

Epiphone®

review



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Jack Casady Signature Bass

The free-flowing, melodic approach Jack Casady developed with Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna on a semi-hollowbody Guild Starfire was an alternative to the monolithic time-keeping employed by many Fender bassists at the dawn of the fusion era. Which might explain why, when acoustic virtuosos Steve Swallow and Stanley Clarke first plugged in, they gravitated toward the plump-sounding Gibson EB-O-an F-hole cousin to the ES-335. However, as the EB-O employed a short scale neck, it lacked the percussive punch and focus of a Fender, which contributed to its gummy feel and wooly tone; it was also prone to feedback, had odd-harmonic wolf tones and had poor intonation above the eighth fret.

Jack Casady's search for a more natural bass tonality led him to a chance encounter with a 1972 Les Paul Signature bass, which inspired him and the folks at Epiphone to perfect the concept once and for all. And while it ain't a double bass violin, this maple laminate/mahogany set-neck/semi-hollowbody offers a range of natural acoustic tonalities unavailable on my 1978 Fender P Bass-allowing for such an immediacy of phrasing (legato inflections, hand vibrato effects, percussive articulations) that I felt as if I could think and feel in a manner analogous to that of an upright jazz player.

The neck is rounded and beefy enough to really dig in to its rosewood fretboard. It arrived with an al dente setup-ust the right degree of resistance-and I was pleased to discover how much I could shade and color each note after plucking it. Because the Casady Signature has such enormous low-frequency energy, you'll have to back off on the amp's bass setting or it can become overpowering. However, because of the clarity of its low-impedance/relatively low-output magnetic pickup, and its placement at the sweet spot along the length of the string, the bass is never muddy-just fat, woody and nuanced. Nor is this the dry, nasal sound of some piezos or the analytical, slightly surreal timbre of active electronics, but the full bodied natural holler of a trad humbucker with a three-way Varitone. Unlike traditional Gibson Varitone circuits that employed capacitors and resistors to shape the frequency response of the signal, the Casady uses a three-position transformer to vary the impedance load and allows for voicings I would characterize as full-frequency warm-dark.

With a retail list of only \$1,199, the Jack Casady Signature offers jazz players an extraordinarily expressive, idiomatic vision of the electric bass guitar.

--Chip Stern
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