

Epiphone®

review



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DR500P Acoustic Guitar

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In 1931, Epiphone introduced the original Masterbilt series of guitars as a powerful challenge to Gibson's dominance of the guitar market. The original Masterbilt guitars were icons of the luthier's craft - archtop jazz boxes adorned with pearl and chrome. Today, Epiphone is a subsidiary of Gibson, but the new Masterbilt series, crafted in China manages to once again nip at the heels of the master.

MODEST YET MASTERFUL

Unlike its earlier namesake, the impeccably built new Masterbilt series is a conservative instrument. The headstock's offset notch, script logo, stick-pin inlay, and gold Grover Sta-Tite tuners all reference the original, yet from the neck down, the DR-500P appears modest. But don't let the bareness of the thin, satin finish and plain-figured maple sides and back keep you from noticing the "split diamond" fretboard inlays are free of excess epoxy, the medium frets are perfectly crowned and polished, and the multi-ply white and black binding is faultless. Internal construction appears equally ideal. My luthier sense tingled at only two small compromises in construction: the finish was applied after the neck and body was joined (separate finishes make neck resets easier in the future), and the saddle had a slight forward lean.

CHURCH BELLS SHOT FROM CANNONS

The sound and playability of the DR-500P is simply stunning. Low yet clear action and reasonable tone have become the norm in imported instruments, but the DR-500P played flawlessly and sounded astonishing. Maple-bodied instruments favor the bright end of the spectrum, and the DR-500P delivered detail to spare in that range; however, it also offers remarkable sustain, a midrange full of gnarly, toothy character, and truly exceptional bass response.

Any square-shouldered, big-bodied guitar begs comparison to its forefathers from Nazareth, Pennsylvania. I played the DR-500P face-to-face with its rosewood patriarch, and the former sounded both louder and subtler. Moderate strumming and single-note lines rang forth like the proverbial church bells shot from cannons on a crisp autumn day, while the fingerstyle example below conjured images of a warm, wool sweater graced with freshly fallen flakes of snow. Only the hardest strumming caused the mids and highs to slightly edge out the bass end for sonic dominance, at which point the DR-500P sounded like the perfect engine for a hard-driving rock track.

The DR-500P's case literally seals the deal. Its lightweight foam frame is sheathed in heavy cloth and lined with plush blue velour, and built-in gold hygrometer (for monitoring humidity) sits inside at the head. For the guitars exceptional tone and nearly errorless craftsmanship, all at a price as jaw-dropping as its playability, the Epiphone Masterbilt DR-500P easily earns our "1 Award."

Douglas Baldwin
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