

Sadowsky Semi-Hollow Model Guitar: Best of Both Worlds

Custom guitar builder Roger Sadowsky has been turning out finely crafted handmade guitars and basses since 1979. The new Semi-Hollow Model is his latest offering; it features the impeccable craftsmanship and excellent playability that we have come to expect from this respected luthier.

Sadowsky, who had built a strong reputation with his solid-body instruments, entered the jazz world with the introduction of his first archtop guitar, the Jim Hall Model. With one successful jazz box under his belt, Sadowsky later added the smaller-bodied Jimmy Bruno Model to his lineup. "The Semi-Hollow was the next logical step after the Jim Hall and Jimmy Bruno," Sadowsky said. "My goal was to design a versatile guitar that would appeal to the [Gibson] 335 enthusiasts and jazz players alike."

In developing the new prototype, Sadowsky distinguished his axe from the standard Gibson 335. "I did not want to build another 335-style guitar, as there are already plenty of those out there," he said.

Much of the Semi-Hollow guitar specs are based on the Bruno design. It features the same custom maple laminate top and 14^{3/4}" bout, but with a narrower 1^{3/4}" body thickness and a deeper cutaway. One of the unique aspects of the guitar's construction is the use of a carved-out spruce center block inside the body as opposed to the maple blocks found in most 335-style guitars. According to Sadowsky, this reduces the mass of the guitar and increases its resonance.

The guitar is beautiful, with a highly flamed maple body finished in an attractive sunburst

and bound with five-ply binding. As with the other Sadowsky archtops, the design is simple yet functional. There are two DiMarzio Virtual PAF pickups mounted into the top along with a Tune-O-Matic bridge and stop tailpiece. In wiring the guitar, Sadowsky once again made a decision to stray from the 335 template.

"I never liked the wiring configuration on the 335," he said.

Gibson used a four-knob setup with separate volume and tone controls for each pickup, which makes it difficult to adjust overall volume without affecting the guitar's tone when playing through both pickups. Sadowsky kept the three-way toggle switch but streamlined the controls down to a two-knob configuration featuring a master volume and tone control.

The Semi-Hollow plays great, with a comfortable 22-fret mahogany neck and Amazon rosewood fingerboard. The extended cutaway allows for easy access to the higher frets. Unlike a 335, this guitar is surprisingly

resonant and produces acoustic tone without amplification. After plugging in, I had no trouble producing a variety of great tones. The neck pickup is thick and lush—perfect for a fat jazz sound. The bridge pickup delivers the bite for rock and blues, and the dual pickup sound is warm, with a powerful in-your-face punchiness. Sadowsky wanted this guitar to be capable of performing at higher volumes without feedback issues, and there is no doubt that he achieved his goal. In both clean and over-driven settings, I could crank it up to past 11 with no problems.

Sadowsky has set a standard of excellence with his guitars, and the Semi-Hollow Model is no exception. Everything about this guitar screams quality, and with its exceptional versatility it is the perfect addition to his archtop line. It's no surprise that premier guitarists like John Abercrombie and Kurt Rosenwinkel endorse this model. Retailing at \$3,495, the Sadowsky Semi-Hollow is a great guitar capable of delivering the goods in a wide range of musical situations.

—Keith Baumann

