

Gear Review



Sadowsky

SPRUCE CORE SINGLE CUT

By Jonathan Herrera

OTHER THAN LEO FENDER HIMSELF, no bass builder is more commonly associated with the Fender Jazz-style bass than Roger Sadowsky. The New York-based luthier first made his mark in the late '70s as the go-to repair guy for the city's session elite. Not long after, he began to build his own line of Fender-style basses, most equipped with his famed boost-only 2-band onboard preamp. Sadowsky has since become an iconic brand, often credited with sparking the souped-up J-style bass boom that has dominated the marketplace for at least a decade now. This long-term association with Fender-style basses is what makes Sadowsky's latest model so intriguing: The Single Cut is an entirely new design, the result of a collaboration a few years ago between Roger Sadowsky and Shop Manager Lisa Hahn. Our tester is even more special than a stock Single Cut, though, as it boasts a chambered spruce body core, here capped with a "master grade" maple burl top and back.

I can't pinpoint the date, but there was clearly a moment in boutique

bass-design history when singlecut bodies became trendy. I think this is due largely to two factors: Fodera — with its exceptional artist roster and sterling reputation — released a singlecut model, and boutique bass buyers often expect their money to result in something that looks innovative, irrespective of the impact on performance. Regardless, Sadowsky stayed out of the singlecut game well into its peak popularity, unmoved by singlecut bass aesthetics, and unconvinced that the increased neck-to-body contact actually made a sonic difference. Yet, growing public pressure, as well as a luthier's natural thirst for challenge, found Sadowsky releasing his first Single Cut a couple years ago. Not only did the instrument's shape meet Sadowsky's aesthetic requirements, but he also reports that there was an audible difference: "To my surprise ... I immediately heard the increased resonance, sustain, and evenness of response due to the increased neck-to-body contact."

Given how ubiquitous and well-regarded spruce is as a tonewood, it's a bit mysterious why it

SPRUCE CORE SINGLE CUT

STREET \$8400

PROS Gorgeous and well-balanced design; sophisticated and sensitive tone; impeccable craftsmanship

CONS None

BOTTOM LINE While Sadowsky is better known for its J-style basses, the Spruce Core Single Cut is a resounding success — and nothing like the rest of Sadowsky's existing lineup.

CONSTRUCTION Bolt-on

BODY Ash or Alder, "Master

Grade" maple-burl top and back

NECK Maple

FINGERBOARD Morado

FRETS 24 medium

NUT Bone

BRIDGE Hipshot (Sadowsky Design)

TUNERS Hipshot Ultralite

SCALE LENGTH 34"

PICKUPS Sadowsky Dual-Coil

CONTROLS Master Volume, Blend, Passive Tone with push pull active passive switch, stacked Treble/Bass boost control.

Separate mini toggle switch to engage mid boost.

MADE IN U.S.A.

CONTACT sadowsky.com



almost never appears in the bodies of solidbody electrics. If it's good enough for piano and harp soundboards, not to mention the tops of million-dollar violins, surely it'll work in a bass. Sadowsky has long championed the notion that a solidbody electric's acoustic response translates into good amplified response, which is in part why his solidbody basses are chambered (the other reason is the weight savings). As its premier bass model, our review Single Cut signals the debut of spruce on the Sadowsky tonewood option-list.

The Single Cut arrived in a robust Sadowsky-branded gig bag, the pockets stuffed with all kinds of cool documentation and certificates of authenticity. The body's sinuous contours give the instrument a lithe and compact look. Compared to many other singlecuts I've seen, the Sadowsky feels and looks slenderer and more approachable. As I expected, its construction was perfect. Every detail, from the impeccable fretwork, to the assembly of the electronics and hardware, was done with the painstaking attention to detail one expects from a luxury brand and bass.

As Sadowsky fans know, one of the basses' distinguishing characteristics is the Sadowsky preamp. The JFET-based circuit is renowned for its polished and buttery sound, due in part to its boost-only design, which diminished the chance for knob-twisting screwups. Our review bass utilizes the Will Lee signature version of the preamp, which adds a selectable midrange boost. Frequency selection is done through control-cavity-cover dip switches, with a mini-toggleswitch on the front handling on/off duties.

The Sadowsky felt great in my

lap and on a strap. It balanced well, and the position of the bridge near the body's end put the neck in a near-ideal place for my technique. The neck profile was meaty, with smoothly rounded corners. Plucking a string prior to plugging in the bass revealed substantial resonance, with a loud and full-bodied acoustic tone. In this respect, I agree with Roger Sadowsky: Basses that sound good acoustically usually sound good amplified.

I've played a whole bunch of Sadowsky basses in my time, and I've never met one I didn't like. That said, each sounded broadly similar to the other; there is definitely a "Sadowsky sound." The Single Cut, however, was a different beast. It's difficult to distill which variable contributed most to this result. Perhaps it's the spruce body, or maybe it's the increased body contact that the single-cut design enables, but it had a richer and more burnished midrange texture than I recall with other Sadowskys. It also had tremendous sustain, a buoyant and solid low-frequency response, and a slightly bloomy attack, registering as a delicate blossom on the front end of finger-plucked notes.

Overall, the Sadowsky presents far less like a Fender-style bass (after all, why should it?), and much more like a singular boutique instrument with a seductively potent tone all its own. As I was testing the instrument, the words *balanced* and *even* kept springing to mind. From the lowest *B* to the high 24th-fret *G*, there's a clarity and evenness that inspires careful and deliberate playing. It's the sort of instrument that rewards good technique and nuanced plucking-hand dynamics. It's every bit the special bass Sadowsky set out to make, and it's a more-than-worthy flagship for the venerable marque. ●

