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GITANE DG-300 MODELE JOHN JORGENSEN

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

Getting a great player involved with a guitar's design usually always pays off handsomely for both the builder and the end user. A case in point is John Jorgenson's recent association with Saga Musical Instruments, makers of the Gitane series of vintage-Selmer/Macaferri-style guitars. In case you didn't know, Jorgenson—whose extensive list of touring and recording credits includes the Desert Rose Band, Elton John, and the Hellecasters—is a world-class Django Reinhardt stylist. In fact, with the

recent release of his new album, *Franco-American Swing*, and performing role as Reinhardt in the film *Head in the Clouds*, Jorgenson is one of today's premiere exponents of the Gypsy-jazz style.

The new Gitane DG-300 incorporates a number of features and modifications that Jorgenson requested after being asked to design a signature version of the DG-250—a guitar that's based on the "petite bouche" (small mouth) Selmer that Reinhardt began playing soon after its introduction in 1934.



(For more on the Selmer/Macaferri story, see our review of the Gitane DG-250 and DG-500 guitars in the January '04 GP.)

D'JORGENSEN DETAILS

From a purely visual standpoint, the Chinese-made DG-300 grabs the eye with its beautifully figured Brazilian rosewood back and sides. How can a guitar that streets for under a grand feature such rare and expensive tone wood? Well, for one thing it's laminated—which is no big deal as original Selmers also used laminated rosewood construction. Secondly, the wood is harvested from reclaimed stumps, which seems pretty cool from an environmental standpoint. Jorgenson says that the rosewood mellows the tone slightly, a quality he obviously desired after reporting that his

maple-bodied DG-250M could be "a little harsh at times."

The cosmetics on the DG-300 are ravishing. Tortoise-style bindings with inset lines of precisely mitered colored-wood are carefully applied around the top, back, and cut-away-side of the neck joint, while black binding is used for the fretboard and end piece. The soundhole rosette is comprised of a tortoise ring-and-square inset surrounded by lines of dark wood, and the classic-style stamped brass tailpiece also sports a tortoise block inlay. (Just to be clear, what I'm calling "tortoise" is indeed a plastic material.)

Jorgenson also requested some changes that would affect the tonal response of the guitar, including the use of lighter bracing under the top. "I had noticed how small the braces were inside my 1942 Selmer," says



INSTANT GRATIFICATION GITANE DG-300

WHO'S IT FOR?

Django stylists and anyone who desires a guitar patterned on a '30s-era Selmer.

KUDOS

Plays and sounds great. Looks fantastic.

CONCERNS

Difficult to access the trussrod with supplied wrench.

PRICE

\$1,395 retail
\$999 street

CONTACT

Saga Musical
Instruments
(800) 588-5358;
sagamusic.com

EDITORS' PICK
AWARD

The horizontal cutaway is beautifully bound with faux tortoise and thin strips of carefully mitered wood.



A big change for the DG-300 is its open headstock and side-mounted tuners.



ZOOM



The ebony "moustache" bridge features a moveable saddle.

Jorgenson, "and I imagined that smaller braces would also let the DG-300's top vibrate more and produce a fuller and sweeter tone. Also, as with the Selmer, the inside of the body cavity is sprayed with a light finish, making it less prone to taking on moisture, which can change the action and playability—especially when the guitar is going to travel a lot, as mine do."

Besides utilizing a rosewood-faced open-headstock, the DG-300's neck—which is patterned on Jorgenson's Dupont guitar—features more of a "U" shape with straighter sides than that of the DG-250. Jorgenson also requested a slightly thicker fretboard in order to accommodate the vintage Stimer magnetic pickup (the type used by Django) that he attaches to the end of the fretboard. According to Jorgenson, this also increases neck rigidity, and makes for a steeper string angle from the bridge to the tailpiece—which creates more downward pressure on the bridge, driving the top harder and resulting in more fullness and projection.

BRAND OF GYPSIES

All of these details add up to making the DG-300 perhaps the most enjoyable of the petite-bouche Gitanes. Its shallower neck profile certainly makes it feel *less* like an exotic French guitar from '30s, yet you still get all the advantages of the extended

scale—i.e. an increase in string tension that not only lends itself to hard strumming and picking, but also helps elicit the uniquely punchy mids and snappy treble that are signature elements of Django's tone. Compared to a standard rosewood DG-250, the 300 sounds warmer overall with an extended low-end response and less tendency to pierce on the treble strings. It's still a great guitar for Gypsy-jazz shredders, but a singer-songwriter could feel right at home with it, too. I also prefer the 300's side-mounted tuners, which not only look fantastic, but are also easier turning—thanks to their smooth gears and large ivoroid buttons.

With its outstanding quality and high degree of player friendliness, the DG-300 is a great choice whether you're a Django dilettante or seasoned pro like Jorgenson. His knowledge, experience, and ability to translate what he *hears* into construction terms have helped make the DG-300 a prize instrument that combines boutique-style tonal response and playability with a look that's simply off the scale. A measure of any great guitar is when it accomplishes its primary objectives while incorporating elements that allow it to stand out from other instruments in its class. The fact that the DG-300 does this—and does it for such a cool price—earns it an Editors' Pick Award. 🎸

SPEC

- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " nut width
- 26 $\frac{5}{8}$ "-scale ebony fretboard with oval pearl position markers
- Laminated Brazilian rosewood back and sides
- Low profile mahogany neck
- Gold-plated engraved tuners
- Selmer-style trapeze tailpiece
- Solid spruce top with aging toner
- Horizontal cutaway
- Ebony moustache bridge with moveable compensated saddle
- Factory Strings: D'Addario Phosphor Bronze, .012-.052 (tested with Argentine, .011-.047)
- 4.2 lbs