned from him last year as a recommended starter gong for the Gong Practitioner Course, for anyone confused with the amount of choice available. The Practitioner Gong has a specially designed logo in the centre representing Heaven and Earth and is 28”. We plan to add a 32” version as well. It's available to order through ECymbals – see below.

SONA – Sona have been making gongs in the far north of Germany for about ten years – the ex-Paiste gongmaster Heiko Palkus (worked with Walter Meyer) runs the workshop. The two main gongs available are the Cosmos gong and the Erde (earth) gong. Nowadays they seem to be making gongs only for Tone of Life – see below, and were reluctant to ship gongs outside of Germany when I last enquired.

TONE OF LIFE – Tone of Life gongs are made by Sona, and are among some of the most interesting gongs available. They are more expensive than the other gongs we

have mentioned, but they are very high quality and the ones I have seen and tried are superb. Their main range is the Four Elements gongs – Water (Shemoo), Fire, Earth and Air (Cosmo), and the Maitreya Peace gongs in several sizes – 25”, 30”, and 42”.

Their little Dance gong is a masterpiece of a small gong at 22” – I have one and like it immensely. Sona gongs are highly recommended if you can afford them!

Tone of Life supply their own gongs – www.toneoflife.com.pl but the other German gongs mentioned here need to be bought through an official supplier – Paiste and Meinl don't sell direct. I recommend ECymbals www.ecymbals.co.uk or Soulnote (as above) in the UK, www.Thomann.de in Germany, or Gongs Unlimited in the USA.

In the UK and Europe we are fortunate to have a small number of talented gong makers : Matt Nolan, Steve Hubback, Joao Pais Filipe, Michael Paiste, and Michal Milas spring to mind immediately. In the USA there is Ryan Shelledy. Do some research on the Internet for details and contact information for these solo gong makers, most of whom make gongs to commission only.

I hope that brief overview is of some help to those who are only just starting off on their gong journey. In an article like this it's impossible to cover all the points I would like to mention – I've literally just topped and tailed here to give you at least a basic idea of what's out there.

My book : 'Sound Healing with Gongs' covers this subject and you will have much more of an idea of what to buy (and where to get it) if you read the relevant sections. I can recommend Phil McNamara's excellent book : Gongs & Tam-tams, which goes into more detail about the types of gongs available. Both books available from my website.

There is no substitute for coming to a workshop (I run regular 2-day Gong Intensive workshops) where you will meet lots of different gongs and be able to try them out while learning playing techniques. Seeing the gongs in person in a workshop, you can then get a feel for what would suit you at this time on your journey of life. I wish you much fun and joy choosing your gong and working with it!

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