

CLASSIC SOUNDS UNCOVERING THE SECRETS OF A 1956 C.F. MARTIN & CO. D-21

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GEAR REVIEWS: MARTIN + KOSTAL + FAITH + ACOUSTIC CENTRE + TERRY PACK + LEVINSON + SANTA CRUZ



APP EXTRA



ACOUSTIC CENTRE

ACOUSTIC COLLECTION STADIUM

Some might find the heart-shaped soundhole preposterous – but not our reviewer, who finds himself enamoured of this characterful all-solid guitar

WORDS: SAM WISE IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

History is important in the guitar world, maybe even more so in the acoustic one. The Acoustic Centre has only been in existence since 1993 – so they can't exactly compete with C.F. Martin & Co. for historical significance – but their CV includes being instrumental in introducing Collings Guitars into the UK and, at one point, being the world's largest Lowden dealer.

Martin comparisons aside, when they took the decision to design their own line of all-solid guitars the Acoustic Centre certainly drew from history. They didn't do it in the conventional, staid way that most guitar makers do; they grabbed inspiration from various by-waters of Zematis-esque guitar history, forming a whole, which, for us at least, is extremely persuasive.

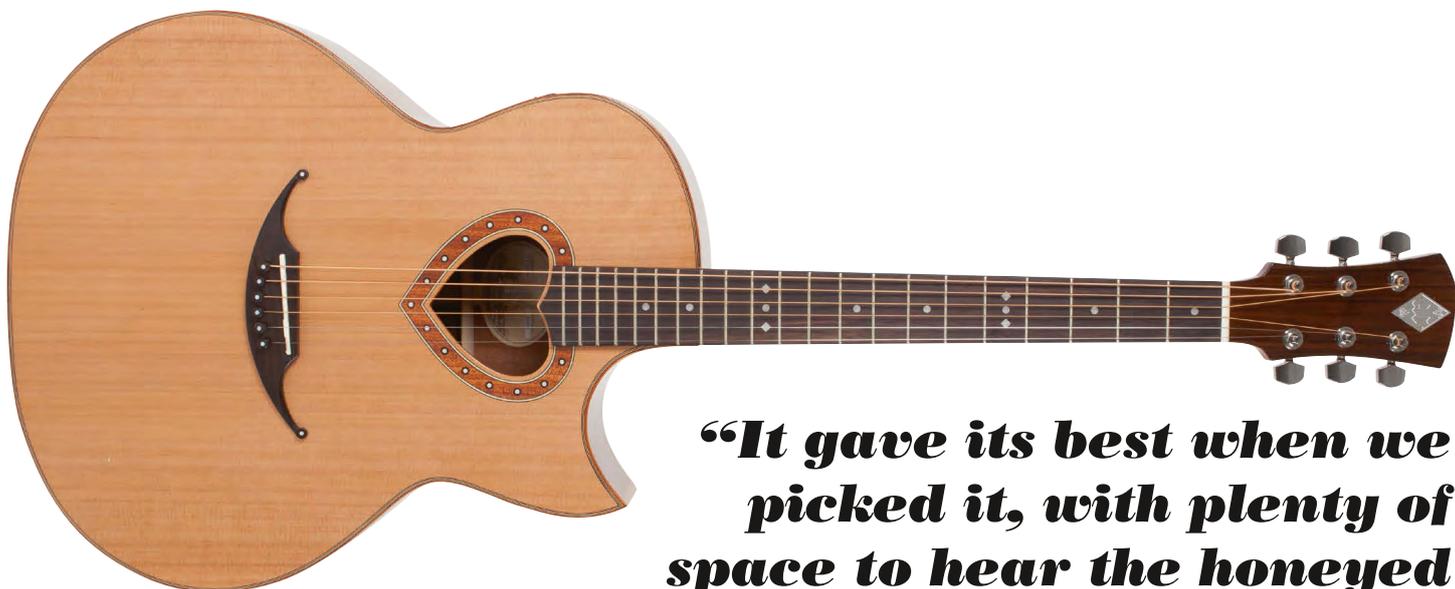
At just under £600 a go, these aren't the cheapest all-solid instruments on



the market; but, for this level of unique character, it's cheaper than its rivals' offerings.

The appearance of this guitar may well polarise opinion. Indeed, it did here: we were all at the "I love it" end of the spectrum. Those who prefer their guitars built to the highly conservative Martin style, however, may find it's not for them. The Western cedar top has a slightly red, honeyed tone to it, and is more finely grained than any cedar this reviewer has seen, with lots of cross-silking. This plays host to the guitar's most notable visual feature: the heart shaped soundhole, outlined (is it still a rosette when it's heart shaped?) in what appears to be mahogany, ebony and spruce.

The Acoustic Centre website describes this as art deco, but while we're not seeing that, it's a very pleasant effect. Back and sides are of rich, striped mahogany, bound in slightly



“It gave its best when we picked it, with plenty of space to hear the honeyed sweetness of those harmonics”

ACOUSTIC CENTRE ACOUSTIC COLLECTION STADIUM

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Acoustic Centre
Model: Acoustic Collection Stadium
Retail Price: £595
Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: China
Top: Solid cedar
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 21
Tuners: Closed gear chrome
Nut Width: 1 11/16”
Scale Length: 22.5”

Onboard Electronics: Fishman
Strings Fitted: Acoustic Centre Elites Phosphor Bronze
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Gorgeous, sounds great, do we need more pros?
Cons: Looks might not appeal to some
Overall: Fantastic, particularly if you like rich fingerstyle tone and unique styling

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ☆☆☆☆
Build Quality: ☆☆☆☆
Value for Money: ☆☆☆☆
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Acoustic Centre
www.acousticcentre.co.uk



paler-stained mahogany, with a lovely central stripe of crosshatched purfling. The ebony bridge is a smile like shape that the Acoustic Centre say is an 18th century lyre-shaped bridge, and it certainly suits the style of the instrument, carrying ebony bridge pins and a compensated saddle which, though the material is unspecified, looks to be good quality plastic.

The mahogany neck has a 21-fret ebony fingerboard with dots-and-diamonds position markers, and is topped with an understated headstock wearing unbranded but perfectly functional closed back tuners.

The final touch is a metal diamond with an ‘AC’ Acoustic Collection logo, which is a little incongruous, and looks as though maybe the DC has fallen off somewhere. That’s picky, however, on a stunning (to our

eyes at least) guitar whose look, even when you’re playing and can’t see the full outline of the soundhole, is unmistakably different. The construction is hard to fault as well; the inlay and binding are executed to perfection and the frets are beautifully sanded with no hint of corner cutting.

Nobody is likely to complain, either, about a Fishman piezo pickup and Ink4 head unit, which, while short on fancy features (it features volume, three-band EQ, Brilliance control and a tuner) makes up for it by being elegantly understated: the black on black flat controls, while illuminated by LEDs to show position when in use, are otherwise almost invisible.

All of this is moot, however, unless it sounds good. Despite being described as ‘jumbo sized’, the relatively slim-



“The looks won’t please some people – but then some people didn’t think Marilyn Monroe was a looker”



waisted, though deep bodied Stadium is more welcoming than our comparator dreadnought, and while we would have preferred a vintage V profile to the neck, its D section provides enough meat even for those with big hands.

Tonally, cedar and mahogany ought to be rich and expressive, with a powerful midrange and lots of harmonic complexity, and that’s exactly what we’re getting here. Here and there while reviewing this, we’ve taken issue with the Acoustic Centre’s descriptions, and we’re going to do so again: they describe this guitar as being designed as a platform for the ‘big strum’, and it does meet their description in that regard, but for God’s sake, pickers, try this out too.

For us, it was massively versatile, but it gave its best when we picked it, with plenty



of space to hear the honeyed sweetness of those harmonics blossom and tumble. Tuned to open D, it sounded huge, rolling great waves of complexity over spacious arpeggios in a way we found irresistible, and which led us to experiment with new tunings and chord voicings; always a plus in a guitar.

Strummed, it does indeed have a big, full, rich sound, but really open up on it, and you’ll find the tone doesn’t retain quite the crisp clarity that a spruce and rosewood combination would.

In no way should this sound like a criticism; you can strum on this guitar to your heart’s content and never be unsatisfied, and make no mistake, it’s pretty loud; it’s only that the obnoxious levels of punch that you can get from the aforementioned alternative is even greater.



For us, we’ll take this every day. The warmth and depth of tone are worth more than the extra punch and clarity ever could be.

Plug it in, and it’s a similar story; the Ink4 is easy to use, and if you do want a bit top end cut, the EQ and the brilliance controls deliver.

We loved it. It’s really as simple as that; the looks probably won’t please everyone (some people don’t think Marilyn Monroe was much of a looker), but they work for us, and they can’t be called ‘identikit’.

Tonally, it’s an undisputed cracker, and it’s more than a match for most styles – and believe us, we tried a few – with tremendously winning warmth. For the price, it’s an absolute bargain, and frankly, we’re tempted to place an order. If that won’t convince you, we don’t know what will.