

Simon & Patrick
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Songsmith

new gear

Simon and Patrick Songsmith



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Simon and Patrick Songsmith

The repected Canadian guitar builders deliver another nicely voiced, versatile, well-made guitar at bargain price.

by Sean Coleman



As a division of famed Canadian guitar builders Godin Guitars, Simon and Patrick has developed a reputation for well made, sweet-sounding guitars at affordable prices. For the last few years, the company's Satin Series (now called the Woodland Series) line has received high marks from players and dealers alike as a best buy among new guitars.

The solid spruce-top Songsmith dreadnought (the line also features a folk size) represents yet another example of Simon and Patrick's success in the price/performance game. And for players seeking a sturdy, singing, and individual ax that will stand apart from the crowd and play with the feel of a more expensive, older instrument, the Songsmith represents another great buy from north of the border.

VINTAGE VIBE, CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION

With an appealing "semi-gloss varnish burst" (which in less health-conscious times might have been called a "tobacco" burst), the Songsmith exudes unassuming simplicity and a vintage look and vibe. And though it has the familiar feel of a vintage instrument, there are a number of high-tech innovations behind its old-school looks. For example, the solid-spruce tops are pressure tested for consistency with special equipment that enables the builders to find the wood capable of the best harmonic resonance. The Songsmith also employs Godin's Integrated Set neck system, designed

to minimize the effect of variable climate on the action and reinforce the body via the inherent strength and rigidity of the neck and fretboard.

The two-piece parallel headstock design is typical of the Songsmith's uncluttered character, which is also evident in the guitar's simple lines, elegant logo, and generally clean look. While poking around inside, I also noticed that the joints were spotless and the Adirondack spruce bracing felt sturdy and secure. The wood rosette was a bit busy for my taste, but that is a personal nitpick.

GREAT SOUND FOR VOCAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Sitting around the living room one sunny afternoon, I ran through some old jazz exercises on the Songsmith. The guitar was comfortable to play both with flatpick and fingers, and responsive even during more complex chord solos. Whether I played hard or soft, the instrument took whatever I had to throw at it—it sounded neither overdriven (nor buzzy) under heavy attack, nor overly quiet or characterless during softer picking.

At a Glance

Simon and Patrick Songsmith

HIGHLIGHTS	Distinctive vintage look. Versatile voice.
THE SPECS	Solid spruce top. Solid wild cherry back and sides. Silver leaf maple neck. Fully compensated saddle and Tusq nut. Indian rosewood fingerboard and bridge. Adirondack spruce X-bracing. Intergrated set neck. 24.84-inch scale. 1.72-inch nut. Optional B-band A3.2 electronics. Made in Canada.
WATCH FOR	May not be best for stinging lead lines.
THIS IS COOL	Excellent performance/price ratio.
BEST FOR	Singer-songwriters and recording sessions seeking maximum bang for the buck.
PRICE	\$399 list/ \$299 street.
MAKER	Simon and Patrick: (514) 457-7977; www.simonandpatrick.com .

The Songsmith also lives up to its name by being exceptionally supportive when used for vocal accompaniment. With a solid low end, the instrument is voiced without a lot of flashy high

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frequencies, leaving a good deal of room for most male and female vocals. Even though the guitar exhibited plenty of volume and resonant sustain, I never felt that I had to strain to get my singing across. And while trying out new song ideas in a variety of styles, the guitar remained an even-voiced platform from which melodic ideas could sprout and flourish.

The big test for the Songsmith, however, came in the studio on some sessions with Memphis singer-songwriter Bob Frank. For a number with an upbeat,

Everly Brothers flavor, we placed two guitarists on either side of a bidirectional mic, one playing a high-strung acoustic and the other playing the Songsmith, in an attempt to recreate the lush Nashville strum. The blend between the two guitars was balanced and complementary, and the Songsmith provided bounce and drive to the auditory romp.

During several songs in various keys, the guitar fared very well with a capo at the fourth and eighth frets, never requiring extensive retuning between positions. I never struggled with the action—a testament to a good factory setup and a nicely compensated, Indian rosewood bridge. Sound and playability were consistent in all positions, and buzzes and catches were absent, making the Songsmith suitable for studio work.

Listening to playbacks, it became clear that

the guitar supported the song with a pliant treble and strong upper-midrange presence. This guitar might not be a candidate for a stinging lead track or bluegrass solo, but it's exceptional as a rhythmic and harmonic foundation for ensemble playing.

THE WRAP

Simon and Patrick has delivered an unassuming yet elegant player and recording and composition tool in the appropriately named Songsmith model—one that stands at the forefront of the affordable-guitar crowd. It is an excellent accompanist, happy to sit on the outer edges of the spotlight, anchoring both song and vocal without calling too much attention to itself, yet contributing its own clear, even voice. Whether used in a group during a jam or as vocal backing, the Songsmith is a truly versatile ax that responds well to a wide range of guitar and song styles and studio recording techniques. **AC**

