

Djangle box blues

THINK THAT ALL GREAT GUITAR INNOVATIONS HALE FROM THE US OF A? **PAUL ALCANTARA** MEETS SIX PRETENDERS TO THE SELMER CROWN, AND DISCOVERS THAT THE ORIGINAL BIG MAC WAS 'FABRIQUE EN FRANCE'

Built originally by the Selmer Company, Maccaferri's 'Orchestre' model and later, Selmer's own design, have achieved the near mythical status generally reserved for the finest vintage Gibsons and Martins.

Inseparable from the Gypsy Jazz of Django Reinhardt (take a look at this month's Vintage & Collectable feature for more on Django, Selmer and Maccaferri), they are more popular today than ever. With originals now changing hands for five-figure sums, here we look at six contemporary copies ranging from the £499 Saga Gitane to the £4000+ Dupont Vieille Reserve. The guitars break down into two main types; D and O-soundhole types and we have three of each. First up are the Ds...

The Saga Gitane D-500, Dell Arte 'Anouman' and Dupont MC50E are all interpretations of the Selmer guitar that Maccaferri designed back in 1932. Though not intended as authentic replicas, all three feature the original's slotted headstock, 12-fret neck, horizontal cutaway and D-shaped soundhole. Other period-correct details include a zero fret, studded tailpiece and fingerboard extension.

Then come the Os. The Dupont MD50, Dell Arte 'Dark Eyes', and Dupont Vieille Reserve Brazilian take the mid-1930s, post-Maccaferri Selmer as their point of departure. All three have the slotted headstock, 14-fret neck, zero fret, horizontal cutaway, small oval soundhole and studded tailpiece of the original. So let's have a look at the lot.

TURN THE PAGE FOR REVIEWS OF THESE SIX NEW SELMER-STYLE GUITARS...



SAGA GITANE D-500

DELL ARTE ANOUMAN

DUPONT MC50E

DUPONT MD50

DELL ARTE DARK EYES

DUPONT VIEILLE RESERVE BRAZILIAN

GBINFO

SAGA GITANE D-500

PRICE: £499
BUILT: China
SCALE LENGTH: 641mm (25-1/4 inches)
NUT WIDTH: (47.5mm) 1-7/8 inches
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK & SIDES: Laminated rosewood
NECK: Mahogany, 12th-fret join
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 24
BRIDGE: Ebony
TAILPIECE: Brass
MACHINEHEADS: 14:1 ratio nickel-plated
CASE: No
FINISH: Amber top, natural back and sides
LEFT HANDERS: No
CONTACT: Gremlin Musical Instrument Company
PHONE: 01273 491333
WEB: www.sagamusical.com

SAGA GITANE D-500 BODY, NECK & PARTS

The Gitane's headstock is attached via a scarf joint positioned about one inch above the nut. Though visible from the back, this can't be seen from the front thanks to the latter's dark 'rosewood' overlay.

Three-on-a-strip, sealed tuners attach from the side, 'classical style'. Fitted with white plastic buttons, these are gold plated, as is the remainder of the hardware. Although the slots that accommodate the tuner barrels are dressed away, this proves insufficient to prevent strings one and six contacting the face of the headstock. This 'fault' is an aspect of the original Selmer design, which Saga has chosen to leave unchanged. As strung, the third and fourth strings rub against the headstock's centre section, though this could be avoided by adjusting the angle at which they are wound.

A zero fret sets the action height, the bone nut merely acting as a string spacer. The other end of the fingerboard extends out over the soundhole, carrying an additional four frets. This results in a full four-octave range, relatively common on electric guitars but unusual on acoustics. Simple pearl dots underline the Gitane's elegant but understated vibe, while the set up and fret work are uniformly excellent. The use of the zero fret circumnavigates problems regarding nut height, resulting in a low, relatively buzz-free action.

The mahogany neck has the flat cross-section to the rear encountered on classical guitars and this, together with a fingerboard that measures 1 7/8 inches at the nut, results in a feel quite different from the average steel-string acoustic. Once you're accustomed to it however, the neck proves remarkably comfortable.

Body and neck join at the 12th fret with a shallow, glued-on heel while a cutaway at the 15th fret goes some way to improving top-fret



"LIGHTLY BUILT, THE GITANE IS LIVELY AND RESPONSIVE"

access. Finished in an amber tint, the solid spruce top is bent, mandolin style, just below the line of the bridge. Back and sides are laminated rosewood and all body edges – including the neck/body junction on the cutaway side – feature black binding that frames a strip of alternating light/dark wood. The large D-shaped soundhole has a rosette of light, dark and coloured woods.

In fact throughout, the construction here is top-notch with details such as the mitred body binding being particularly impressive. The interior of the guitar is clean while the use of authentic non-slotted lining demonstrates an attention to detail exceeding expectations at this price.

Attached at the bottom of the body, the gold tailpiece is embossed with an S (presumably for Saga rather than Selmer!) and fitted with a black plastic insert. Though the insert's appearance is reasonably authentic, it feels a bit flimsy.

SOUNDS

Lightly built, the Gitane is lively and responsive. Fitted with the nickel strings

traditionally used on this style of guitar, it combines the quick attack of a true archtop with the longer decay of a flattop – a sound ideally suited to the rapid flurries of picked notes and sustained legatos of Gypsy Jazz.

Bass and treble are evenly balanced and while the guitar has enough 'cut' to make itself heard above other instruments, the overriding impression remains one of sweetness. This results from the combination of oversized soundhole, 25-1/4 inch scale and 12th-fret neck join, which positions the bridge at the centre of the soundboard. Despite the cutaway, upper-fret access remains a compromise while the fingerboard extension proves something of a mixed blessing in that it can often get in the way of your pick.

Though predominantly associated with Hot Club-style swing, there's no reason why the Gitane couldn't be used to advantage in a whole host of other musical contexts.

GBOPINION

SAGA D-500 GITANE

GOLD STARS

- ★ Great sound
- ★ Great playability
- ★ Superb value for money

BLACK MARKS

- At this price, none

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone looking for the best quality/value for money compromise



GB RATINGS

SAGA D-500 GITANE

BODY & NECK	★★★★
HARDWARE & PARTS	★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
GBVERDICT	★★★★

HIRSUTES YOU SIR

SAGA HAS DONE ITS HOMEWORK WITH THE BRIDGE

■ The Gitane's moustache bridge is similar to that fitted to the earliest Maccafferri-designed Selmers.

The centre section's top surface forms six compensated steps intended to improve intonation. This style was soon replaced by a bridge where intonation was achieved via a progressive curve running along its top surface.