

**AT A GLANCE**

BODY Jumbo body. Salvaged redwood top with Sitka spruce X bracing. Figured koa back and sides. Thin nitrocellulose lacquer finish.

NECK Honduran mahogany neck. Ebony fingerboard and cocobolo bridge. 25.4-inch scale. 1.6875-inch nut width. 55.6-millimeter string spacing at saddle. Waverly tuners.

EXTRAS Martin SP strings (.012–.054); Ameritage hard-shell case.

PRICE \$7,800 as reviewed. (\$7,000 without koa.) Handmade in California. roninguitars.com.

**BUILT IN THE REDWOOD FOREST**

Founded in 2008, Ronin is a collaboration among the luthier and designer John Reed, the guitar maker and repair expert Izzy Lugo, and Reed's father, Jack, who also builds instruments. The three spend part of each year in the rainforest of Humboldt County, in Northern California, building instruments using salvaged wood from a dozen acres of protected redwood forest the Reed family owns. Ronin has access to an additional 2,000 acres that belong to a family friend, and all of the wood the company uses comes from trees that fell more than 80 years

ago. Ronin also has reclaimed redwood from the barrels of a decommissioned wine factory.

The guitar company first used redwood to create a line of vintage-inspired electrics now played by such greats as experimental guitarist David Torn and longtime *Conan O'Brien* house band leader Jimmy Vivino. And now, having prototyped acoustic guitars for two years, the company has introduced a line of redwood models, including jumbo, dreadnought, 00, and parlor guitars. This year, Ronin plans to build no more than 20 acoustics. One of those rare instruments is the Glory, Ronin's second jumbo.

GLORIOUS TONEWOODS, LOVELY DESIGN

This guitar is built from a nice complement of woods. The soundboard, fashioned from a 1,000-year-old billet of old-growth redwood stashed away in Ronin's private stock, is finely grained and devoid of any irregularities. While some of the company's parlor models feature redwood back and sides, those on the jumbo are made from AAAA-grade koa, stunningly flamed and richly colored. The neck is carved from Honduran mahogany and capped with a fretboard of the inkiest black ebony, also used

A Redwood Giant

Ronin's Glory jumbo is not your average beautifully handcrafted boutique guitar

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

No trees are more majestic than those in the Sequoioideae family. Native to California and Oregon, these redwoods—as they're more commonly known—can live thousands of years and grow to incredible heights. While the trees are not generally associated with guitars, some luthiers are finding redwood's splendor translates to uncommonly good sound. One of the biggest proponents of this alternative tonewood is Ronin Guitars, which makes predominant use of salvaged old-growth redwood in a line of handmade electric and acoustic guitars.

for the headstock veneer. A nicely swirled piece of cocobolo (made from a hunk of wood that Jack Reed bought 30 years ago) was used in creating the bridge.

An autumnal-hued sunburst finish on the top and neck enhances the beauty of the Glory's woods, and the guitar is trimmed with the most tasteful ornamentation. The classical-style rosette and back strip lend an old-world feel to the guitar—on the body, neck, and headstock, a three-layer binding of tortoise and crème outlines the instrument with a subtly sparkling effect.

HAND BUILT

As with all Ronin guitars, this Glory was made entirely by hand, with no CNC machinery used at all. It is assembled in an old-school fashion, influenced by the many 1930s and '40s flattops that the Reeds and Lugo have checked out in an intensive study of the instrument. Everything is carved as thinly as possible and the bracing is appropriately light. The neck sports a hand-shaped dovetail joint, a labor-intensive process that results in what many regard to be a superior means of transferring tone.

The guitar boasts superb craftsmanship. Its StewMac 152 frets are impeccably dressed and seated, and the bone nut and saddle are perfectly notched. Free from the tone-robbing plasticizers standard in modern finishes, the nitrocellulose lacquer is buffed to a sumptuous gloss and applied so thinly one can almost feel the grains in the wood.

THE FEEL & SOUND

With its extra wide body—18.5 inches compared to Gibson's Super Jumbo at 17 inches—the Glory is one giant guitar. When I unlatch its Ameritage case, I expect to be overwhelmed by the instrument, especially given my preference for smaller-bodied guitars. But that doesn't happen. Because of the delicacy of its components, this review model weighs a mere four pounds, nine ounces, and, despite its size, feels comfortable and balanced when played in seated and standing positions.

I repeatedly pick the low open-E string. The note sounds so powerful and majestic that I spend a good five minutes luxuriating in it. When palm-muted, it has an especially satisfying thump. Strumming some basic open chords, I find the guitar has a bold, stentorian voice, not to mention great clarity and note separation—it's a sound that's warm and rich with harmonic overtones.

It's a pleasure to play this guitar—almost effortless for barre chords and single-note runs alike, thanks to a perfect setup on a medium C-shaped neck. This doesn't come as a surprise, though, considering that Lugo happens to be an expert repairman whose clients include several big-name players.

While jumbo guitars tend to be bass-heavy, perfect for booming country accompaniment, the Glory has a much more balanced sound than most, with ample midrange and a present treble. The boom-chuck style does sound great on the instrument (thanks to a booming low E),

but the Glory also lends itself to the most delicate fingerpicking.

Jumbos tend not to record as well as smaller-bodied guitars, but the Glory is an exception. This guitar would make a perfect all-round studio instrument, as you can hear on a series of clips that the jazz guitarist Adam Rogers prepared for Ronin's SoundCloud page (soundcloud.com/roninguitars).

HEIRLOOM QUALITY

Ronin's Glory is a fine new addition to the world of boutique instruments, a jumbo guitar with an uncommonly balanced voice and versatility, with beautiful cosmetics, playability, and sound—not to mention the uncommon appearance of a redwood soundboard. With a base price of \$7,000, the guitar will inspire sticker shock in some guitarists, but considering the materials and handwork that goes into the making of Ronin instruments, as well as its limited production, this heirloom-quality guitar is actually a good deal. **AG**

Contributing editor **Adam Perlmutter** transcribes, arranges, and engraves music for numerous publications.



Figured koa back and sides

