

# RWE SIGNATURE SERIES BODHRÁNS

Seán Laffey talks to Rolf Wagels about the Christian Hedwitschak RWE Signature series of Bodhráns.



**Seán:** “Can you tell us about your journey in the world of the frame drum?”

**Rolf:** “I got in touch with the Irish music through an orchestra exchange in 1988, I heard traditional music and fell in love with it. I bought my first drum in Donegal in 1992, it was a cheap tourist thing.

“I joined my first band, DeReelium, in 1996, I was asked to teach bodhrán for the German Uilleann Pipes society in the same year. I played with the Cara gang for 15 years and we recorded seven albums. We toured all over Europe including Scotland and Ireland, and we were also invited to the US for seven tours. Who would have thought that the little drum would take me around the world?”

“The bodhrán has developed like no other traditional instrument and Christian keeps coming up with innovations all the time”

“In 2001 myself and Guido Plüschke started a workshop series called *Bodhrán Weekends*. It runs twice a year and became the focal point for the German bodhrán scene. In 2001 and 2004 I attended the Craiceann summer school on Inis Oirr, Aran Islands. For 2005 I was asked to come back and join the teaching team, which was a great honour. I have been teaching at Craiceann ever since and I got more involved in the organisation of this unique event.”

**Seán:** “Could you introduce us to Christian Hedwitschak’s bodhráns?”

**Rolf:** “There is not “the” Hedwitschak drum. This is best reflected in the signature lines he makes for very different high-profile professional players like Eamon Murray, Cormac Byrne or Martin O’Neill. If you know what sound you want, he can tailor the drum perfectly to your ideas. The key for me is that he is so versatile that he can accommodate for such different players. The bodhrán has developed like no other traditional instrument and he keeps coming up with innovations all the time.”

**Seán:** “What did you want in your signature series?”

**Rolf:** “I wanted a Lambeg skin, and I wanted a tool-less tuning system. Séamus O’Kane, the bodhrán maker from Dungiven put us in touch with his Lambeg drum maker and skin provider, Tommy Louden. Lambeg skin is a lively drum skin; it is easy to change tones, because it reacts quickly to the tonal hand. It gives a lovely feedback to the stick and to the player. It has great attack and enough overtones for harmonic playing, but not too many overtones that wouldn’t allow the occasional open bass playing. There is also a great rebound, as the skin is not so soft that the tipper sinks into the skin. By now you can get ‘Lambeg’ skins from Pakistan and other locations in the Middle-East. For us, the Lambeg skin must come from a good maker in the North, one who makes Lambeg drums and cures the skins with his traditional methods and ingredients. This is what we call a genuine Lambeg skin.

“Christian came up with several prototypes for the tool-less system. I am not an engineer or maker, I can just look at things and say: ‘nope, not good enough yet, it needs more of this or that’. So I drove Christian nuts, but eventually he came up with a smooth and easy to turn system. And that was the first generation of the RWE sorted.”

**Seán:** “How has the RWE series evolved since it began in 2005?”

**Rolf:** “We added a compressor tuning rim, which helps to generate a clean and short, punchy bass sound. The latest additions are the ChangeHED system in the RWEchange, which allows to change head and tuning rim and the IsolatHED technology, which allows the tuning rim to be the only component still in direct contact with the drum skin. Again, this helps to achieve a cleaner sound, the effect was shown during our sound testing sessions at Munich university sound laboratory.”

**Seán:** “What makes the RWE a great choice for gigging musicians?”

**Rolf:** “The key for me on stage is a clear sound, that cuts through without being too loud. If the bass is too roaring, this leads to the

sound guy bringing the overall volume down. I need to be able to tune the drum quickly, so no searching for tools like a screwdriver is important. A clear tone is important to me, so a stable drum without unwanted overtones that keeps its tuning is essential. And I am delighted to say Christian has achieved all that in the RWE series.”

**Find out more at: [www.bodhran-info.com](http://www.bodhran-info.com)**

