



department. Tex deliberately orders light swamp ash bodies, which impart a fast attack and a classically bright and penetrating voice, tempered a bit by the Lollar Special pickup as described. The number 1 position on the 3-way selector (closest to the bridge) is the pickup with tone control. Number two is the pickup straight to the input jack with no tone control. Hide the women and children. Number 3 is Tex' own cap and wiring recipe that delivers a pre-set tone resembling the rooting snort of a large hairy beast with tusks. As you may know, Texas is literally overrun by

wild pigs, and they can often be found in roving packs near a Houston bar called the Big Easy. The 3rd tone setting on the Big Tex seems to have been inspired by the Texas Pig Nation, and we promise you'll use it often, *wee, wee, wee*, all the way home. It truly is a very useful, unique and 'old school' sound.

Our overall impression of the Big Tex ToneQuest Special is that it comfortably roams between a beautifully seductive lapsteel tone played clean, to the unmistakable signature voice of a '50s Telecaster all up in your face, not to be ignored or mistaken for any other guitar cranked. Pretty much as good as it gets, although you could certainly spend more getting here. The only thing this guitar lacks is a '69 silverface Twin. To place an order for your own personal Big Tex/ToneQuest Special, just call or write to Big Tex. \$2250 with Big Tex gig bag. **TO**

www.bigtextguitars.com, 832-202-7725

REVIEW

Collings D1 & D2H

As we listened to the many beautiful acoustic guitar tracks on Steve Wariner's Guitar Laboratory we pondered what we could share with you that would have value and meaning in the acoustic world. Wariner plays a variety of acoustic instruments that he has owned for years, some very rare, like the '54 Martin 0018 he bought for \$375.00 in high school, his Hascal Haile classical, a classical electric built by Kirk Sand, a jumbo Guild J50, '67 Martin D35, and his 3/4 size Takamine. More pondering got us thinking about our impressions of the most supremely toneful contemporary acoustic guitars being made today. We've repeatedly expressed our admiration



for the Martin D18 Golden Era (see TQR, January 2007), but what else deserves your consideration on a comparable level? The answer was obvious – Collings. We arranged to receive two dreadnought style guitars from Austin – the Sitka and mahogany D1 and rosewood D2H for review, and to say these instruments deserve your consideration is an understatement.

Describing the subtle differences in the character of acoustic instruments can be a difficult task when all you have to work with are words. Even a well-produced video clip of a tasteful guitarist demo'ing a luscious guitar is a poor compromise for actually hearing an instrument resonate in a room, let alone playing it yourself. But when it comes to Bill Collings' acoustic guitars, such concerns are diminished by the fact that the superior tone and construction of his guitars is by now a matter of record not open to debate. Consequently, our review needn't be a complicated and overwrought process of comparative analysis and technical minutia. The proof is in the listening. Having specifically requested the two models presented here, we kinda knew what we were getting before we opened the boxes, and we've played a variety of Collings acoustic guitars in the past. But past experience does not diminish the anticipation of strumming the first chord on a Collings and experiencing the deep, sonorous voice of the wound strings contrasted against the magical, musical richness of the treble strings. To think that string vibrations can be amplified and enhanced so elegantly by nothing more than wood is a miracle of physics, craftsmanship and nature. Does it get any better than this? Yes, of course a vintage acoustic will have developed character and mystery that only time can impart, but for a new acoustic guitar, no, we really don't believe you can do any better than this. More abalone inlay? Yes. 'Better' tone? No. What's the secret to Collings' success? As our May 2008 cover story revealed, Bill Collings is an engineer who has carefully studied what makes great guitars great. He doesn't compromise on the quality of wood he buys, and his engineering and design skills have enabled him to make certain calculated structural adjustments to compensate for the inevitable variability that exists in the wood used to build guitars. As he pointed out in an interview in *Acoustic Guitar*, he doesn't use the same type of glue throughout an acoustic

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instrument, because some glues used in the wrong place can affect tone and resonance. Collings just seems to beat the details to death while creating a process for building guitars that insures a more predictable and exceptional outcome.

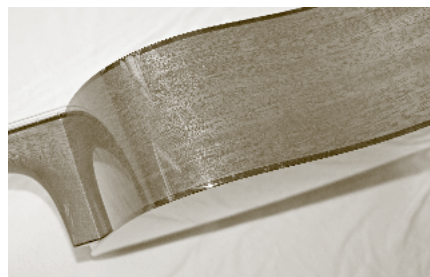
We chose dreadnoughts for this article because ever since Eric Clapton emerged in the '80s playing a smaller 'auditorium' style 00028, dreadnoughts seem to have been neglected beyond bluegrass circles. This was not always the case... During the late 60s and throughout the '70s Martin D18s, 28s, 35s and 45s were the bomb among guitarists, further elevated by nearly every popular singer/songwriter/balladeer and rock stars like Keith Richards, Stephen Stills and Neil Young. A Gibson J200 may be physically bigger, but for maximum projection and depth played softly or strummed with a powerful attack, dreadnoughts are the kings of the acoustic world.

Collings D1



We love acoustic guitars with a mahogany back and sides, and the Collings D1 embodies everything there is to love about them. You may be surprised to hear, however, that the sound of the D1 was bright and percussive when compared to the rosewood D2H. You'll hear people describe rosewood as being 'brighter' or mahogany being 'warmer,' but

we actually found the D1 to be a faster, livelier guitar. Oh, it does possess plenty of warmth on the bottom, but the sparkle on the top was equally vivid. True to a traditional design, the D1 features tortoise shell binding, ebony fingerboard, bridge, bridge pins and strap button, a Honduran mahogany neck, back and sides, Sitka spruce top (book matched with some figure in our review guitar), bone nut and saddle, 'pre-war' scalloped bracing and flawlessly precise nickel Waverly tuners. We found the neck profile on the D1 to have slightly less shoulder than the D2H, and the D1 also felt lighter in weight overall. The tone was mesmerizing, with great sustain and volume with both chords and single notes. The D1 is a joy



to play, with a comfortable neck shape that is perfectly carved and rounded, and impeccable fret work. Both guitars also respond beautifully to

soft finger-picking/strumming styles and a harder attack using a pick. In our opinion, this is where dreadnoughts really shine as the most versatile of all acoustic flat top models.

D2H



Sharing the same ebony appointments as the D1, the D2H is traditionally designed with herringbone trim and back strip inlay, ivoroid binding, a Brazilian rosewood peghead overlay, diamond and square fingerboard inlays, Indian rosewood back and sides, Sitka spruce top, bone nut and saddle and nickel Waverly tun-

ers. The D2H is also a wonderful player with a perfectly shaped mahogany neck. We stared at that neck for a long time, wishing we could have one just like it on a few other guitars we own... The tone of the D2H was a mile deep, slightly darker than the D1, and dripping with mystery.

Both guitars are exceptionally loud and percussive, but the



D2H possesses a wizened old voice that is a little more serious and weighty than the D1. Of course, much of this depends on what you're playing, but the D2H has a voice to be reckoned with, even if you happen to be playing something 'happy.' Like old Martins, Collings guitars are built to outlast their owners, and they aren't cheap, but given a choice between owning and playing one

or two affordable, 'pretty good' production acoustic guitars and just one of these, we'd take out a loan for the Collings. Like so many things in the quest for exceptional tone, you don't know until you know. *Quest forth...to*

www.collingsguitars.com

Resource Reference

Callaham Guitars: www.callahamguitars.com, 540-678-4043

J.M. Rolph: www.jmrolph.com, 859-448-9463

Bakos Ampworks: 404-607-8426

Todd Sharp: www.amprepair.com, 615-591-7556

Celestion: www.celestion.com

Avatar Speakers: www.avatar-speakers.com

Fender & Collings guitars: Dave's Guitar Shop,

www.davesguitar.com, 608-785-7704