

L-R
Nuevo single coil,
Django Bucker



AT A GLANCE

KRIVO DJANGO BUCKER & NUEVO SINGLE COIL

THE SPECS

Low-profile magnetic single-coil (Nuevo) and hum-cancelling (Django Bucker) pickups

Neodymium magnets

Switchcraft jacks

Mogami cables

PRICE

Django Bucker: \$229

Nuevo Single Coil: \$169

Djangobooks.com

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A Gypsy Caravan of Sound

Krivo's Django Bucker and Nuevo Single Coil pickups are well-suited for jazz guitarists

BY GREG OLWELL

When Gypsy-jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt went electric in the years after World War II, he was a little late to the game. With their electrified archtops, American jazz guitarists such as Charlie Christian and Oscar Moore had been swimming in that pool for ten years by the time the world famous Gitane guitarist added a pickup and amplifier to his favorite Selmer Modèle Jazz guitar.

Adding a magnetic pickup to his famous acoustic guitar, Reinhardt began playing solo lines that took his playing someplace totally new, and it continued evolving until his death in 1953. His tone wasn't like anyone else's. But for fans who wanted that singing, sometimes slightly distorted sound, tracking down the original Stimer magnetic pickups that Reinhardt used was all but impossible. Reissues

closely copying the originals are available, but can be cost-prohibitive for some Gypsy-style guitarists.

That's where Jason "Krivo" Flores steps into the picture. He balked at spending the money he was making as a touring Gypsy-jazz guitarist and upright bassist on magnetic pickups, so out of necessity he decided to make his own. As he improved his designs, his one-man shop in Portland, Oregon, started filling orders from players. Fast-forward a couple of years and his handsome Krivo Nuevo Single Coil and Django Bucker pickups have developed a strong following and a good reputation among Manouche-style jazz guitarists.

Each Krivo pickup model features neodymium magnets and is made with reclaimed wood covers, which add a handsome touch. Though not technically hand-wound, the pickups are hand-built—Flores uses a hand-guided Schatten winder to "scatter wind" the 44 AWG wire onto each coil in a particular pattern. The pickups also each feature high-quality Mogami cable and Switchcraft connectors—Flores doesn't offer mini-jacks or volume knobs, which he says not only increase costs and labor, but also noticeably degrade the signal path and color the sound. The pickups are easy to attach and easy to remove, using two lentil-sized dollops of sticky blue putty. Before you gasp and turn your head away in disgust at the thought of damaging your guitar's finish, it's OK—people have been using this method to affix pickups to guitars for a long time. It's a convenient way to attach a pickup securely and it's non-invasive. At its worst, I only needed to gently wipe off any residue from my Gitane DG-250 with a soft towel.

As a narrow-profile humbucking pickup, the Django Bucker is the more innovative design of the two. While it cuts the 60-cycle hum that's a part of every single-coil pickup, the Django Bucker isn't made like a traditional dual-coil humbucker. To keep weight and size down, the Django Bucker instead uses two small single-coils in the same housing, wired like a humbucker to eliminate the background hum. The Django Bucker also has adjustable pole pieces, so you can balance the string-to-string volume to your liking. (Mine came with a small Allen wrench to make adjustments.)

The single-coil Nuevo is closer in concept and tone to the pickups that Reinhardt himself used and has a narrower profile than the Django, so it takes up a little less right-hand real estate. The pearl dot inlaid into the wood cover helps you align the Nuevo under the B string.

TRIED & TRUE

I tested both pickups through a few different amps, including modern acoustic-centric amps, like a Fishman Loudbox 100, and a mid-'70s Fender Princeton Reverb, a 12-watt tube amp that's closer to the 12-watt Stimer amps used by Reinhardt and his contemporaries.

Tonally, both pickups are closer to each other than you might expect from such different designs. Both models sing and have a fantastic dynamic range, in part because of Krivo's "optimized microphonics" concept. To maximize the pickups' sensitivity and tone, Krivo wanted them to be slightly microphonic. The thought is that it should suit most situations in which Gypsy-jazz-style guitarists will perform, given that these won't normally be used in large venues where a slightly microphonic pickup could be a problem.

Playing the Nuevo or the Djang Bucker lightly, I was able to get a pleasant, round tone with both warmth and a slightly zingy bite. Digging in a little harder, I was able to drive my amp to get a little grit, which sounded more authentically like Reinhardt's overdriven late-'40s/early-'50s recordings. Its inspiring sound will also cut through your band. The tone of the Nuevo and the Django Bucker was nearly the same, but the Django had a slightly thicker midrange and the sort of quiet operation I expect from a humbucker.

Another benefit of this slim, removable design is that I could easily experiment with different pickup locations. Even small adjustments of under a ¼-inch could make a big difference in my tone's chime and punch. My favorite sound was when I placed the pickups near the end of the fingerboard, where it seemed to pick up most of the guitar's magic and stayed out of my right hand's way as I played single-note lines and rhythm comps. Still, there was much to be said for trying out other locations. By moving it closer to the bridge, I could capture a more biting tone, which can be just what you need for a live performance, or a more unique personal sound.

After weeks of playing with both pickups, I figured that one of them would edge out as a favorite, but both call to me. I love the glassy clarity and slightly more authentic "electric Django" sound of the single-coil pickup, but I also love the Django Bucker's quietness and slightly thicker tone. If you told me I could own only one, I'd just close my eyes and grab one. I would be happy either way, but at these prices, it's not unreasonable to seriously consider owning both of the handmade, boutique pickups. At least that's what I keep telling myself.

They're both marvelous, not only for players of Gypsy jazz, but for any player looking for a good magnetic pickup for an acoustic guitar. **AC**