

OVATION

NIKKI SIXX ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC

NIKKI SIXX AND THE ACOUTIC BASS? NOT SOMETHING YOU WOULD NECESSARILY ASSOCIATE THE INFAMOUS ROCK STAR TO, MIKE BROOKS DELVES DEEPER.

INTRO AND BACKGROUND

The Ovation brand is synonymous with acoustic and electro-acoustic instruments and has a reputation for being at the forefront of developing technologies and enhancements in this marketplace. What we have here is a signature model based around the design preferences of an infamous rock player not necessarily known for playing an acoustic bass.

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

Straight out of the substantial hardcase (included in the price), the body and headstock red flame artwork indicate that this bass is definitely an attempt to break away from the usual, more traditional, natural timber finish on an instrument of this type. The flame graphic is striking without a doubt and grabs the attention instantly. Inside the body is a label hand signed by Nikki himself.

The 34-inch neck felt full and well shaped, fitting snugly in the palm of my hand. The natural satin finish facilitated easy movement across the dark ebony fingerboard that offered a perfect background to the mother of pearl iron cross fret markers... being associated with Nikki Sixx, would you expect anything less? Black machineheads and a black graphite nut contrast well with the red flame finish of the headstock, finished with the signature of Mr Sixx in silver. The fretwork was excellent, no sharp edges or ill fitting frets were evident and generally the set-up across all 24 frets was very good. Due to the limitations of an acoustic bridge, also made of ebony, there is only so much you can do regarding string height though I was quite happy with the factory setting, allowing room to 'dig in' rather than having a relatively low action. This bass was fitted with phosphor bronze strings so having the medium action prevented excessive string noise which these strings can sometimes produce.

Fitted with the OP-Pro circuit, looking at the topside of the body reveals the controls and tonal possibilities on offer. A 3-band EQ section allows *Low, Mid* and *High* frequencies to be boosted or cut as required. The overall output level is adjusted using the *Gain* control. The *Pre-EQ* button allows a tonal shape (-7.44db @ 500Hz, +3.3db @ 70Hz, 0db @ 7.15kHz) to be added as desired. This contours the electric output, limiting the natural tonal characteristics of the piezo pickups and provides a noticeably warmer tone. A red LED indicates powering up of the circuit and low battery power. The inbuilt *Tuner*, always a welcome addition on an acoustic instrument, is simple to use; one press of the switch activates it, play a note or open string and follow the up or down arrows on the screen to tune to your desired pitch. On average, a 9v battery will provide around 250 hours of battery life. Changing the battery is realtively easy and is done by removing the circuit pack via the press of a button, releasing the circuit block, removal of the battery hatch and changing the battery. The circuit block is then slid back into place by lining up the circuit contacts.

IMPRESSIONS

Being used to playing an acoustic bass, my initial playing sessions led me to conclude that this is an instrument that feels slightly awkward and needs some application to get used to its feel and balance. Perched on my knee, the deep roundback design felt cumbersome especially with regard to my right arm playing position, it felt like my wrist and elbow playing angles were considerably different to how I would normally play. The lack of any body chamfering meant placing my forearm over the straight body edging, which isn't the most comfortable way to play, in fact over time this can become quite painful.

It was a welcome sight to see strap buttons on this bass, too many electro-acoustics simply don't have them. Placed on a strap, it became evident very quickly that there is noticeable neck dive. Considering the body size, I found this surprising but due to the light weight of the body construction, the neck and headstock dominate the overall balance. This, coupled with the body size, made playing the bass with a strap a not entirely enjoyable experience. I found I was constantly adjusting the position of the bass in order to play it. Effectively, to get the most out of this bass, playing it whilst sat down would appear to be the best option. Having said that, bearing in mind this has been developed with Nikki Sixx in mind, playing the bass lower down on the strap with a plectrum offered an alternative playing option, but at this level, an instrument such as this should be adaptable. I wouldn't like to guess how many rock players would be willing to spend this sort of money on an acoustic instrument; such limitations may well put off any other player who may be looking for an electro-acoustic bass.

On a positive note, the acoustic tone was excellent, providing everything I would expect of a bass eminating from the Ovation stable. Full-

"INSIDE THE BODY IS A LABEL HAND SIGNED BY NIKKI HIMSELF."



OVATION ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC NIKKI SIXX SIGNATURE MODEL



BGM RATINGS

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bodied but with a pleasing brightness - although the phosphor bronze strings accentuate this brightness - the customary Ovation multi-hole rosette is ideally positioned towards the neck to accentuate the bass tones and there was very little acoustic boominess to speak of. However, it is worth bearing in mind that to really achieve loud bass tone acoustically a massive body is required to amplify the bass frequencies, which is why electro-acoustic instruments are seen as a compromise or bridge-gap between upright and electric instruments.

The plugged in electric tone was equally pleasing although with the gain turned down, I

"THE ACOUSTIC TONE WAS EXCELLENT, PROVIDING EVERYTHING I WOULD EXPECT OF A BASS EMINATING FROM THE OVATION STABLE"

INFORMATION

Price: £599 including case
Made In: USA
Body: Solid spruce with red flame artwork, mid-depth cutaway
Neck: Maple, natural satin finish
Fingerboard: Ebony with mother of pearl trim cross fret markers, 24 frets
Electronics: Ovation Op Pro preamp
Hardware: Ebony bridge, black machine heads
Controls: Gain, tune, pre-EQ shape, low/mid/high cut/boost (+9.4db / -8.1db @ 70 hz, +11.7db / -11.8db @ 556hz, +11.1db / -11.8db @ 3.6kHz, preshape = -7.44db @ 500Hz, +3.3db @ 70Hz, 0db @ 7.15kHz)
Options: Grey flame finish

BGM RATINGS

★★★★★
CLASS LEADER: YOU CAN PURCHASE IN CONFIDENCE

★★★★☆
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: TEST DRIVE IMMEDIATELY

★★★☆☆
AVERAGE FOR THE MARKET SECTOR: ONE TO TRY OUT

★★☆☆☆
BETTER ALTERNATIVES EXIST

★☆☆☆☆
AVOID

thought the circuit was still quite noisy with a fair amount of hiss present. The EQ was powerful and required only slight adjustments depending on the tone required, overdoing it merely clouds the issue and detracts from the acceptable flat EQ tone. The pre-EQ shape was particulalry useful in obtaining a warmer tone without the crystal clear highs on offer from the piezo pickups alone, very useful for a more traditional acoustic bass tone. I did notice a slight loss of signal from the D string compared to the other strings which was slightly improved by a battery change although the other strings still had a fuller signal. This indicates a possible fault with the transducer or its fitting - remediable but slightly annoying on such a high-end intrument.

TEST RESULTS

In terms of sound and tone, there is an impressive tonal character on both an acoustic and electric/amplified level. There is plenty of tonal flexibility on offer to cater for any live or recording situation. The negative issues though are too evident to ignore and on an instrument of this calibre at this price, I was expecting great playability, comfort and good overall balance but the bass falls short on several counts. With a lower price tag, you may overlook such shortcomings but at over £2,500 you have to look at other products on the market and ask yourself what else is available. At this sort of level, dedicated Nikki Sixx fans and rock players looking for something different to the more traditional electro-acoustic design are really the only people that this bass will appeal to. And certainly at this price level, you could potentially have an electro-acoustic instrument custom built to your own specifications and requirements. But as with any signature model, this has been designed either to the artist's specification or with the artist in mind and from this angle, the bass certainly befits the player. Rock on!

Mike Brooks