

# A STANDING OVATION

## *Ovation 25th Anniversary*

Is it really 25 years since the birth of the Ovation guitar? It seems just like yesterday that we were celebrating the 25th year of the Les Paul! I must be getting old... Review by Robbie Gladwell.

It's true, Ovation, famous for their plastic bowl backed acoustic and electro-acoustic guitars (and somewhat less for their solid bodied electrics) are indeed a quarter of a Century old this year.

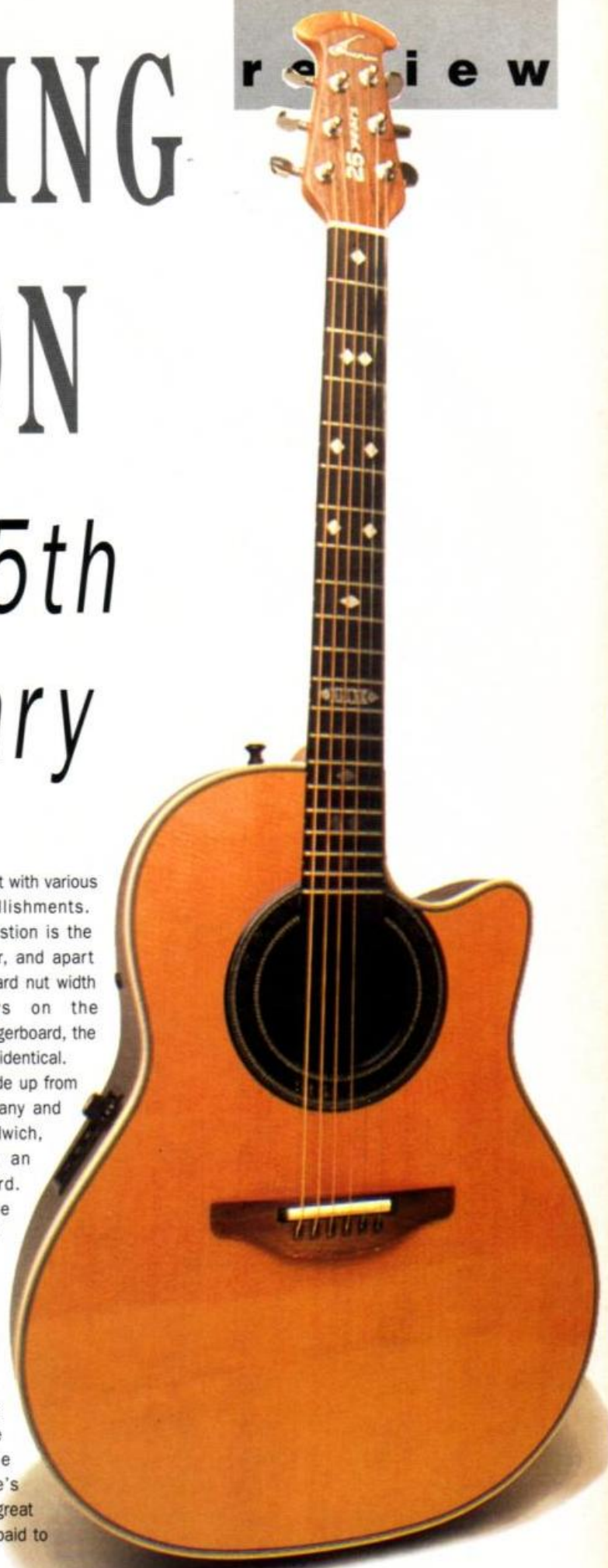
To celebrate this achievement they have issued a limited edition 25th Anniversary model, complete with a certificate hand signed by C. William Kaman II, the company's President, stating that: 'The instrument's unique combination of features will only be used on this particular series and will not be produced again after this run'.

In keeping with most companies which from time to time release anniversary guitars, this instrument is based on an

existing model, but with various additional embellishments. The guitar in question is the Custom Balladeer, and apart from the fingerboard nut width and the inlays on the headstock and fingerboard, the specifications are identical.

The neck is made up from the usual mahogany and maple multi-sandwich, and fitted with an ebony fingerboard. The frets are narrow nickel silver and number twenty in all. As one would expect from Ovation, the fret job is excellent, as is the finish on the frets and the fingerboard; there's obviously been a great deal of attention paid to detail.

Where the Anniversary differs from the Custom Balladeer most distinctly, ►







► is in nut width ( $1\frac{1}{8}$ " as opposed to the latter's  $1\frac{7}{8}$ "), which lends the neck a slightly narrower feel. This is unfortunately offset by the rather clubby profile of the neck, and in my opinion they should have altered the overall dimensions to conform to the fingerboard, so as to achieve a more uniform feel as you play in positions further along the neck.

The scale length is  $25\frac{1}{4}$ " which gives the action a taut, but by no means difficult playing action, with the Adamas medium/light gauge strings supplied with the instrument. Schaller M6 chrome machineheads adorn the headstock, which features an attractive walnut fascia inlaid with a solid silver '25 Years' logo, along with the Ovation motif. The fingerboard inlays are mostly diamond-like, apart from the cigar shaped '1991' 12th fret inlay, and these are all made of silver. Rich pickings, or what?

As mentioned earlier, the body is made from a material which Ovation call 'Lyrachord'. This is a very rigid, stable material developed by the company in preference to fibreglass. A high quality, close grained, Sitka spruce top is glued to the single cutaway body, which is bound with a multi laminate black/white purfling. The bridge is made of walnut and is designed so that the strings are anchored at the back, dispensing with the need for bridge pins. A large silver and black plastic soundhole rosette leaves one in no doubt that this guitar is indeed an Ovation.

The top and neck are finished with polyester lacquer, the neck being rubbed down at a later stage to give a 'clag free' matt finish. Unlike the Custom Balladeer, the Anniversary is only available in natural finish. Overall dimensions are: length  $40\frac{1}{4}$ "; width  $15\frac{1}{4}$ "; depth  $5\frac{3}{8}$ "; fingerboard radius  $10"$ .

The pickup assembly is the standard Ovation unit, which is located beneath the intonation compensated Delrin saddle. However, the preamp is Ovation's new OP-24 active equalisation system. This comprises 6 chips, each containing 24 transistors, for which the claim is made: 'The OP-24 is quieter, more efficient and more reliable than traditional preamp systems.' Although technical specifications are not given for the preamp, no audible hiss or hum could be detected during use, even with effects pedals and high amounts of gain.

The preamp's controls are mounted on the upper waist of the guitar and consist of a volume control and three sliders for bass, mid and treble. These sliders are centre indented to help the player locate a flat frequency response with ease. The frequency centres are chosen to give

maximum tonal variation with the minimum of feedback problems, and in practise this proves to be true; the tonal flexibility is excellent and allows perfect control over the sound, irrespective of amplifier choice. The EQ range is  $\pm 12\text{dB}$  over the fixed frequency centres.

Included in the literature is a small leaflet giving seven of the more useful EQ settings, based on the American guitarist Larry Coryell's favourite sounds. These are actually rather good and range from thick jazzy tones to bright solo chord sounds. A small LED is incorporated, along with a miniature push switch to monitor the condition of the battery. This also doubles as a backlight to help you find and adjust the EQ or volume settings on a dark stage. The battery life is expected to be in the region of 2000 hours, or approx 6 months of normal use.

## CONCLUSION

The build quality of this Ovation guitar is excellent. The attention to detail evident in its construction makes it worth every penny of the £1045.00 recommended retail price. However, I must confess that I have never really been a fan of the Ovation acoustic sound, and unfortunately this guitar, irrespective of construction quality, has done nothing to alter my opinion. This does not mean it has a bad sound – in fact it's very distinctive – and obviously I realise how subjective these things are... It's just that, to my ears, it's slightly lacking in warmth when compared to most dreadnought-style acoustics.

The electric sound is a different animal altogether. The range of tones available is very impressive and very much to my liking. In fact, the flexibility of sound and the instrument's overall playability would still make it worth every penny to me, solely as an electro-acoustic guitar!

The Ovation 25th Anniversary comes complete with a hard shell case, an owner's manual and a limited lifetime warranty to the original purchaser. The production run for this model is limited to orders taken during 1991 and a source from the distributor, Rose Morris, expected that there would be no more than around fifty instruments arriving in the UK (the serial number of this guitar is 52). So get your orders in fast if you want to join Ovation in celebrating their Silver Jubilee.

**RRP:** **£1045.00**

For further information contact *Rose Morris Ltd, 8/9 The Crystal Centre, Elmgrove Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 2YR. Tel: 081 427 5377.* ■