





VIDEO DEMO



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GODIN MULTIAC NYLON SA ~~\$1,499~~  
ELECTRO ACOUSTICS



# Uniquely brilliant

At over 20 years old, Godin's Multiac remains one of the world's most stage-specific electro-acoustics. We catch up with the latest version of the original model and its designer, Robert Godin

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# Godin Multiac Nylon SA

## £1,499

### What We Want To Know

1

#### What is a Multiac?

A stage-aimed thinline, all-hollowbody electro-acoustic with nylon or steel strings. Certain SA models, such as the original, offer synth access via a hexaphonic pickup and 13-pin output.

2

#### Are there more standard models?

Yes, the Ambiance models use Fishman's Aura technology and the Encore models have a more standard undersaddle/sound transducer pickup system. There are also MultiOuds, a MultiUke and a soon-to-be-released Multiac cavaquinho.

3

#### Who plays them?

A wide selection of players, including Al Di Meola, Steve Stevens, Leonard Cohen, Roger Waters, Habib Koité, Lionel Loueke, Sylvain Luc and Rubens de la Corte, not to mention oud master Fatih Ahiskali, and many more sidemen and session players.

**T**he 2014-spec Nylon SA attempts to provide a stage-specific electro nylon-string – and in doing so, irrelevant of its origins, throws out the rulebook. Or maybe that should read 're-writes the rulebook'. You see, outwardly, there seems very little of the classical guitar here. The scale length is Fender-like at 648mm (25.5 inches), although in reality that's just two millimetres short of the classical standard of 650mm.

The outline of the almost solidbody-like instrument stretches approximately 460mm in length and 360mm in width, with a 250mm waist – not too far away from a 12-fret modern electro nylon-string design such as, for example, Yamaha's NCX. But our Multiac's neck joins its body between the 15th and 16th frets, while its pointed treble cutaway allows easy access to the top 22nd fret. The body depth, at 58.6mm, is around half the depth of a conventional classical, though some 12mm deeper than, for example, a Telecaster.

The clear cream spruce top is finely grained and edge-bound with a whiter plastic and inner black/white/black 'violin' purfling – about as fancy as the guitar gets. The mahogany back

and sides start life, like a solidbody, as a centre-joined block that is routed out, leaving a pretty thin braced back and sides.

"I have the main chamber and another smaller chamber [under the control area, which has 10 small 'sound holes'] that we transfer the air to," says Robert Godin. "There's less air than a full acoustic, but the channel to get the air out is reduced, and because it pushes so much it's hard for other instruments to get in; well, they don't. So, if you play live, it's virtually totally insulated: you don't get the other instruments coming into the soundbox and

creating problems like a standard acoustic. You're not 100 per cent insulated, but you're 95 per cent."

The neck screws to the body with four screws with inset washers. The heel area is reduced in depth, further aiding top-fret playability. Designed to appeal to 'crossover' players, the neck has a slimmer nut width of 48.6mm, and just over 57mm at the 12th fret. Yes, it's wide compared to your Strat, but not as wide as a standard classical. It also employs a lightweight aluminium dual-action truss rod that certainly helps to achieve a 'really low for a nylon-string' action.



Unlike the original guitars, the new Multiacs have an incredibly low action



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The Multiac's neck is joined to the body by these four screws

## The Rivals

The Multiac, with synth access, is unique in the mainstream market. **Taylor's T5** and smaller **T5z** follow a similar modern thinline path, and both are steel string with a choice of acoustic transducers and magnetic sounds. The Classic versions of both cost £1,511. More conventional are **Yamaha's** steel-string **APX** and nylon-string **NTX**, but both are fit for the stage. For example, the **APX700II** costs £546; the **NTX700C** is £581. Another futuristic vision is **Yamaha's Silent** guitar. Ideal for practice and loud stage work, there are steel and nylon versions, with onboard effects. Expect to pay around £500.



Strap buttons are borrowed from Schaller's Security Lock system



As well as a standard jack, there's a 13-pin output socket for synth access

An original feature of the design is the longer classic-style slotted headstock. "The distance from the nut to the tuning key is important," Robert tells us. "The further I go away, the more tension I have, and because a lot of players use a pick, or play the more percussive, aggressive Latin styles, regular tension is not enough – the string doesn't know where to go. Also, the action on the guitars is very low [especially for a nylon string], half the height of a classical guitar. The original guitars were not like that, I have to admit, but the headstock, yes."

## Modern advances

One of the most noticeable recent changes in the Multiac comes from the use of the paper-based fibre composite Richlite, instead of ebony, for the fingerboard. "Richlite is very rigid, so we can now go with a thinner-depth neck. Also, there's less taper, so the depth at the 1st fret is almost the same as it is at the 14th. These things came in about a year ago. It's about our fifth improvement to the design – it's been evolving. We also improved the accuracy of the scale length and fret positions, so it's more precise now. We wanted open strings to

really be in harmony with higher-fretted notes. It's better, too, for alternate tunings, which don't always work on a conventional instrument: you're constantly retuning."

Another advantage of Richlite's rigidity is that "on the upper frets on the high strings [of a conventional nylon string] the note can die [decay] too quickly, but on a Multiac it now sustains more, no problem."

While the various Multiacs have different pickup systems, the SA models stick to pretty much the original design: an RMC hexphonic pickup system with both a standard jack and

13-pin synth access outputs. Along with volume and programme-up and -down buttons for the synth control, you get volume, bass, mid and treble slides, plus a mid shift switch. These EQs have also been tweaked. "Originally, there were no centre notches on the EQ sliders," remembers Robert. "That's one change from the original guitars. But what we've changed more recently is the amount of cut and boost – four or five years ago, it was +/- 8dB, I think. Now it's less than 5dB: more subtle, harder to get a bad sound. And when we say those centre notches are 'flat', they're





Robert Godin's signature adorns the classical-style slotted headstock



Tuners are three-a-side, classical style, with cream plastic buttons

not. There's a curve in the middle, which is very important. We've been careful with the high notes, too – before, it was a little bit too much [brightness] and a lot of people were playing with the treble slider reduced, so we've sorted this out."

### Sounds

This really is the definition of the 'crossover' guitar. Played seated, the neck extends much further than a conventional classical – it feels more like a Fender solidbody – and it's weightier. It's designed to be strapped on, and uses the strap

buttons from Schaller's Security Lock system; you just need to buy locking caps for your strap.

The change in neck depth, thanks to the Richlite fingerboard, is very welcome. A well-gigged 2011 Grand Concert SA we have for comparison has a much deeper neck. This one feels more comfortable, especially in the upper-fret positions, and tapers from approximately 19.5mm at the 1st fret to approximately 22mm at the 12th – around 2mm thinner than our earlier model. The very appealing thing about all the Multiac models we've played over the

years is the lively, natural acoustic response. Of course, it doesn't have the volume or projection of a regular acoustic, but there's plenty of sound for solo practice, and it responds like a conventional guitar – it doesn't feel restricted in any way. We've recorded Multiac guitars with mics and achieved surprisingly good results for a more modern tonality. On receipt of this guitar, the action was super-slinky, a little too low for us, so we just relaxed the truss rod a little. There's a lovely balance to the sound and, as Godin observes, the upper access and response is greatly

improved over any nylon-string guitar that we own.

We're part of the 95 per cent of players who don't use the synth access side of our SA guitars. Yes, it all works well, but there's another reason why we'd choose the SA setup over either the Ambiance or the Encore: it just seems to sit with a band better. Does Godin agree? "The RMC still has a lot of fans – they are very nice sounding. There's a floating diaphragm in each [pickup] element; it's a more dynamic response, that's the key, and it's a patented system. If you play with a band, personally, I prefer the RMC.





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Playing high up the neck is a pleasure, thanks to the pointed treble cutaway

There's a family resemblance. All of the guitars are superbly built for their stage-specific purpose

If you record or play in a small ensemble or venue, the Aura sounds are the way to go."

So, plugged in with the EQs in their centre notch positions, we're not hearing a nicely mic'd concert classic guitar or any kind of digital recreation. Like an undersaddle, the sound is very present, but balanced without any harshness and only very slight 'artifacts' when you really dig in. The EQ is very unobtrusive, too. There's plenty of boost and cut, but when used to lightly colour your sound it's very musical: a little high-cut smoothes out the highs for softer styles, the opposite adds

bite for Spanish flourishes. The mid shift is subtle and only really noticeable at the extremes of the mid slider's travel, but the actual midrange is well voiced, removing a little honk, or with treble reduction adding a little more thickness. Aside from a slightly noticeable hiss on the treble EQ boost, there's nothing to complain about, and even that proved virtually unnoticeable in all but the quietest of solo passages.

### Verdict

Having played virtually all of the current Multiac models, from the MultiUke, the

MultiOud and the Inuk to the more regular steel-strings, there's certainly a family resemblance: all of the guitars are superbly built for their stage-specific purpose.

But what is a little surprising is just how much the subtle improvements have lifted the latest-generation instruments. Put simply, the 2014 specification is noticeably improved in terms of neck shape, EQ and overall intonation from our 2011 reference which, to be fair, is far from shabby. World music styles continue to grow in popularity, with more and more acoustic players taking to the stage – and finding it's not always as easy as they'd thought, especially with a band involved. This means the Multiac is more valid today than it was on its introduction in 1993. A modern classic. **G**



### Godin Multiac Nylon SA

**PRICE:** £1,499 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Canada

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, hollowbody nylon electro

**BODY:** Hollow mahogany back/sides with solid Sitka spruce top

**NECK:** Mahogany, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech Tusq/48.8mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Richlite, face and side dots, 406mm (16") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**TUNERS:** 3-a-side, gold/black-plated classical style with cream plastic buttons

#### STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:

Rosewood with compensated individual saddles/58mm

**ELECTRICS:** Custom electronics by Godin/RMC – individual diaphragm transducers. Slider controls for guitar volume, bass, mid, treble, synth volume, 2-way mid select slide switch, 2 push buttons for synth program-up and -down change. Mono jack and 13-pin outputs

**WEIGHT (KG/LB):** 3.17/6.97

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See website

**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes, at £1,599. The Encore Nylon is also available left-handed at £899

**FINISHES:** Natural gloss with satin neck (as reviewed)

**440 Distribution**

**0113 258 9599**

**www.godinguitars.com**

#### GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

**Build quality** ★★★★★

**Playability** ★★★★★

**Sound** ★★★★★

**Value for money** ★★★★★

**Guitarist says:** Purposeful innovation and regular upgrades mean this electro nylon is virtually unique





## A Quiet Man

With over 40 years of guitar-making behind him, Robert Godin still oversees a huge empire that produces more steel-string acoustic guitars than any other North American maker. We head off to Montreal to have a chat...

**"WE'VE** known each other a long time," muses Robert Godin as we finally get to sit down after an exhausting day visiting two of his six factories. It was back in the 80s that this writer first met Monsieur Godin. He had just released his solidbody-sized electro, the Acousticaster, which achieved its aim of sounding good plugged in thanks to a still-unique internal 'harp' that exaggerates the top's vibration, which is compromised by the small, hollow body. I thought he was charmingly bonkers, but the growth of his empire – now run by his two sons, Simon and Patrick – has proved me wrong. Alongside Godin, his 'electric' brand, the company, with some 700 employees, also produces Seagull, Simon & Patrick, Art & Lutherie and Norman steel-strings, and LaPatrie nylon-strings. It amounts to

around 4,000 acoustics per week and around 1,000 electrics. But we're here to celebrate 21 years of the Multiac. "I knew it was coming because I'm a jazz guy and a Latin guy, too," says Godin. "Jazz guys like the sound of nylon strings, but might want to use a pick. Using a conventional classical nylon-string and a pick doesn't always sound good, the string is too loose. I wanted more tension. Making a longer headstock and a long scale gives this tension, so you can use a pick and it sounds good."

Using a hexaphonic pickup system meant you could plug into a synth and use MIDI. "We don't have an interface in the guitar, but we do have the hexaphonic pickup, and so it costs just a few dollars more to add the 'Synth Access [SA]' feature. So we thought, 'let's just do it.' I should say only five per cent

of people use it. But today there are many new-generation synths, and some that are coming that will be very inexpensive, and they still use that 13-pin connector. This will give you the option of having a channel per string. In a mixer, in a studio, you can use that to create stereo imaging."

Steel-strings and fretless models followed, and the 'World Music' scene was becoming more popular with Western audiences; markets such as Brazil, as Godin had predicted, were growing rapidly. In 2000, the Glissentar, an 11-string fretless acoustic/electric thinline, strung with nylon strings and tuned to standard guitar tuning, appeared in Godin's A-Series. It was a hybrid of Western and Eastern-style instruments: the former in its almost Telecaster outline, the latter "from the oud, an ancestor of the mandolin that dates back to the 17th century". It's one of the most unusual instruments from any mainstream brand. "It was a demand from certain musicians, and that included many Turkish musicians, who then asked if we'd go another step from the Glissentar and make them the real oud." The result was the MultiOud, again an 11-string – with a single low string then five doubled courses, tuned F, A, D, G, C, F – launched in 2011.

With considerable input from Turkish oud master, Fatih Ahiskali, the MultiOud proved that the Multiac concept was broader than just the conventional guitar. The oud, of course, is not easy for most of us to play: "It can take 10 years to master," exclaims Godin, but fuelled by player interest, Godin's next development was the fretted 11-string Inuk. "It wasn't as easy as just putting frets onto a MultiOud: I had to create a practical scale length. I used tiny frets, like mandolin frets, so when you slide, in the style of the oud, you almost don't hear that it's a fretted instrument. And you can tune it like a standard guitar."

"The first big player to work with it was Al Di Meola. Al took my first one, he came to visit us and saw the prototype and said, 'Robert, I need that for the show tonight.' He never brought it back!"

Godin has also applied the Multiac concept to the ukulele: the MultiUke, stage-ready with three-band EQ and RMC pickups, and the about-to-be-launched cavaquinho, known as the 'Brazilian ukulele', tuned an octave above the guitar's top four strings. "It's very different to a uke: it's steel string with much more tension and a totally different bracing because of that tension. It's incredibly popular in Brazil, Argentina and even Mexico, also in Portugal."

Where next, we ask. Africa? "Not yet, but I'm very interested," Godin muses. **G**