

DELM NC-11A

LUTHIER MICHAEL DE LUCA COMBINES TRADITIONAL TOUCHES WITH A FLAIR FOR THE UNIQUE. THE CHAMBERED NC-11A MAY LOOK A BIT DIFFERENT, BUT DON'T BE AFRAID! IT WON'T BITE. MUCH. BY **PETER HODGSON**

Melbourne luthier Michael De Luca has created a very fine line of instruments which have that unique ability to look at once familiar and exotic. Some of his designs owe more to the classics than others, but even a quick glance at his website at delmguitars.com reveals design aesthetic of his own, even when making double-cutaway semi-acoustic instruments like the ED-87.

HAIL ATLANTIS!

The distinctively-shaped NC-11A features chambered mahogany body with a hand-carved bookmatched flame maple top with natural wood faux binding. It's a beautiful instrument, with slightly quirky curves and elegant lines, set off by an aquatic colour scheme based on an 'Atlantis' theme inspired by the works of luthier Jason Z Schroeder. The set neck is made of solid walnut, and the fretboard is Madagascar ebony. The mother of pearl/abalone fretboard inlays also appear to be partly inspired by some of Schroeder's work, and they have a nice Art Deco feel to them which balances nicely against the sweep of the headstock. The Delm logo at the headstock is inlaid mother of pearl, and it has a look of authority about it. There are 22 Jumbo Gold Evo frets, and the neck offers a nice mix of comfort and support. The curly maple fretboard binding is a nice touch, but even nicer is the setup: slinky on the high strings, snappy and powerful on the low. The fretboard radius is 12 inch, which is curvy enough to support chording techniques but flat enough to prevent choking out on wide bends, even if you tend to get pretty extreme, and even with the low treble string action.

Hardware includes a Bigsby B50 gold vibrato tailpiece and a matching gold roller saddle bridge, a single volume control with treble bleed circuit to maintain the high end when you roll the knob back, a master tone control which delivers a smooth, oboe-like quality when rolled all the way back, and a three-way pickup selector switch. The output jack is on a little mounting plate, and a classy partially-circular control cavity cover grants access to the guitar's innards. The pickups are P-90 influenced single coils hand-wound by De Luca and featuring Alnico magnets. They're wax-potted to eliminate microphonics, and they have flame maple covers which match the stain on the body.

COUCH-JAMMIN'

Unplugged, the NC-11A is resonant and

toneful. Definitely the type of guitar you could happily strum on the couch when you don't feel like plugging in. The Bigsby is very well set up (notoriously difficult to do!) and the action feels great. It's rare to play a lower-action guitar with such a trouble-free setup, but Delm nails it. Upper fret access is quite good, especially if you like to grab hold of the 22nd fret and bend like crazy. It could get in the way slightly for players who need more precision for rapid-fire licks up at the wiggly end, and De Luca tells me he's working on a smoother neck joint, so perhaps that will enhance the playability even further.

Plugged in, the NC-11A sounds rich and dirty and with plenty of bite, in the nicest possible way. The bridge pickup has a nice midrange ring to it along with the expected bright P-90 treble, and it captures plenty of string detail, so players who put a lot of work into their single note phrasing will love it. It also excels at jangly chords. The neck pickup feels a lot more high-powered than the bridge one, and it tracks speedy playing quite well, as well as being a nice jazz pickup. Sustained, Bigsby-shimmered phrases sound especially good through the neck pickup. In the middle position setting the neck pickup overwhelms the bridge a little bit, so this setting comes across as a more trebly version of the neck pickup sound rather than its own unique setting – a little bit more height for the bridge pickup or a little less from the neck would address this and make the two pickups a bit better matched.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The NC-11A is a really beautiful Australian-made guitar which is unique, finely crafted and sonically distinctive. It actually sounds a little more 'rock' than its elegant looks might imply, and it's surprisingly adept at Richie Kotzen-style blues rock shredding. **A**

PRICE: \$4200

FEATURES

- Body: mahogany with flame maple top
- Neck: walnut
- Fretboard: madagascar ebony
- Frets: 22 jumbo Gold Evo
- Machine heads: Gotoh 16:1 ratio
- Pickups: Delm D90A Series
- Tailpiece: bridge Bigsby B50, roller saddle
- Electronics: volume, tone, three-way toggle switch



► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ◆ Distinctively unique
- ◆ Great construction
- ◆ Killer playability

CONS

- ◆ Some players may dislike P-90s

CONTACT

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