



Rocking the Dynasty

The Richmond Empire

Canada's Richmond Guitars offers instruments with a retro vibe and styling coupled with fine modern components. Their latest offering, the single-cut Richmond Empire, epitomizes the company's efforts.

The Empire may look like old-school, but of course, looks can be deceiving. Close inspection reveals its three-piece body with maple center and poplar wings, and 24³/₄"-scale bolt-on mahogany neck with 12"-radius rosewood fingerboard and 1¹¹/₁₆" nut. The satin-finished neck has a broken-in feel with real vintage vibe. Vintage-style chrome-button tuners and a wraparound bridge complete its basic-is-better nature, along with a master Volume, single Tone control, and basic three-way pickup selector. Tones come courtesy of a Godin single-coil pickup in the neck and vintage-voiced humbucker in the bridge. Finally, the one-ply pickguard and traditional shades of finish (black, cream, or natural) help it transition smoothly from garage to stage.

Sporting the heart of a rocker with more spirit, the Empire's maple/poplar body and mahogany neck yield interesting sonic results. Notes are consistent all over the neck, with focused low-end that responds very well when playing low rhythm chords.

Plugged in, it's easy to forget the Empire is a intermediate-grade instru-

ment; overall construction screams of Godin's influence, but with a garage-band sort of twist. Its electric tones are somewhere between a cool old Danelectro and an old Les Paul Special. The single-coil in the neck is similar to an old TV 'Tron pickup with a hint of a lipstick-tube-pickup vibe. The bridge-position pickup offers just the right amount of grit – not overly hot, but with ample windings to render good overdriven tones.

Live and in the studio, the Empire is a cool sonic option. Its low-end is simply fun, and it has a cool retro spank thanks in part to its wraparound bridge. The body resonates really well, which helps the fullness of the chordal work. The neck pickup is useful for blues, punk, and even surf, and responds favorably to overdriven tones.

The Empire's bridge pickup has a just-right amount of bite without being overly aggressive – more early-PAF than hot rocker, which maintains the garage-band nature of the instrument.

Richmond guitars keep getting cooler. The company's line is relatively small, but offers a great mix of well-conceived instruments, useful in a variety of applications. – **Sean O'Bryan Smith VG**

RICHMOND EMPIRE

Price: \$639 (list)

Contact: RichmondGuitarsCanada.com.

