

new gear

First Act CG914

Stage-ready auditorium-size flattop delivers contemporary tone and playability at an affordable price.

by Adam Perlmutter

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First Act isn't yet a decade old. But in that time the Boston company has turned into a major musical instrument manufacturer and distributor. The First Act brand now appears on everything from student-level band instruments to handcrafted electrics designed by rock stars including Paul Westerberg and David Hidalgo to a family of sensibly priced acoustics. First Act's first real foray into the latter category (it has sold a number of budget guitars for students and kids for several years) is a recent development. But the CG914, a mini-jumbo, single-cutaway flattop, delivers on the formula that has made many of First Act's electrics a pleasure—playability, fit, and finish at a reasonable price.

THE FIT AND FINISH

With its asymmetrical headstock and bridge, Grover Rotomatic tuners, offset fretboard inlays, and natural finish, the CG914 has a handsome, if decidedly modern, appearance. Side-mounted electronics make for a clean, uncluttered look that is complemented by tasteful adornments including multilayered pearlloid inlays, ivoroid body binding and heel cap, and a patterned back strip.

The CG914 sports some attractive tonewoods, as well. The finely grained Sitka spruce top contrasts nicely with the exotically figured zebrawood back and sides and plain mahogany neck. And the guitar's high-gloss finish, while on the thick side, looks nice and even and feels smooth.

Overall, the CG914's construction was tidy. The binding and inlay work was flush with the wood, the frets well seated, and the nut neatly cut. A glance inside revealed very

clean bracing work, and while some glue was apparent here and there, the workmanship was superior to many instruments I've seen in this price range.

THE SOUNDS AND STYLES

With its medium-size C-shape neck and medium action, the CG914 is very comfortable to play. Barre chords and swift single-note lines fell easily beneath the fingers, and the guitar responds equally well to a variety of right-hand techniques: flatpicking, strumming, hybrid picking, and fingerpicking.

The First Act is well balanced across all registers, with a tight bass, clear midrange, and sparkling trebles that will appeal to those who favor a more contemporary, midrange acoustic tone. And despite its overall lack of volume, the CG914 musters a fair bit of sustain that works well in both strumming and fingerpicking contexts.

The CG914's limited volume ceiling resulted in a rather compressed dynamic range, which felt somewhat inhibiting when I played tunes that rely on quiet-to-loud mood variations. Interestingly, though, the CG914 does not suffer from the harsh buzzing that often plagues instruments with a narrow dynamic

At a Glance

First Act CG914

THE SPECS

Solid Sitka spruce top. Zebrawood back and sides. Mahogany neck with rosewood fretboard. Dovetail neckjoint. Grover Rotomatic tuners. Fishman Classic 4T pickup with four-band EQ, built-in tuner, and 9-volt-powered preamp. First Act Light Phosphor strings. 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch scale. 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch nut width. 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch string spacing at saddle. Made in China.

THIS IS COOL

Versatile voice and easy-to-use electronics.

WATCH FOR

Somewhat limited dynamic range.

PRICE

\$649 list/ \$549 street.

MAKER

First Act: (888) 551-1115; www.firstact.com