



STERLING BY MUSIC MAN ST VINCENT STV60 £699

Has alt-pop's hippest star helped shape this year's coolest signature electric?

When you're going to spec an electric guitar in your name, it's best to go all in and fix yourself something totally different, something unique. Why stop at a specially designed headstock decal, and maybe an exotic tonewood and custom pickup set, when you can all but reinvent the shape of the instrument for your own needs? That's what Annie Clark, better known by her stage name St Vincent, has done. Clark's Sterling by Music Man STV60 – an affordable, Indonesian-built version of her Music Man USA

Berklee College of Music, Boston, and could rebrand herself as a bona fide shredder. Instead, she cuts an ethereal presence, taking a broadly experimental, alt-pop approach to her craft. She appreciates minimalist design but puts an ambitious, maximalist spin on pop.

The STV60 is similarly enigmatic. It looks all neck, but in truth its 648mm (25.5") scale gives it a somewhat conventional feel, certainly for the fretting hand, with a slim but far-from-skinny neck profile – finding that sweet spot between speed and comfort. The STV60's asymmetric outline

“A CURIO OF AMERICANA... WITH AN OFF-BEAT AESTHETIC”

custom model – has a boxy retro-futuristic body that looks as though it's been recovered from a late 50s/early 60s blueprint for a guitar or automobile.

Clark wanted a guitar that would complement her frame, and the result is a lightweight plank of contoured African mahogany that's all aggressive angles and smooth edges. We've seen all kinds of shapes through the years, but this is really something, as though they glued a couple of Bo Diddley's cigar box guitars together and carved a new shape out of them inspired by the tail fin of a Lincoln Futura. It's a bizarre guitar, a curio of Americana, but that's what makes it so cool. Its off-beat aesthetic, however, only tells part of the story.

As an artist, Clark is hard to pin down. She was weened on grunge, has a penchant for metal, attended

affords great access to the upper frets with an obtuse angle cutaway exposing most of the fretboard. The heel is slight and slopes away from the neck. Whether playing seated or standing, the STV60 feels well balanced – just be mindful not to bang that longer body into doors, walls... or bandmates. Your back, meanwhile, will forever be thankful if you make this your go-to instrument. One noticeable difference from the USA model is that the STV60 has a maple neck with a rosewood fingerboard as opposed to both being rosewood. This works just fine. The congruent circle fret markers are a nice understated flourish, and another aspect to the STV60's embrace of geometry as a designing principle. Clark's fingerprints are all over this – she was involved from the start – but it is in no way a fans-only

1 HEADSTOCK
The '4+2' arrangement of tuning pegs dispenses the need for a string tree, helping the string resonate from the machinehead to the bridge.

2 BODY
The body shape might be too weird for some, but we say weird is cool, and it makes for a well-balanced and comfortable instrument.

3 PICKUPS
Designed by Music Man, these mini-humbuckers have got plenty of personality, and help the STV60 deal in all manner of styles.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: African mahogany
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 3x mini-humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x tone, 1x volume, 5-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Sterling Vintage tremolo, chrome
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Vincent Blue only
CONTACT: Strings & Things 01273 440 442
www.sterlingbymusicman.com





The Connoisseur

How Annie Clark's gear choices informed her breathtaking new guitar

It should come as no surprise that an Annie Clark signature model would be super-cool, a little weird and a trove of great old-school tone. She has been sketching guitars since she grew obsessed from watching *La Bamba* on TV as a kid. She has used Fender Jazzmasters and Jaguars, Guild Aristocrats and a variety of Gibson SGs. Then there are the likes of the Silvertone 1488, a 1980 Hagström Swede and the Harmony Bobkat – a 60s model favoured by Clark for its lightweight construction and tone. For her signature model, Clark wanted a more stable vibrato, better upper-fret access, and the sort of playability that she got from her Music Man Albert Lee. Having seen Clark play the Albert Lee, Ernie Ball invited her to the factory, let her sketch her ideal guitar, and bingo!

instrument. Sound-wise, it plays to a broad church.

With three mini-humbuckers, selectable via a five-way switch, the STV60 has plenty of range. Through a clean valve amp, the bridge pickup has an abundance of attitude and treble bite. It's a little brighter than a regular 'bucker, and calls to mind a Firebird. With the bridge and middle pickups selected, some of that bite is tamed, revealing a warm, elastic bounce, while the middle pickup has a clarity that's perfect for fingerpicking – a big part of St



The bridge pickup boasts an abundance of attitude



Annie Clark's signature guitar: cool, with old-school tone

Vincent's technique. The neck and middle pickups are warm without ever being muddy. No matter where you set the switch you'll find some great tone that scrubs up well with overdrive or fuzz. A vintage-style vibrato unit offers a welcome bit of jiggly fun without throwing the tuning out.

It's poetic that Clark found a home with a manufacturer who once made Eddie Van Halen's guitars. Both are technically gifted, maverick players with a proclivity for two-hand tapping. The SVT60 is a serious instrument for the

money. It might leave you a suit of boutique valve amps and stompboxes short of Clark's sound but it'll broaden your sonic horizons and its old-school take on the future makes for an instrument whose retro voice is perfectly in tune with the here and now.

Jonathan Horsley

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

ALSO TRY...

GRETSCH CORVETTE

This Electromatic edition of Gretsch's first solidbody has serious vintage rock 'n' roll tone and an awesome Bigsby wobble.

£809

FENDER STANDARD JAZZMASTER HH

A winner for grunge and alt-rock, and a similarly outré and asymmetrical electric that's a modern classic by now. Just add a fuzz pedal.

£589

GUILD S-200 T-BIRD

An awesome reissue that turns the clock back to the mid-60s, the T-Bird has some weird controls but is great to play and sounds incredible.

£849