

Epiphone®

review



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Jorma Kaukonen Riviera Deluxe

Epiphone's Jorma Kaukonen signature model Riviera is a straight-up pleasure to look at. For starters, there's the beautiful maple top and striking gold hardware appointing the cherry-finished semi-hollow body. But the joys of the instrument go far beyond aesthetics.

Indeed, right out of the case the Jorma is a dream to play, even un-plugged. The action on our review instrument was very low, yet strings were easy to bend, even with the stock wound .019 G (the guitar was strung .011-.052). The guitar stayed in tune perfectly, even with heavy pushing and bending. The headstock, equipped with Grove tuners, has Kaukonen's signature under the Epiphone logo. The fretboard, top and back are all bound.

Electronically, the Jorma employs Epiphone's wonderful '57 Classic Alnico V pickups, manipulated via the standard two volume/two tone setup with three-way toggle. Plug the Jorma into an all tube amp with a little added grit and reverb, flick to the bridge pickup, and roll the tone off a bit, and behold! The sound of Hot Tuna's "Keep Them Lamps Trimmed And Burnin'." With the amp dirtied up, the pickup screams with a creamy distortion, funky and cutting edge.

With the amp cleaned up a bit, we dialed in a close rendition of The Rolling Stones' "19th Nervous Breakdown" and Jefferson Airplane's Volunteers!

Changing to the neck pickup and tossing in a little delay and preamped overdrive produces tone reminiscent of Eric Johnson's "Ah Via Musicom."

Adjusting the tone control of the neck pickup creates a soulful, jazz-like presence that gives the Jorma an earthy character. Utilizing the pickups together, and with a clean amp sound, can lead to inspired solo instrumental playing. And with the Vibrotone tailpiece, one can accent (a la Chet) every now and again. The vibrato is similar to the old big-spring Bigsby's, with the strings going over the bridge then wrapping under the tailpiece.

With the Vibrotone, subtle bends will keep the Jorma in tune. Bending down (loosening the strings) works

best. The Vibratone will bend up, but that's not its forte'. And it is not a divebomber unit! The tri-layered pickguard keeps the finish sage from aggressive strummers.

--Guy Lee
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