

Indian giver

Paul Day gets in a tizz about the Eyb Electric Sitar, a German-made six-string solid that emulates those psychedelic 60s sounds without any technique or tuning troubles.



• Eyb's Electric Sitar out-performs all those sought-after US-made oldie originals.

SINCE ITS INTRODUCTION in the far-out era of the late 60s, the electric sitar has appeared on innumerable records, often lending a distinctive-sounding hook to many a hit.

Back then there was really only one game in town concerning choice of such an instrument. Danelectro was responsible for creating this new concept (courtesy of the ever-inventive mind of US session player Vinnie Bell) and

the company subsequently sprang two models on an unsuspecting public — the Coral Sitar and its more basic, less

expensive sibling, the Danelectro Baby Sitar.

Both were pretty shortlived as Danelectro went under at the

end of the 60s, but since then those oldies have become very desirable, attracting price tags to match. This ongoing popularity

prompted US maker Jerry Jones to start producing his own close copies a few years back, albeit with some improvements

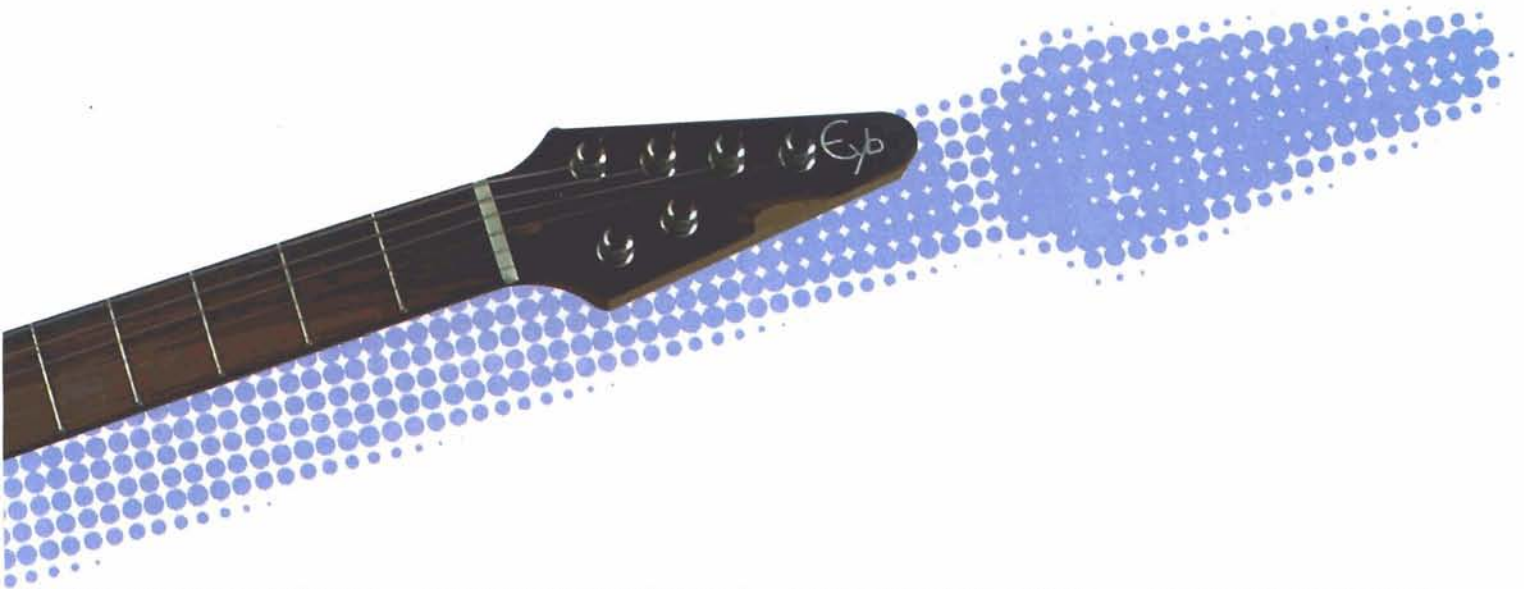
regarding intonation — always a failing on the originals.

A third way of obtaining the zingy, tizzy sounds typical of this type of instrument comes courtesy of German maker Gunter Eyb. He debuted his Electric Sitar in 1994, and as well as owing very little to earlier interpretations, this also offers the best solution to the tuning problems inherent in the design.

Dummy head

The Eyb Electric Sitar is actually headless in terms of tuner

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placement, as these are located down at the bottom of the body, but it still employs a small pointed 'token' headstock. This is used to carry Eyb's own-design, individual string anchor clamps — arranged in four-plus-two formation — and the end result is far less disorientating than the usual chopped-off look.

The slim gauge frets are smoothly finished but left quite high, while the neck profile feels familiar and comfortable. It combines with the gently radiused rosewood fingerboard to foster a friendly feel that makes the longer than usual scale far less obvious.

The body boasts some pretty radical curves and contours, but they prove to be practical rather than gimmicky. An extended left horn helps balance the longer neck, while the scooped-out forearm shaping bestows a tactile character.

Deep cutaways and a chamfered heel allow an easy reach right the way up, and the end results of all this whittling look great under the review example's high-gloss coat of seafoam green — a custom option costing another £100 and more exciting than the standard natural satin finish.

The bridge is very different

to both Danelectro's design and the Jones revamp. Eyb opts for long and chunky individual metal saddles, chrome-plated to match the rest of the hardware on this example. Two grub screws at the back of each provide height adjustment, while another up front alters the degree of tilt.

Angling for success

The latter affects the amount of saddle surface making contact with the vibrating string ahead of its correct bearing point. This is what produces that buzzy, fizzy sitar-like sound and the

buzz is achieved, the saddle is then repositioned to compensate for any resultant change in intonation. Once all six are located correctly they're locked into place via a grub screw in the right side wall of the beefy bridgeplate.

Eyb's ideas score over the one-piece bridge/tailpiece found on all the competition, old and new. On this instrument it's possible to set up the Eyb so that both chords and lead lines play in tune all over the neck — not the case on any other electric sitar.

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more the string and saddle touch, the greater the physical effect generated.

Of course, introduce too much tilt and the string just chokes out, killing all ring and sustain, while intonation goes out the window. So finding the optimum angle setting for each string is both vital and rewarding, but it can be a tricky and quite time-consuming task.

Once the desired degree of

The accompanying tuner-toting tailpiece is equally well engineered. It's located in a large sloping recess to ensure enough downward angle for the strings off the bridge, while the body base is cut away to allow plenty of room around the tuners. These are quite close together so careful fingering is necessary, but actual operation is positive and precise.

The review instrument

features Keystone noiseless single-coils with white covers that look great against the green body, but other pickup choices are available, including DiMarzio Fast Track humbuckers.

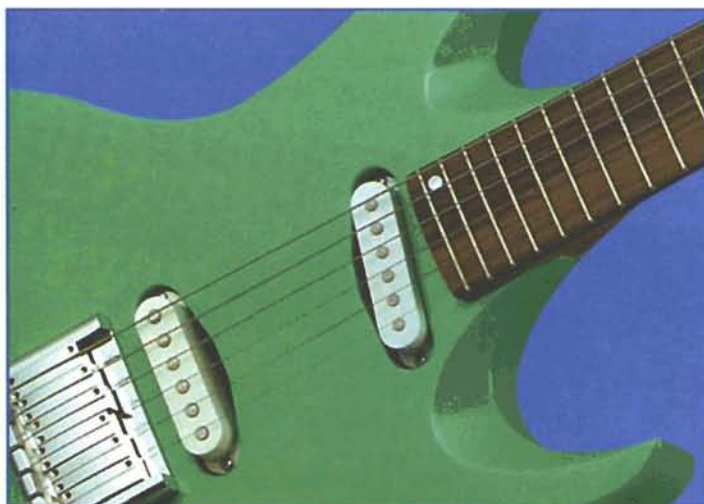
As standard the electrics consist of master volume, three-way lever-type pickup selector and a mini-toggle coil switch, but again the review example offers a custom option — Eyb's 'Nature' piezo system — costing an extra £150. This combines an under-bridge transducer with an internal preamp incorporating bass and treble trim pots, while a separate volume control for the system replaces the coil switch.

PERFORMANCE:

Thanks to the longer scale, there's an abundance of acoustic resonance along with a very responsive feel. The extra stretch required is achieved without undue effort, courtesy of the comfort-conscious neck.

Having virtually ideal intonation on an electric sitar is a revelation — especially for anyone who has had to suffer an old Coral or Dano job and the attendant chore of retuning just to make the thing play properly in a certain position on the neck.

No such hassles here and



the ability to exactly determine the desired buzz content for each string is another real bonus. The top four yield that great natural fizzing sustain typical of the pseudo-sitar breed. The remaining lower two tend to rattle more, but this is only to be expected.

The Keystone pickups are powerful but clear, with a wide-ranging tonality that's very good at conveying convincing sitar-like results. All three selections are very usable, but the piezo system isn't so impressive.


Although it does subtly enhance the sound, the noticeable increase in amplified body noise and microphony negates any improvements regarding authenticity.

CONCLUSION:

The Eyb Electric Sitar is a highly original creation that does a great job in recreating the

sounds that make the old Coral and Dano models so sought-after. This instrument is great for underpinning lead lines or supplying zingy, ear-catching hooks, as well as chords rich in droning sustain.

The natural satin standard version should do the job for most players, although some might appreciate paying out the extra necessary to score a snazzier sunburst or solid colour. The piezo system is something of an acquired taste and rather than being an automatic must-have, its benefits will depend on personal priorities.

The Eyb may not possess the kudos associated with the Coral and Danelectro originals, and it lacks the similarly retro looks of the Jerry Jones repros. But in my opinion, actual performance potential is much greater, far outweighing any 'vintage is best' ethos. 

AXEFAQ

Origin: Germany
 Neck: Maple, bolt-on
 Fingerboard: Rosewood, 24 frets,
 686mm (26.95in) scale
 Body: Alder
 Pickups: Two noiseless single-coils
 Controls: Master volume, three-way selector, coil-switch
 Bridge: Six-saddle sitar type
 Weight: 4kg

PRICE:
 £935 (standard version)
 £1,185 (review example inc options)

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