





Different Strokes

Few, if any, major guitar manufacturers offer Godin's extensive range of guitar styles. We catch up with a couple of new additions that couldn't be more different

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Phil Barker



GODIN 5TH AVENUE TL GOLD FOIL & LERXST BY GODIN GRACE £2,099 & £5,499

CONTACT **John Hornby Skewes** PHONE **01132 865381** WEB **www.godinguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1 The 5th Avenue guitars have been around for ages. What's new?

Correct, the 5th Avenue model was launched back in 2008 as a non-cutaway acoustic archtop. This latest addition moves to a slightly smaller thinline style and adds Lollar Gold Foil pickups to the mix.

2 What's Lerxst?

It's a brand that was formed in 2012 between Alex Lifeson and MojoTone, "founded on the desire to design and manufacture a line of guitar products that reflect Lifeson's forward-thinking approach to sonic exploration and live performance", so says the blurb. The Limelight guitar appeared at the start of 2024; this Grace model at the end of the year. Both are made by Godin and are very limited.

3 And very expensive!

The original Limelight run was limited to 150 pieces (75 each with Floyd Rose vibrato and Vega-Trem) and sold out to dealers at NAMM 2024. This second Grace run of 100 with each vibrato style sold out in the autumn of 2024. Each one is signed and numbered by Alex Lifeson, and there's clearly quite a demand!

Godin makes a colossal number of models that really span the diversity of the guitar: acoustic to electric and beyond! It's also only one brand in a Canadian manufacturing empire that includes Seagull, Art & Lutherie, Norman, and Simon & Patrick, not to mention the innovative Tric cases. Another brand that Godin is more recently responsible for making is the latest venture of fellow Canadian Alex Lifeson, Lerxst. So when we got the chance to take a look at one of Godin's latest 5th Avenue models alongside the second highly limited Lerxst edition, we couldn't resist. Just how good are Godin guitars?

5th Avenue TL Gold Foil

Godin's roots might lie in the acoustic guitar, but innovation – in both manufacturing and style – has long been its calling card, and electric models have been on the increase for some time now. Our 5th Avenue model illustrates that progression. Originally a single non-cutaway acoustic archtop that was introduced in 2008, some 17 years later it's grown into a 12-strong mini-range of archtops with non-cutaway and cutaway models, with and without Bigsby's, and a variety of pickups that include its own range, Seymour Duncan and, as we have here, Lollar.

This new 'Thin Line' (TL) model launched in 2024. It has a thinner-depth

body (the rim measures 45mm, the same as a Gibson ES-335 as opposed to the 76mm depth of the original), and it's also a little narrower across the body, measuring 381mm (15 inches) and not the 406.4mm (16 inches) of the original 5th Avenue. So less 'big ol' archtop' and more akin to Godin's Montreal Premiere in size by design. It's still a hollowbody, though, with two longitudinal spruce braces supporting the top, instead of the 'Breathe-Through' centre block of that Montreal Premiere.

As you'd expect with the style, the body, arched front and back are constructed from laminated wild cherry with attractive bookmatching to the outer

Godin's roots might lie in the acoustic guitar, but innovation has long been its calling card

layers on the front and back. The edges are cleanly bound with a single-ply dark brown binding that does get hidden by the sunbursting of the almost light grey-to-dark brown gloss finish in places. The two f-holes are nicely stylised, and you can clearly see the classic thinline construction with thin sides and kerfed linings to increase the glueing area. It's a very tidy job.



The archtop style is referenced here by the neck, which glues to the body at the 15th fret but then extends above the body to the neck pickup. This means that section of the neck, and the pickups, sit quite high off the body. The neck itself is silver leaf maple, again with a similar 'bursting as the body, but here it's satin. The 'board is ebony, unbound, with simple dot inlays reflecting the unshowy style. In fact, only the headstock face has a fancy pattered three-ply plastic facing, hinting at a bygone style.

The pared-back aesthetic is reinforced by the absence of a pickguard, and the biggest visual statement is the pickups themselves. The Lollar Gold Foils are placed inside cream 'dog-ear' covers that sit on quite thick dark-brown height-raising spacers. The standard tuneomatic sits on a synthetic (not wooden) foot that appears to be firmly pinned. And while the Stratocaster-style plastic knobs seem an odd choice, at least they're brown with a gold lettering, so they fit the theme rather well.

Lerxst Grace

Another illustration of the diversity and quality of Godin's manufacturing capability, it's more than a feather in the brand's cap to work with Alex Lifeson in creating contemporary versions of his classic Hentor Sportscaster (various modded Fender styles from back in the

day) under the Lerxst brand. As we've mentioned, this metallic red version is the second run, which follows on from the Limelight, and aesthetics aside, the Grace we have here is the same guitar. Now, Godin isn't new to creating electric guitars based on the good ol' Stratocaster, and currently its Session T-Pro is a stylised take on that blueprint. What is new, however, is the frankly colossal price tag of the Lerxst Grace in comparison: the production Session T-Pro is £1,749; the limited-edition Grace is considerably more.

1. As with all the 5th Avenue designs, the neck sits above the body, reflecting its archtop-like heritage. It also means the pickups and the bridge sit quite high off the body. At the bridge, the Lollar Gold Foil has a DCR of 7.12kohms; the neck measures 6.23k

HEART OF GOLD

It's one of the trendiest pickup styles of the moment – you can't keep a good Gold Foil down

While it's not confirmed whether it was DeArmond or Teisco that first created what we now call the Gold Foil, both pickups appeared in the 1950s. Championed by the likes of Ry Cooder and plenty of other leftfield visionaries since then, the Gold Foil was originally a cheap 'n' cheerful single-coil pickup, and Lollar states that its version is a "true reproduction of the famous original Teisco pickups found in older import and student guitars".

The visual style gives the pickup its name, but there is no one recipe, although those original Teisco units used low-powered rubberised ferrite magnets, as do these Lollars – like a fridge magnet. Vintage examples vary in both quality and sound, and contemporary versions are now offered by plenty of makers, not least Mojo here in the UK or Roswell in Asia. Of course, the 'gold foil' was typically coloured aluminium foil on a thin card backing that has zero effect on the sound, and some contemporary makers are using gold-coloured mesh, in conjunction with partial covers, for both conventional humbuckers and single coils, just to give them a different 'retro' look.

2. Unlike on many more contemporary HSS super-S designs, the heel of the Grace model just has a rounded treble edge and no other contouring

3. The 5th Avenue's body is edge bound, but the actual binding disappears under the dark brown gloss finish. The all-satin neck has similar colouration



But pulling this one from its classy hard case, it's a very good advert for the detailed Godin quality. You can't see the body wood under the deep-red metallic gloss, but the spec sheet says it's swamp ash. And along with what appears to be a slightly modernised outline, it's not as contoured as the Fender classic, especially in the forearm area. It's not a particularly lightweight guitar, either: our sample is a little weighty for the style.

Obviously, here we have a longer scale length than on our 5th Avenue,

measuring 648mm (25.5 inches) as opposed to 631mm (24.84 inches). We have a bolt-on neck, and while the neck heel is round-nosed, it's not as contoured as modern HSS Stratocaster models such as Fender's Ultra II, for example. The standard slab-sawn maple is pretty plain in appearance (some would even say bland), and like the 5th Avenue it features a dot-inlaid ebony fingerboard with a 305mm (12-inch) radius and mirror-polished stainless-steel frets that match the mirror (plastic) scratchplate.

The Vega-Trem UltraTrem and the staggered-height rear-lock tuners all keep the quality high, and the pickups are specifically designed for these guitars by Mojotone. The wiring is pretty simple with just that three-way toggle switch – which voices neck, neck and middle, and bridge – and a master volume and tone. Oh, and the dished jack socket cup is reversed and sticks out from the body, as per Alex's original apparently. You'll also notice that the two controls are effectively like the two tones on a Stratocaster in terms of their placement, with the volume removed. Plenty of artist-specific idiosyncrasies, then, but the craft is seriously good.

WHAT IS A VEGA-TREM?

The company's VT1 Ultra Trem aims to offer wide travel with no locks

Founded by touring roadie and pro guitar player Isaac Vega, Vega-Trem is based on the Spanish island of Mallorca, and both the VT1 UltraTrem (as used on the Grace) and the VT2 TeleTrem (designed for T-style guitars) are made in Europe and use "the same materials, quality, process and precision control used in the manufacturing of surgical materials", says the company. "[The VT1's] components are made of high-quality stainless steel, even the block is made of galvanized steel" – and it's designed to be retrofitted to a standard Fender Stratocaster. The system pivots on that front-placed bar, and the moving section uses six lock-down saddles with height-adjustment screws that sit in recessed grooves to prevent any sideways movement; they have an overall string spacing of 53.5mm. The uniquely shaped stainless-steel block allows the very wide travel and, like the Fender design, uses a standard spring claw; ours came fitted with two springs. The UltraTrem is a retrofit system that's easy to install, comes in various finishes and is available left-handed. <https://vegatrem.com>

Feel & Sounds

It's doubtful whether we could have selected two more different guitars if we'd tried, and so it's little surprise that not only do they vary in feel, the sound is contrasting, too. Let's go back in time and start with the 5th Avenue...

The reduced size here proves very comfortable, seated or strapped on, and although the neck, pickups and bridge do sit quite high off the body, there's no problem or struggle. The neck has good width, it's slim in depth in lower positions and fills out nicely by the 12th fret. And yet because it joins the body at the 15th fret, upper-fret access isn't that easy, and there's a sharp corner under the neck heel. But the main shaft of the neck is very

well shaped (a classic C), the fingerboard's edges are lightly rolled, and the fretwork, from a medium gauge, feels a little more contemporary than the style might suggest. The setup is pretty standard, but it ships with 11s, which certainly gives it some fight.

With its hollow body you get plenty of unplugged volume, all with that hint of quick attack and shorter-sustain 'archtop'-like response. You could easily put a mic in front of this one and capture a pretty good swing-era rhythm sound. Plugged in, though, and bringing up the volume of the neck pickup, there's a very evocative, thick chocolatey voice that just needs a late-50s jazz combo to fit right in. There's a slight softening as you pull back the volume (which suggests we don't have a treble bleed circuit), but full up there's just the

You could easily put a mic in front of the 5th Avenue and capture a swing-era rhythm sound

right amount of clarity. With both controls full up, the mix nods more to classic Gretsch – it's bright but with depth and a hollowed middle. Back off the volume and a little tone and it's a wonderfully softer, yet clear, jazzy voice. You can't help wondering what this TL would sound like with a volume control for each pickup.

Flick over to the bridge pickup and we're now in the 60s, with bite and quite a bit of honky depth that could be useful for any beat-band pop hit of the era. There's a little 'vibrato' if you push the neck, too, and if Godin hasn't considered a TL with a Bigsby then it should. But the quality of sound here is really something, and the volume and tone control provide more than useful shade. We're really loving this sound – and we're still on the clean channel with no effects.

Adding some dirt doesn't ruin the fun, and we're into an old-school ride with the bridge proving surprisingly aggressive. It gives a Mod classic voice that does an earthy rock 'n' roll twang nicely – great sound! Things get a little fruity at the neck, with instant swampy slide, and fuzztones implode. Here comes the feedback... Hold on tight!

By design, of course, our Grace is a very different ride. Although it is a little weighty, it's an absolute pleasure – very good looking with a neck and fingerboard that disappear under your hand and fingers. It ships with 10-gauge strings,



4

but with the different-tension supplied springs for the vibrato, you can go lower or higher gauge. The neck reminds us of PRS's Wide Thin in its profile with a nicely relaxed C section that's pretty slim in depth (20.7mm at the 1st fret, 22.6mm by the 12th), albeit it with a more regular nut width of 42.5mm and string spacing of 35mm. The fretwork (2.4mm wide by 1.25mm high) is exemplary, as is the perfectly cut Graph Tech nut.

But it's the voicing that's really well considered here. The neck pickup very

4. Mojo's dual-blade humbucker is based on the classic Bill Lawrence design and, says Mojo, "utilises an Alnico magnet and chrome-plated surround for a smooth treble response that cuts through the mix with punchy lows and strong midrange presence". Sitting some way in front of the bridge for a less treble-heavy tone, it's measured DCR is 10.5k

5. The 5th Avenue's fancy three-ply plastic laminate facing here adds to the retro vibe, although other Godin electrics use a similar laminate facing



5



6



7

subtly leans into a humbucker with what sounds like a subtle high-end roll-off – a little less sparkle than a lower wind, perhaps – but that’s where the middle position comes in with more high-end detail to those bouncy, funky sounds we’ve heard hundreds of times before. Then there’s the bridge ‘bucker that has a little more kick; it’s rounder and thicker, but it doesn’t lack clarity or presence. These are three very strong sounds that cover a wide range – one reason why a good HSS guitar such as this is a function player’s dream. The guitar plays beautifully with those super-smooth frets, which make for effortless bends.

Speaking of which, there’s quite a large range of bendability on the UltraTrem,

too. The supplied arm does sit a little high in playing position compared with our vintage-spec Strat reference, but the up-bend is huge, easily five semitones on the G string and down to very slack. Don’t forget there’s no locking nut here, but even with the strings barely stretched the tuning stability and return-to-pitch is superb. Of course, the wide range won’t suit everyone, but it’s here if that’s your style. The very smooth-feeling vibrato only uses two springs. You find three additional spring sets in the case: high tension, low tension and extra low; our fitted springs are normal medium tension. If you thought Godin only did lower-end ‘functional’ guitars, this might make you think differently. We certainly did.

THE RIVALS

If the 5th Avenue looks back to classic archtops of yesteryear, then check out D’Angelico, which has the slightly larger-bodied 406.4mm (16-inch) wide Excel 59 and Deluxe 59 (both approximately £1,800), both with laminate construction, dual P-90s with master volume and tone controls.

Another name from the classic archtop era is Stromberg, and it’s making a return to the market manufactured in the EU. Look out for very high-end and limited Masterbuilt reproductions of the Master 300 and 400 models (see next issue), along with contemporary designs in the ‘Hanover Street’ range such as the Montreux and Newport. Prices TBA.

There’s no shortage of top-quality HSS super-S styles and plenty of signature action, too. PRS’s Fiore is the signature model of Mark Lettieri and is available in new satin or gloss finishes from £2,779. Here in the UK Jamiroquai lynchpin Rob Harris hooked up with Patrick James Eggle to produce a superb HSS 96 (from £3,499) with Sunbear pickups. Elsewhere, Charvel’s Guthrie Govan models – technically HSH super-Ses – (approx. £2-3.7k) never fail to impress.



8



6. The pickup mounting on the 5th Avenue is quite convoluted but certainly works. The standard tune-o-matic bridge also sits on a synthetic (not wooden) foot. And Strat knobs on an archtop? Well, yes, but they match the colouration of the body and work very well. Why not?

7. On the Lerxst Grace, the Mojotone single coils feature flush magnetic polepieces and they're said to be "higher-output single-coil pickups that have been carefully calibrated to match the output of the humbucker for a full and dynamic tone in every position". They have a measured DCR of just over 7k

8. While the headstock face bears just the Lerxst Grace logo, at least the back tells us who made the guitar: you'll see Alex's signature here, too. The Godin logo'd rear-locking tuners look like Gotoh's 510 tuners, too

9. The master volume and tone on the Grace are placed where the two tones would be on a Strat. And the upside-down output jack plate is by design, not error!

Verdict

Judging by this disparate duo, and in answer to our original question – just how good are Godin guitars? – we have to say, very good indeed. Always functional and fit-for-purpose, these contemporary models possess another level of quality.

The TL is a superb evolution of the original 5th Avenue that retains its

The Grace covers a wide range – a good HSS guitar such as this is a function player's dream

archtop style without the physical bulk. The Lollar Gold Foils combine to produce hugely evocative jazzy, bluesy or garage-rock swamp tones. We just can't say enough how good this guitar sounds.

We don't usually review a guitar like the Lerxst Grace because, put simply, it's a limited collector's piece and is priced accordingly – just look at Fender, Gibson and PRS who milk this market. The 'but' – and the point of this feature – is that this Grace vividly illustrates that Godin should be taken very seriously, and we can only hope that, with or without Alex Lifeson's input, this style becomes a mainstay of its line-up at a more real-world price. **G**



GODIN 5TH AVENUE TL GOLD FOIL

PRICE: £2,099 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Single-cutaway, archtop electric
BODY: Laminated Canadian wild cherry
NECK: Silver leaf maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 631mm (24.84")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/43.95mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, pearloid dots, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Graph Tech adjustable Tusq bridge base with tune-o-matic bridge, trapeze tailpiece, Godin logo'd enclosed-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Lollar Gold Foil single-coil pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.44/5.37
OPTIONS: Thin Line also available with Godin Kingpin P-90 single coils in Trans Cream (£1,149)
RANGE OPTIONS: The 5th Avenue range kicks off with the original non-cutaway w/ neck P-90 (£949). The cutaway models start with the full-depth model with dual P-90s and Cognac Burst finish
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model, only the non-cutaway 5th Avenue with neck P-90 (£999)
FINISHES: Vintage Burst HG (as reviewed) – gloss body, satin finish to neck



PROS Crisply made hollowbody archtop construction; excellent neck shaping; fretwork and setup; Lollar pickups provide superb old-school sounds

CONS Doesn't have great high-fret access; it's a hollowbody, so watch your onstage volume



LERXST BY GODIN GRACE

PRICE: £5,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Swamp ash
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech/42.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium stainless steel
HARDWARE: Vega-Trem UltraTrem vibrato, Godin logo'd rear locking tuners – chrome/nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Mojotone overwound single coils (middle and neck), double-blade humbucker (bridge), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.96/8.7
OPTIONS: Also available with double locking Floyd Rose vibrato
RANGE OPTIONS: Lerxst Limelight (£5,149) in Limelight Cream with either Vega-Trem or Floyd Rose
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Red – metallic gloss body; satin natural neck back



PROS Inspired HSS design with plenty of neat tweaks; superb fretwork, neck shape and setup; Vega-Trem has wide travel and very good pitch stability; very considered sounds and switching

CONS Collector's-only price – if only this were a production model!