

## Archtop Roundup

Sadowsky Jim Hall Model,  
Martin CF-2, Stromberg Monterey

By Michael Ross

There was a time when, if you wanted a quality instrument for playing traditional jazz guitar, you were faced with spending a good chunk of your yearly income—especially if your income came from playing jazz. You can still pay the price of a small car for a handmade archtop, but nowadays you can also score a professional instrument for an affordable amount. Here are three axes that might fill your needs without emptying your bank account.



### SADOWSKY JIM HALL MODEL

A-list modern jazz guitarists such as Pat Metheny, John Scofield, and Bill Frisell cite Jim Hall as one of their main mentors. For close to half a century, Hall has helped define modern jazz guitar with his cliché-free improvising, melodic integrity, and a sense of sonic adventure that only seems to intensify with age. His sound is defined by a minimal use of amp volume and often inventive strumming passages.

Roger Sadowsky, who has maintained Hall's guitars for over 15 years, has collaborated recently with the jazz legend on a Sadowsky Jim Hall model. Manufactured in Japan, the guitar has a thinner-than-usual laminate top and back for greater acoustic response; a reduced body depth to control feedback; a new, ebony tailpiece with a string ground; and a neck shaped to Hall's specs. The finish is nitrocellulose lacquer with a "Jim Hall Sunburst."

Some guitars impress you the instant you put your hands on them; the Jim Hall model is one of these. The thin body sits comfortably against your torso, and from the

first note, the instrument seems "alive." The wide nut eased the voicing of complex chords, and whether strummed or plucked, the guitar clearly revealed the voice of each individual string. In addition, every note of a single-note solo rang at equal volume, regardless of string choice or position on the neck. Even strung (at our request) with the same lighter-gauge flatwounds used by the master himself, the Sadowsky still resounded with both warmth and body. For the audio review, I miked the guitar acoustically and was rewarded with shimmering rhythm tone. The guitar sounded equally musical when I played a solo with it plugged into a Reverend Hellhound.

The Sadowsky Jim Hall is not necessarily the right guitar for every style of music, nor is it right even for every style of jazz. But if its expressive, acoustic-based sound suits your music, you'll get an amazing guitar that even at nearly four grand is a stone bargain and merits our "1 Award."

### MARTIN CF-2 SUNBURST

C.F. Martin & Co. is known primarily for its world-class flat-tops. Its new, decidedly distinct CF-2 model, meanwhile, represents a rare foray for the Pennsylvania company into the world of archtop jazz guitars. And though Martin can claim a rich history, it has never been tradition-bound. So it comes as little surprise that this guitar offers a new take on archtop aesthetics, from the black color scheme (ebony neck binding, black hardware, smoked pickup-covers) to the funky controls, which resemble stomptop knobs. The end-pin jack—found more often on flat-tops—is also a departure from archtop architecture.

The design may be a departure, but the workmanship—especially its flawless finish and fret work—is solidly up to Martin's standards. The chunky neck is better-suited to larger-pawed players, but it was still workable even with my miniature mitts. Through a Mesa/Boogie Lone Star amp, the neck pickup's tone



Sadowsky  
Jim Hall