

# Hamblin

## Grand Concert

Kent Hamblin has a reputation for building top line instruments. Richard Thomas explores this Grand Concert.

**K**ent Hamblin initially trained at the highly regarded Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery, where he eventually became an instructor. He went on to work with esteemed luthier Charles Fox, before setting up his own workshop in Telluride, Colorado, from which he turns out around 12 to 15 guitars a year. Kent concentrates on just two models – the SJ (Small Jumbo) and the GC (Grand Concert) and is represented in the UK by The Acoustic Music Company in Brighton, who specialise in guitars and mandolins from single luthiers or small workshops.

### Build Quality

The GC equates roughly to an OM in size, although Kent's curvaceous design is distinct from the traditional Martin model. With a lower bout of 15 ¼", upper bout of 11" and a waist of 8 ⅞", it's a comfortable instrument to hold. It's a handsome guitar too. Back and sides are fashioned from quilted maple, with a three-dimensional quality to the quilting that is simply stunning. The top is high-grade Sitka spruce with some nice cross-silking and simple, but effective, dark- and light-wood purfling. The soundhole is also bound in bubinga to match the body binding and features an unusual rosette in what looks to me like spalted maple. It's an

understated but elegant approach to guitar aesthetics that I think is very effective.

The well-shaped one-piece neck is made from mahogany and features a slim unobtrusive heel that helps with playability in the region of the higher frets. The fingerboard and elegantly shaped bridge – both in ebony – are smoothly finished, with no fret markers (other than side dots). However, the fingerboard features a light coach line and is bound in ebony too. The coach line continues around the otherwise unadorned headstock, which is faced with an ebony veneer on the front and quilted maple on the back to match the body. Tuners are the excellent Gotoh 510s, with bloodwood buttons which match



The quilted big leaf maple back is astonishing



**“...a peek inside the soundhole reveals an interior that is finished to perfection.”**

the bridge pins. The bone nut and bridge saddle are as immaculately finished as the rest of the guitar, and a peek inside the soundhole reveals an interior that is finished to perfection.

### Sound Quality

The GC came with a set-up that suited me perfectly, with an action that was low enough to be comfortable and easy to play, but high enough to avoid any fret buzz. Now, I must admit that I don't generally like maple-bodied guitars. I don't own one, and although they often look very nice, I find that maple tends to produce a colourless, two-dimensional tone that I tire of very quickly. There are rare exceptions – Fylde's Leonardo, for example, and Steve Knightley (of Show of Hands) has a beautiful maple jumbo made by David Oddy.

However, in general, maple guitars are not for me. I am delighted, therefore, to be able to add a third exception to the list. The GC completely challenged all my preconceptions. There is certainly the separation we tend to associate with maple-bodied guitars, making it very good for acoustic lead playing or for fingerpicking, but this instrument has far more tonal depth than I was expecting. The bass is well defined in an almost classical guitar fashion, yet both bass and lower mids have a warmth that I wasn't expecting. Trebles are bright (as you might expect) but again have a solidity to them rather than the overbright metallic 'zing' that I often find with maple-bodied instruments. As a fingerpicker, the GC excels. The characteristic separation, combined with a perfect tonal balance across the



strings, makes for an articulate performance, with a high degree of responsiveness to the dynamics of the player's touch. The guitar also responds well to plectrum-based styles of playing. It seems to be able to produce chords that are perfectly coherent, yet leaves one feeling that one can hear every note in the chord separately. Although the GC is a medium-sized guitar, it makes a surprisingly effective flatpicker too, with the clarity and power of the bass strings delivering more than one might expect from a guitar of this size.

## Conclusions

I've played several Hamblin guitars and this is the second GC I've reviewed. I liked it every bit as much as I liked the first one. This is a sweet-toned instrument, with faultless build quality, effortless playability, and an appealing, if understated, aesthetic that capitalises on the top-quality woods used. At a time described

by many writers as being a golden age of guitar making, with many truly exceptional luthiers, Kent Hamblin stands out as a major talent. This maple GC is an excellent guitar. If you think you know what a maple guitar sounds like, think again and try out this Hamblin GC. I guarantee it will



put a smile on your face. Hot off the press, by the way, is the news that Kent is producing an 00 model which is available for the comparatively modest price of £3,495, including case, and is attracting a lot of attention. I feel a strong need to review it!

**Richard Thomas**



The finishing is flawless

## HAMBLIN Grand Concert

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### Technical specification

**Manufacturer:** Hamblin Guitars  
**Model:** Grand Concert  
**Retail Price:** £5995  
**Body Size:** Grand Concert  
**Made In:** Colorado, USA.  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce  
**Back and Sides:** Quilted Big Leaf Maple  
**Neck:** Mahogany  
**Fingerboard:** Ebony  
**Frets:** Evo Gold medium  
**Tuners:** Gotoh 510  
**Nut Width:** 44.45 mm  
**Scale Length:** 647.7 mm  
**Onboard Electronics:** No  
**Strings Fitted:** Elixir Light  
**Left Handers:** Yes, no charge  
**Gig Bag/Case Included:** Ameritage Custom

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### What we think

**Pros:** Superb materials, build quality and tone.

**Cons:** There are cheaper instruments, but there's a correlation between price and quality – in this case at least!

**Overall:** Another stunning instrument from the workshop of one of the USA's most talented luthiers.

### Our Ratings Explained

**5 Stars:** Superb, Almost flawless.  
**4 Stars:** Excellent, Hard to beat.  
**3 Stars:** Good, covers all bases well.  
**2 or 1 Stars:** Below average, poor.

### Rating out of five

**BUILD QUALITY**  
**SOUND QUALITY**  
**VALUE FOR MONEY**

