

The Triggs San Salvador – Opportunity Knocks

Have you ever thought "someday I'd like to just go out and get me a Corvette, or even better a Ferrari. I'm sick of driving these old Fords & Chevy's. I want something really sexy." And every time, the one you want is just too expensive, the kids need braces, college tuition is coming or any of a million reasons you can't get what you've been wanting for a long, long time. Well, isn't it just like that for guitars too, especially guitars. I've been playing for 30 years now and I can remember wanting a D'Aquisto in the worst way and telling myself I was going into hawk to get one no matter what. Every time I was ready, the price went up until they were astronomical. My dream seemed out of reach... until I met Triggs. The guy believes in players and he likes to give them an opportunity to get the right instrument for them. Here's a real opportunity to have the dream guitar you want. Let me tell you why I really think this is a special opportunity and all about the instrument itself, the San Salvador.

Opening the case, I would guess the instrument to be worth \$7000.00 to \$10,000.00 or more. What you see first is the wood on the top - beautiful natural blond spruce. Not seconds, not some cheap wood source, but number one spruce, the kind you only see on star's guitars, because someone at the factory made them a "special".

Next you notice a hand carved ebony bridge and the bound, finished neck, you know with the little point that many expensive guitars omit. You see the split block inlays, ebony pick guard, detailed head stock, Grover Imperial Tuners, multiple bindings, everything's there, not one expensive detail missing. Then turn it over and the guitar bursts into flames. The back is a special too. The price is going up in your mind I bet.

Ok, pretty girl, got any brains in there? Let's play it.

The first thing you feel is comfort. The neck had to come from somebody who's been contouring Super 400 and L5 necks for years, a custom shop guy. The curves in the body seem to fit just right and the body depth has been tweaked too.

The next thing I did was play a couple standards. Herbie Hancock's Dolphin Dance is a real work out for a guitar because of the complex harmonies. It lets you know right away if the instrument has clarity between the voices of the chords. The tune also moves around between several octaves testing all registers for tonal quality. The San Salvador exceeded high expectations for any carved arch top jazz guitar. A remarkable item is the warmth and presence of this guitar even though it was less than two months old, some of the glue isn't even dry.

No evaluation is complete with out comparing an instrument to its peers and its supposed superiors. I played it back and forth between two other acoustic archtops, each worth over \$10000.00. With the exception of price tag, I couldn't hear or feel major differences in the instruments.

I tried a series of different techniques to look for a weakness: octaves gave a nice blend of mellowness & brightness using the thumb, bass & chord technique ala Joe Pass had the tonal separation between the walking bass and the harmony, upper register fast and slow figures had a fullness that made either end of the tone accessible. If you wanted the subtle muted Pat Martino thing or if you wanted a bright Grant Green high register it was available. The big wide bass frets make that classic dark bop tone of the Wes School if you want it or the icy bass register playing we hear Benson load up on at times. Many instruments shove you one way or another unlike the San Salvador where you get the whole color palette.

I tried some Latin tunes with my open hand playing the rhythm and got almost a gut string tone. The acoustic richness was there if you wanted the Jobim style or you could grab a pick and sound like the Gypsy Kings. Again the tonal spectrum is there enabling variety. If an instrument isn't versatile, it's tough to fit into the different band layouts a player has to be able to go with today – solo, duo, straight ahead, blues, funk and fusion.

Speaking of the more down home genres, I tried some blues and funk on the San Salvador. I got that Eric Gale funky blues tone and a bunch more. You can make her bark at the moon and scream. Believe it or not, some of these floating pickups I got from Triggs are scary at times. So's this one. Is it a Les Paul and a Marshall, no, but I've seriously frightened several of my students and other unbelievers from the pop world by cranking the crap out of my arch tops. When you harness the feedback just right on this

one you feel like Santana for a minute.

I know this sounds like a Triggs commercial, but I have been playing arch tops for over 30 years professionally and can look any player in the eye because [I'm telling the truth here](#). I've played all the great boxes and can say beyond a shadow of a doubt **this is the best value I have ever seen in a carved top jazz guitar**.

I asked Triggs how is he doing it and he said that the addition of his son Ryan has allowed their shop to increase output. In other words, this is his production guitar. He can only make a small amount compared to a Gibson or Heritage so they're not a quite a typical production guitar. Triggs and his son actually build and complete each instrument, but they don't customize each one like they do for their custom shop clients. In which case, you're still getting their work for a fraction of the price of their custom shop instruments. They've standardized, modernized and got efficient, we get the benefits.

Another concern of mine is consistency. If these instruments are anything like the other four Triggs arch tops I've purchased from him, the answer is better than consistent. His guitars get better the more he builds and each time I've ordered, Triggs said if you don't like it I'll take it back. Tough to beat that answer.

If you want that dream opportunity before you get old and you don't want to consolidate your debt and get a second mortgage, this is the time to get a San Salvador before Triggs gets swallowed up by one of the big companies.

God Bless You,
Gaetano Letizia May 2003

P.S. - The lucky buyer of this instrument is Craig Swancy of Craig's Music in Weatherford, TX. He purchased this instrument to sell but I would bet that he keeps this one.