

Epiphone®

review



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1964 John Lee Hooker Sheraton II

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When Gibson's creative point man and chief operating officer Ted McCarty shepherded the development of the original ES-335 semiacoustic electric guitar, I doubt he knew to what degree the versatile instrument would transform the world of possibilities available to blues, R&B, jazz and rock guitarists.

The John Lee Hooker Sheraton II essentially reprises aspects of the original Epiphone Sheraton and the Gibson ES-345 (a fancier take on McCarty's ES-335), with some significant differences. Whereas today's ES-335s employ traditional maple-basswood-maple laminate construction throughout, the Sheraton II employs a 5-ply maple-birch-maple-birch-maple back with a 3-ply spruce-maple-spruce top - the latter contributing a touch of sweetness and harmonic complexity while slightly softening the attack.

While the one-piece mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard and gold-plated parts echo standard Gibson parameters, the Sheraton II's fancy leaf-and-vine Epiphone peghead logo is derived from the company's original flagship archtops, while the mother of pearl rectangles intersected by abalone triangles on the fretboard are an elegant touch borrowed from the Guild Artist Award.

From a tonal perspective, the Sheraton II reprises the original Alnico V Mini-

Humbuckers. Their magnets are a special blend of aluminum, nickel and cobalt, and these pickups are hot - good hot, maintaining excellent tone throughout their volume range (even when rolled off for a mellower jazz tone), with a very warm bottom end, rich midrange detail and exceptional high-frequency clarity and bite.

The guitar arrived with a warm amber sunburst and a splendid al dente set-up perfectly balanced for heavy jazz picking and supple blues bends and legato effects. Its performance was more than competitive with any of todays more expensive reissues and many of the pricey vintage icons I've played over the years, with a level of vibrancy worthy of the legendary Boogie Man who inspired the name.

While the Epiphone 1964 John Lee Hooker Sheraton II carries a not inconsiderable list price of \$2995, the elevated quality of its construction, performance parameters and aesthetic appointments warrant serious consideration by jazz guitarists seeking class, value and a distinctive sonic signature all their own.

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