

YAMAHA APX500II, CPX700II & APX1000 £320, £515 & £778
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS



Yamaha APX500II, CPX700II & APX1000

£320, £515 & £778

Yamaha offers even more reasons why its mega-popular APX and CPX electros will be flying off the shelves. We test out three new arrivals *by Jim Chapman*

Since their introduction nearly 25 years ago, Yamaha's APX stage electros have undergone periodical revamps, as have the larger-bodied Compass Series CPXs, first unveiled in 1999. 2011 sees another stage in the evolution of both, embracing not only cosmetic updates and new colours, but also revised electronics. The new models are the APX/CPX500II and APX/CPX700II (replacing their un-suffixed predecessors) and the APX1000, a new model to succeed the ART-powered APX900, that incorporates SRT (Studio Response Technology) mic-modelling similar to that first used on the APX1200.

One change common to all these debuts is the replacement of the near-ubiquitous PP3 9V battery with two 1.5V AAs. Within the circuitry, Yamaha has somehow managed to boost the batteries' voltage to 11V to give, it says, a wider dynamic range, more stable operation and reduced distortion, even when the batteries are running low. In short, the claim is better tone for longer: no bad thing at all. Presumably a spin-off

benefit is that rechargeables can be used – as long as they're alkaline – so you won't need to keep forking out for batteries.

The 700IIs continue to employ the one-way ART system with a contact sensor under either side of the bridge, while the 500IIs and the APX1000 receive a new piezo under-saddle pickup. Rather than a single, narrow ribbon, this comprises six individual elements on a wider strip that, says Yamaha, offers improved

clarity, definition and balance. The preamps in the 500II and 700II retain their predecessors' facilities of a three-band EQ and wide-range mid contour, but the control panels have been physically redesigned (akin to APX1000's preamp), and the EQ is said to have been "reviewed for optimum sound and balance". The auto-chromatic tuners, with a new, clearer display, are apparently now more accurate (though we don't recall a problem with the

old ones), but they still don't mute the output when engaged. For discreet mid-performance tuning tweaks this is a significant omission. Happily, the APX1000's tuner does mute its system, and can also be recalibrated in 1Hz increments between 438Hz and 445Hz: very handy for accompanying off-concert-pitch instruments.

As for cosmetics – extended colour choice aside – the main changes are black-faced headstocks (translucent on our CPX700II and APX1000), and truss rod access via the soundhole, where previously one or two models had theirs on the peghead. On all but the 500II, Yamaha has replaced the APXs' raised soundhole ring with inlaid rosettes: rosewood/mahogany on the 700II and rosewood/abalone on the 1000. CPX rosettes are unchanged; they were inlaid anyway.

APX500II

Despite being the entry-level model this laminated spruce/nato APX500II is attractively

The Rivals

APX500II

Takamine's EG260C (£275) carries the three-band TP4T system. **Tanglewood's TSF-CE** (£279) uses Fishman's Isys preamp. Both come in choice of five colours. **Ibanez's AEG10E** (£279), in three colours, has a three-band SST system including shape and phase. All three guitars are spruce/mahogany; the Takamine and Ibanez include a tuner.



The APX and CPX guitars now come in a wider choice of colours



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The Rivals

CPX700II

Takamine's spruce/sapele **EG541SSC** (£550), with solid top and back, features a TK40 system. **Vintage's** **VEC1900N** (£579) is all-solid spruce/lacewood, powered by Fishman's Presys Blend. **Crafter's** cedar/mahogany **GAE698-CD** (£519), with a solid top and back, has an LR-T Pro preamp. All three include a built-in tuner.

decked out. The all-over gloss red metallic finish – one of the new colours – is very well applied and buffed, aside from a small length of imperfect edging next to the cutaway's purfling, while the grain lines indicate that the lacquer hasn't been sprayed on too thickly. The rosewood fingerboard is edged in body-matching cream plastic binding and, like all APX and CPXs, there's a second strap button at the heel.

In common with all steel-strung, six-string APXs, the span across the nut is 43mm, while the nato neck has a

moderate-depth 'C' profile with just the hint of a 'D' along the shoulders, and width graduates only modestly further up. Aided by a fine set-up, well-dressed fretting and a shorter 634mm scale length, this is eminently playable and comfortable, yet bridge string spacing is perverse. As opposed to the APX norm of 53mm, our sample's is barely 50mm, harking back to eighties FGs. Fingerstyle isn't out of the question, but there's no denying the spacing feels restrictive. Yamaha evidently reckons most buyers will be strummers, which may or may not prove true.

Sounds

The guitar is a decidedly capable performer. Acoustic volume, if not blastically loud, is up to par for the body size, with reasonable dynamics and sustain, and the tone is smooth and fluid with an agreeable degree of lower-end warmth and sweet-edged highs. Powered up, the new pickup clearly pays dividends. There's not a hint of piezo 'quack', the whole delivery sounds natural, flowing and open, and the wide-range AMF mid contour helps attain an impressively broad tonal palette without ridiculous extremes. Icing on the cake is the system's decent gain and spot-on cross-string output balance.

CPX700II

This 15.75-inch wide, nato-backed cutaway mini-jumbo, with a solid laminated spruce top, shows off a new colour – tint – which means a top stained to a medium-hued

browny-amber that looks stylishly striking without being garish. The back and sides are left natural while the cream-bound body is glossed to a high standard and carries a simple abalone-inlaid rosette and discreet clear scratchplate. As on the APX500II, the fingerboard has body-matching binding, this time continuing around the headstock, which bears the series-identifying compass motif.

Unlike our two APXs, the CPX's full-scale nato neck is satin and a shallower affair, kicking off at just over 20mm, deepening quite gently further up and fashioned to a more conventional 'C' profile. Thanks again to an excellent set-up, the grip is enjoyably slick, while string spacings are the typical Yamaha dimensions of 43mm at the nut and 53mm over the bridge. Some of us would undoubtedly prefer it if the latter was a shade airier, but the arrangement is pretty amenable to picking techniques nevertheless.

Sounds

Acoustically, CPXs aren't necessarily the punchiest small jumbos around, and this one's a touch light on low-end grunt and richness for its size. But their biggest asset is a precisely balanced timbre, accompanied by a sustaining, resonant follow-through. The CPX700II ably fulfils this brief.

Fired up, an important benefit of the ART's sensors is an inherently well-balanced output across the strings, and this one's bang-on. The one caveat, though not as noticeable as on earlier, similar ARTs this reviewer has tried, is that the



The preamps now use two AA batteries instead of a 9V PP3



**Guitarist
CHOICE**

The APX500II is a decidedly capable acoustic performer, with reasonable dynamics and sustain

system needs careful EQ'ing to disguise what seems to be an intrinsic hint of nasality in the upper-mids and a little hardness in the highs. Fortunately, this is where the flexible preamp proves its worth. It's not necessarily just a case of reining back the treble and mid bands on their own, but rather tinkering with the contour settings – whose range goes well into the treble zone – so that these less desirable traits are minimised. Once achieved, the EQ can then be fine-tuned in a positive and creative manner.

APX1000

The general aesthetic of the APX1000 isn't so different from the APX500II's but, reflecting the price, there's more bling for your buck. There's the aforementioned mahogany/abalone rosette inlay, extra cream-edged purfling plies around the solid spruce top, and SG3000-style markers up the fingerboard that finishes with a 23rd part-fret flourish, while the tuners are gold not chrome. Not that you'd know it through the guitar's immaculate metallic pearl white finish, but the back and sides are stated as being flamed maple. You have to wonder whether Yamaha actually bothers to use figured outer veneers on anything but the natural version though.

Aside from its 650mm scale and more widening further up, the neck has a very similar grip

and profile to the 500's, and it shares the same nut span. But, joy of joys, the bridge string spacing is a full 55mm, helping make the 1000 more of an all-round player than the other two guitars on test.

We've dealt with the SRT preamp's tuner before – it does what it needs to – and its three-band EQ and pickup/mic blend controls can each be selected with the option of close- or far-mic'ing. This is then linked to a resonance rotary, which subtly adds lower-end warmth and body to the images. A killer feature – literally – is AFR (Auto Feedback Reduction), which involves up to five search-and-destroy filters. If a single press of the button doesn't do the job, the other filters can be progressively activated until feedback is completely eliminated. The facility is extremely effective. Note also that the AFR button doubles up as the means of recalibrating the tuner.

Sounds

Predictably, the guitar's maple element contributes to a slightly brighter, tauter tone than the APX500II, and projection is shade more vigorous. But beyond this, the unplugged sound is pretty similar, sharing the same commendable poise and balance.

Powered up, with the new undersaddle pickup admirably taking care of the piezo side of things, the guitar's SRT aspects



The APX1000 uses Yamaha's SRT sound imaging system

knock the socks off onboard real-mic blender systems. The images remain musical and convincingly usable up to higher ratios of mic-to-pickup, and it's only when running near full-bore mic that undesirably artificial ambiances creep in. A 50:50 mix or thereabouts produces very satisfying results. Which image will be preferred is entirely a personal choice since the differences between each – whether simulating close or far mic'ing – are subtle. Two improvements compared to early SRT systems appear to have been made. Firstly, a faint, low-frequency rumble that could be heard

The Rivals

APX1000

Takamine's solid cedar/mahogany **EF261S** (£934), available in three colours, uses the three-band CT4B system. **Tanglewood's** similarly timbered, all-solid **TW45H-B** (£899) features B-Band's A5T preamp. **Ovation's** super-shallow **1867AX Legend** (£862), in black or cherry, carries an OP-Pro Studio system with exciter and comp/limiter. All include a built-in tuner.



when the AFR was switched in is no longer audible; and secondly, the preamp delivers a bit more gain than it previously did, though it's still not a belter in this respect.

Verdict

Yamaha has unequivocally moved things along nicely with these newcomers. The APX500II has one of the best, most natural sounding piezo-based systems you're likely to find, even if, from a playing viewpoint, the company ought to have a rethink about that tight bridge string spacing. The CPX700II, looking great in its tint-finish option, is an easy-handling, general-purpose electro and, with some user familiarisation, its ART system can do a fine job. The APX1000 is a definite hit, not just as a fingerstyle-accommodating, stage all-rounder, but also for its high-quality powered versatility at a price that other manufacturers offering mic-imaging blender systems have yet to achieve. **G**

The Bottom Line

Yamaha APX500II

We like: Knock-out performance for the money
We dislike: Close bridge string spacing; non-muting onboard tuner
Guitarist says: Guaranteed to keep APX high up the stage-electro charts

Yamaha CPX700II

We like: Looks; neck; general competence
We dislike: Getting the best out of ART needs a little work; non-muting tuner
Guitarist says: This handsome mini-jumbo ticks nearly all the right boxes

Yamaha APX1000

We like: Some excellent piezo-cum-modelling sounds; wider string spacing
We dislike: More gain wouldn't go amiss
Guitarist says: This sets a value challenge for other guitar makers offering mic-imaging technology



Yamaha APX500II

PRICE: £320
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Medium-bodied cutaway electro-acoustic
TOP: Laminated spruce
BACK/SIDES: Laminated nato
MAX RIM DEPTH: 89mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 386mm
NECK: Nato
SCALE LENGTH: 634mm
TUNERS: Chrome, die-cast
NUT/WIDTH: Urea plastic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream-bound rosewood with 356mm radius
FRETS: 22, thin
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/50mm
ELECTRICS: Six-element undersaddle piezo pickup; System 65 preamp with volume, low, mid, high, AMF contour (80Hz-10kHz), tuner on/off and display, battery warning LED, separate 2 x AA battery housing
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.0/4.4
OPTIONS: APX500II-FM with flame-maple top in old violin sunburst (£369); solid spruce/nato APX700II (£540) and APX700II-12 12-string (£579), both with one-way ART system
LEFT-HANDERS: Not in 500 Series, but try the APX700II-L (£579)
FINISHES: Red metallic (as reviewed) vintage white, black, old violin sunburst, natural and Oriental blue burst
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Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha CPX700II

PRICE: £515
TYPE: Cutaway mini-jumbo electro-acoustic
ORIGIN: China
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK/SIDES: Laminated nato
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 400mm
NECK: Nato
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm
TUNERS: Chrome, die-cast
NUT/WIDTH: Urea plastic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Cream-bound rosewood with 356mm radius
FRETS: 20, thin
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/53mm
ELECTRICS: One-way ART underbridge contact sensors; System 64 preamp with volume, low, mid, high, AMF contour (80Hz-10kHz), tuner on/off and display, battery warning LED, separate 2 x AA battery housing
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.15/4.75
OPTIONS: CPX700II-12 12-string (£608); CPX500II with piezo-based system (£340)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Tint (as reviewed), black, sandburst, natural and dusk sun red

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha APX1000

PRICE: £778
TYPE: Cutaway medium-bodied electro-acoustic
ORIGIN: China
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK/SIDES: Laminated flame-maple
MAX RIM DEPTH: 90mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 384mm
NECK: Nato
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm
TUNERS: Gold, die-cast
NUT/WIDTH: Urea plastic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood with 356mm radius
FRETS: 23, thin
BRIDGE/SPACING: Cream-bound rosewood/55mm
ELECTRICS: Six-element undersaddle piezo pickup; System 63 SRT preamp with volume, low, mid, high, image presets (1-3), focus/wide select, pickup/mic blend, resonance, five-band AFR anti-feedback, tuner on/off and display, separate 2 x AA battery housing
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.18/4.8
OPTIONS: CPX1000 with same SRT system (£817); all-solid spruce/rosewood, SRT-equipped APX1200 (£1,264 inc case)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Pearl white (as reviewed), crimson burst, mocha black and natural

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★