







## FIRST PLAY



**D'ANGELICO  
PREMIER BOB WEIR SS**  
£960

**What Is It?** Single-cut semi-acoustic signature model from the founder of the Grateful Dead...



**D'ANGELICO PREMIER DC**  
£659

**What Is It?** A classic ES-335-style semi dressed up in Art Deco togs... basically

# New York Dolls

The iconic jazz guitar company gives its catalogue a hippy hippy shake-up with a collaboration with one Grateful punter, and beautifies a much-loved 50s classic...

**Words** Ed Mitchell **Photography** Olly Curtis

**S**ay you had to come up with a good-looking retro guitar design, then you could do worse than bolt on some Art Deco-inspired bits and pieces. It's an approach that has worked well for the likes of Reverend, Italia and, of course, Duesenberg and D'Angelico.

The difference between D'Angelico and the rest of those guys is that the brand was actually born in New York City in 1932, a place and time where Art Deco was a living, breathing thing. In fact, the ultimate expressions of Deco decadence, the Empire State and Chrysler buildings, were only a year and two years old respectively when jazz archtop godfather John D'Angelico broke ground on his workshop at 40 Kenmare Street in Manhattan's Little Italy.

D'Angelico built 1,164 instruments before his death in 1964, and while his hollow-body archtop jazz guitars are regarded as some of the finest ever made, the Bob Weir SS and DC models that have fallen into our clutches are slim-bodied semi-acoustics. Both guitars belong to D'Angelico's entry-level Premier range, and despite being spec'd as a single-cut



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1. The Bob Weir SS is adorned by a licensed Bigsby with a roller saddle bridge to ensure tuning stability
2. A Gretsch-style master volume control sits atop the guitar's upper bout
3. Push/pull tone controls coil split the D'Angelico's Dual Coil pickups
4. It's Art Deco all the way for the Bob Weir signature's headstock

(the SS) and double-cutaway (the DC, natch) they share a number of features. Semi-hollow like your classic Gibson ES-335, there's a big timber centre-block adding weight to the SS and DC's laminated maple carcass. While both guitars have 44mm deep sides, the spec differs slightly when it comes to another dimension. The DC measures 406mm across the widest point of its body. The Bob Weir SS is a trimmer 381mm.

The glued-in necks are hewn from maple and feature the same slim C profile, rosewood 'boards, block inlays and 22 medium jumbo frets. The top nuts are crafted from finest PPS. That's plastic to you. Again, there is a subtle tweak in the specs. The DC comes with the classic Gibson-style 629mm scale length. The Bob Weir SS is brandishing 635mm.

Now, before we go any further, we should address this Bob Weir we keep name-checking. Bob is best known as a founder member of 60s cosmic-jam band, Grateful Dead. The Sex Pistols warned never to trust a hippy but D'Angelico has given Bob carte blanche to spec his new signature guitar.

You may recall this isn't Bob's first rodeo. In 1974, Weir worked with Ibanez to develop the 2681 model, the now sought-after Artist Series guitar with a German-carved solidbody and a pre-Vai 'tree-of-life' fingerboard inlay. The 2681 was an important milestone for Ibanez,







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not least as it helped shatter its image as another band of Japanese copycats at the height of the 'lawsuit era'.

Pretty as it is, Bob's new D'Angelico SS is much less groundbreaking. You get two servings of the house 'Dual Coil' pickups, aka humbuckers, and a wiring loom consisting of two volumes, two tones and a three-way pickup selector toggle. What you might not expect is the Gretsch-style master volume, within easy reach on the guitar's upper bout, and a push/pull coil split for each 'bucker on the tone controls.

Hardware is covered by an anchored tune-o-matic bridge and a licensed Bigsby B50 vibrato. It's the import version of the classic B5 'horseshoe' Bigsby – you can tell this isn't a US item because of the added zero on the model designation, and the fact it has 'licensed' cast into it. The bridge also has six roller saddles to aid tuning stability – reducing string drag is always a good thing.

Bob's guitar comes in a Matt Stone finish. That might sound like a private eye, but this paint is described by D'Angelico as a "rich grey-black that sits somewhere between smoke and a rain cloud". Hippies, eh?

Finished in a standard gloss black, the Premier DC is basically a 335-style guitar with a fancy headstock. The hardware

offers no surprises with an anchored tune-o-matic – no roller saddles this time – partnered with an equally secure stop tailpiece. Pickups are the same D'Angelico 'buckers spec'd on Bob's SS, only here you don't get his master volume and coil splitters. Unlike the Weir SS, you are party to a choice of colours – Black, Wine Red and White – a lefty version (Black and Wine Red only) and the option of the stud tailpiece or an Art Deco 'Stairstep' trapeze. Oh, and look around for the Ocean Turquoise finished version that comes with an ovankol fingerboard and Duncan Designed HB-01/HB-02 humbuckers. It's pretty...

Before we set about plugging these things in, let's tie up some loose ends. The SS and DC come with big headstocks emblazoned with beautiful mother-of-pearl D'Angelico logos and an Art Deco Premier shield. It might say 'New York' on the logo but the price tags should be a clue that these guitars

It might say 'New York' on the logo, but the price is a clue that these weren't born in the Big Apple

weren't born in the Big Apple. Indeed, an unsightly sticker on the reverse of the headstock reveals the truth. Production has migrated from Little Italy to Indonesia.

The headstocks feature the same cutout at the tip that plays host to the familiar D'Angelico Deco style urn. And there's three-a-side die-cast tuners with Grover Imperial style buttons, plus a skyscraper-esque metal truss-rod cover that looks like something a giant gorilla might swat biplanes from. The 'stair step' design of the truss-rod plate is echoed by the SS and DC scratchplates and the guitars feature Gibson-style speed controls.

### Feel & Sounds

Straight from their included padded gigbags both guitars play well with a medium to low action. While the SS feels light hanging from a strap at 3.2kg, the DC teeters on the scale at 3.7kg – that's 8lbs and 14 ounces to those of you watching in black and white. If a gutsy fly landed on the headstock you'd be reeling in a nine-pounder. The good news for your ears – if not your shoulders – is that the extra heftiness is evident in the guitar's tonal output. Acoustically, it's loud and possessed by impressive sustain. Plugging in, we're struck by the punchiness of its pickups. Info on these things is thin on the



ground but they sound like there's powerful ceramic magnets in there. Whatever is fuelling them, we got convincing country, blues, jazz – you name it – tones on clean settings, and great rock and metal sounds when we stepped on the gas. Would a metalhead use a pretty semi like the DC? We don't see why not.

The SS shares the same power as the DC but, while it's subtle, we reckon we can detect a little extra bottom-end snap due to the increased scale length. Tuning stability is good too, even if you give the Bigsby a decent workout.

The coil splits drop the output of each 'bucker in single-coil mode but what's interesting is how little the tonality changes. Almost to the point of the coil splits being surplus to requirements. There's still a good amount of bottom-end grunt in the single coil tones. What you do gain when you drop to single coils is some extra clarity on filthier tones, especially when you're noodling through some overdrive-fuelled blues clichés on the neck pickup. Back off the volume a touch and you're almost in Fender territory. This guitar is tonally versatile, then...

### Verdict

Old hippies never die, they just get offered their own signature guitars. And we do like Bob's take on the D'Angelico SS. The Grateful



5. At nearly 9lbs, you'll certainly know you're wearing the DC – but a lot of that weight transfers to the guitar's acoustic tone

6. Grover Imperial style tuners flank the DC's impressive headstock

7. A hardwood centre block, twin humbuckers and a double cutaway all add up to a tried and tested formula for the D'Angelico DC

8. A standard array of volume and tone controls with a three-way toggle switch make up the DC's controls







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The SS plays, sounds and looks great. Deadheads might be drawn to it because of its pedigree but, the rest of us might take issue with the price

Dead were famous for playing epic jams, and the SS feels like it could handle it. It plays, sounds and looks great. Of course, Deadheads might be drawn to it because of its pedigree. Meanwhile, the rest of us might take issue with the price. As pretty as it is, the Bob Weir SS is a bit too close to a grand for our liking. It faces some competition in the semi-acoustic sector, not least from Epiphone with its well-built and lower-priced ES-335 Dot and Sheraton II models. Likewise, the DC. We like the feel and tones on offer but beyond that beautiful headstock this is just another mid-range 335 reboot. It's competent rather than exceptional.

That all said and done, if you're looking for a good quality semi-acoustic, you'll want to consider as many options as possible. That means you need to have these guitars on your 'must try' list. Sniff out the right deal and you might just snap up a Bob Weir SS or DC in a New York minute. **G**



### D'ANGELICO PREMIER BOB WEIR SS

**PRICE:** £960 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Indonesia

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, semi-acoustic electric guitar

**BODY:** Laminated maple top, back and sides with hardwood centre-block

**NECK:** Maple, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25")

**NUT/WIDTH:** PPS/42mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Chrome anchored tune-o-matic-style bridge with roller saddles, licensed Bigsby B50 vibrato and Rotomatic Stairstep tuners

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm

**ELECTRICS:** D'Angelico 'Dual Coil' humbuckers, two volumes, two tones with push/pull coil split, master volume, and three-way pickup selector toggle switch

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.2/7.10

**OPTIONS:** No

**RANGE OPTIONS:** None

**LEFT HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Matt Stone (as reviewed)

**Coda Music**

**01438 350 815**

**[www.dangelicoguitars.com](http://www.dangelicoguitars.com)**

7/10

**PROS:** There's no denying it's a pretty guitar but it's the feel and tone that'll keep you coming back

**CONS:** Stuff like the OEM pickups, plastic top nut and import Bigsby make it feel overpriced



### D'ANGELICO PREMIER DC

**PRICE:** £659 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Indonesia

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway semi-acoustic electric guitar

**BODY:** Laminated maple top, back and sides with hardwood centre-block

**NECK:** Maple, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75")

**NUT/WIDTH:** PPS/42mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22 medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Chrome anchored tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, Rotomatic Stairstep tuners

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm (2.08")

**ELECTRICS:** D'Angelico 'Dual Coil' humbuckers, two volumes, two tones and three-way pickup selector toggle switch

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.7/8.14

**OPTIONS:** Available with Stairstep trapeze tailpiece at no additional cost

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Premier DC in Ocean Turquoise finish with Ovankol fingerboard and Duncan Designed HB-101/HB-102 humbuckers, £659

**LEFT HANDERS:** Black and Wine Red finishes with choice of stopbar and Stairstep trapeze tailpieces at £659

**FINISHES:** Black (as reviewed), White, Wine Red

7/10

**PROS:** The powerful pickups add to the prospective customer base and we, of course, love the headstock and Art Deco stuff

**CONS:** Again, it's a little pricier than we expected